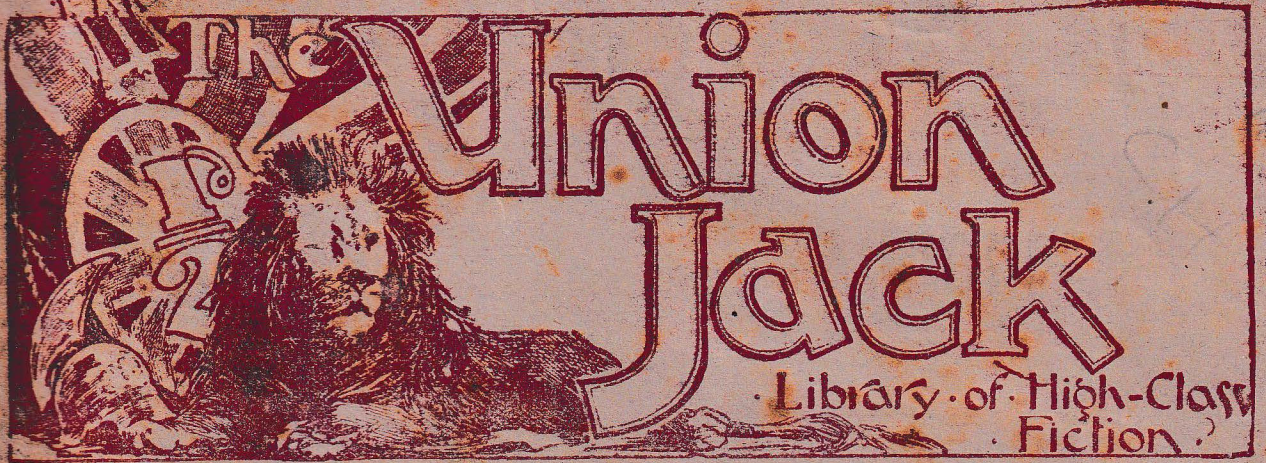


A SHILLING BOOK FOR A HALFPENNY.



THE SLAVER CAPTAIN.



A last desperate stand was made round the foremast, where the bluejackets stood like lions at bay.

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THE SLAVER CAPTAIN.

By CHAS. HAMILTON.

CHAPTER I.

THE SLAVER AND THE CRUISER.

"We shall have to run into the Salvás creek, Carlos."

The above words were uttered by the captain of a small brigantine, which, running before a light breeze, was approaching the African coast opposite Prince's Island. The captain stood beside the helmsman, and his eyes were fixed upon the huge white sails of a vessel that was following in his wake. The vessel was a twenty-four gun frigate, and the British ensign at her peak showed her nationality. She was less than a mile from the brigantine, which was making its way towards the hazy blue line that marked the coast. The decks of the little vessel were crowded with men clad in the duck trousers, loose cotton shirts, and broad-brimmed hats universally worn by the sailors of the Gulf of Guinea. The brigantine's crew numbered forty—a large number for a craft of her size, had she been engaged in a peaceful traffic. But the calling of the

"Seabird" was by no means pacific, for she was a slaver, and was now on her way to the Salvás River to take in her cargo of "black ivory."

Whilst crossing the Gulf of Guinea, the brigantine had been sighted and pursued by the British cruiser, and her commander—Rodrigo Vincent—aware that if he was overtaken the fittings of his vessel would betray her occupation, had put the "Seabird" before the wind, and was in hopes of reaching the Salvás River before the frigate could overhaul him.

"Once inside the sandbanks of the Salvás, and this John Bull will have to give up the chase, Carlos," the captain said, addressing the man at the wheel; "so head her in that direction."

"The cruiser will send her boats up the river, captain," said Ricardo Leon, the first mate of the "Seabird."

"The stockade will secure us from her boats," replied the clever captain; "and when we have taken in our 'passengers,' there is another creek by which we can return to the ocean, while the Englishman is waiting for us at the mouth of the Salvás."

"That is true, Captain Vincent," observed Carlos. "If we can reach the river before the cruiser takes us. There goes a gun from the frigate."

As the steersman spoke, a report reverberated over the broad expanse of sunlit water, a puff of smoke issued from the bows of the frigate, and a roundshot fell into the sea a few yards astern of the flying brigantine.

"That is a hint to round to," observed Captain Vincent, with a smile of disdain. "But they shall blow me out of the water before I surrender."

"It is still five miles to the mouth of the Salvás," said Ricardo Leon, who, not being possessed of any great amount

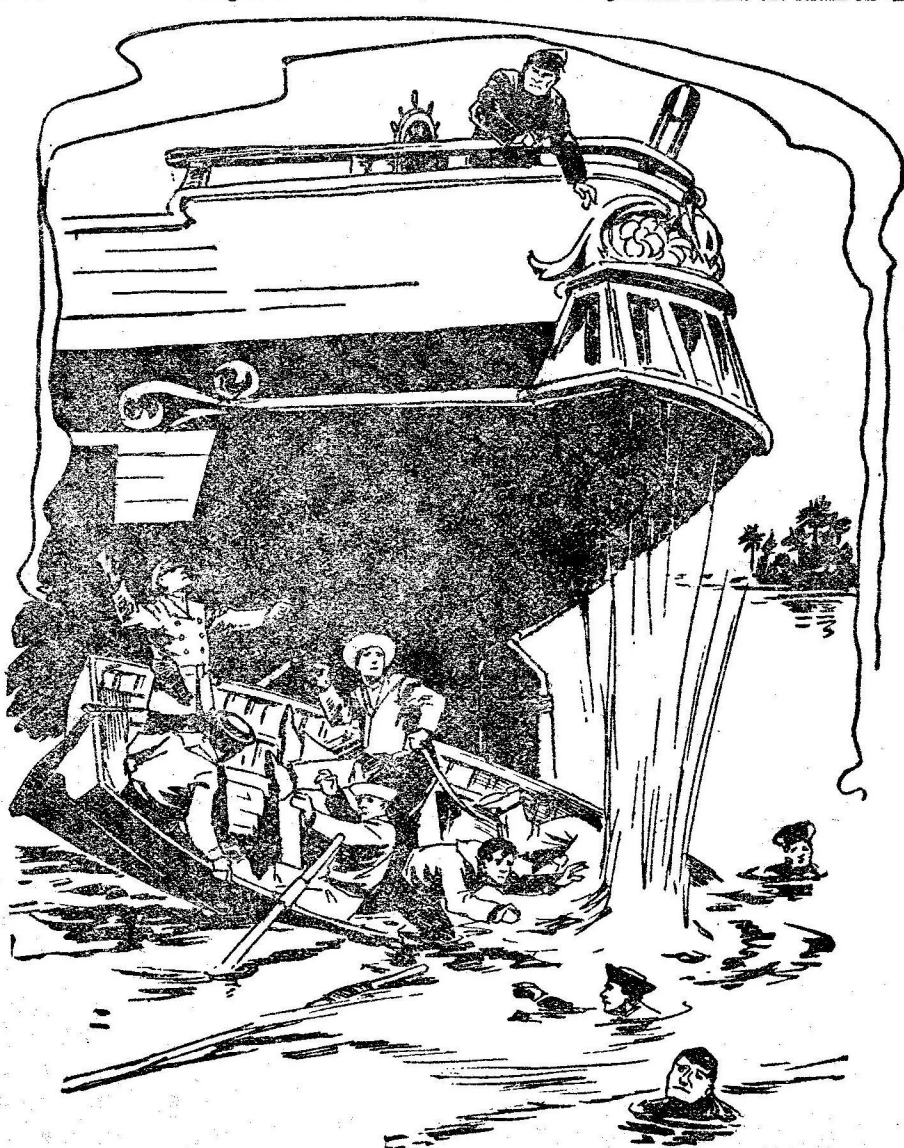
of courage, did not like to run the gauntlet of the frigate's cannons.

"We are holding our own," replied the slaver captain. "I reckon none of the cruisers in these waters can show a faster pair of heels than my brigantine. Keep her before the wind, Carlos."

"Ay, sir!"

The "Seabird" skimmed over the sunny waves with the speed and elegance of a huge albatross, now rising on the summit of a roller, now plunging her bows through the waves, leaving a long line of white foam in her wake. Every sail was set, from the main to the studding and sky sails, and every stitch of canvas was drawing in the stiff breeze.

On the deck the sailors were hard at work, doing everything in their power to increase the speed of the vessel. Some were wetting the sails with buckets of sea-water, to make them draw the more; others were reeving braces to take the strain off the



A pig of lead, hurled by one of the slavers, stove in the boat.

mainmast, which was groaning under the force of the wind, which bellied out each sail to its full extent.

Aboard the British cruiser equal activity was visible. The bluejackets—numerous but orderly—were at their stations, and the chief gunner and his mates were reloading the bow-chaser which had sent the ball after the slaver. The captain stood with his first lieutenant on the quarter-deck, and on the lee side stood a group of petty officers. One of these—a midshipman of about nineteen—was regarding the fleeing brigantine through a glass. This midshipman was named Edward Harrington. He was a well-built, broad-chested young fellow, tall and agile, and his face was handsome and manly.

There was one peculiarity noticeable about his countenance—it wore an expression of thoughtful melancholy, which rarely left it. He did not join with his companions in their merry anticipations of an approaching scrimmage, but kept his eyes fixed on the slaver with an intense gaze.

"Well, Harrington," said one of the other reefers—a merry-faced lad of seventeen, named Tom Williams—as Edward lowered his telescope at last, with a sigh, "what can you see aboard the brigantine?"

"He thinks there are some sable young ladies aboard, and he is smitten in anticipation," laughed another midshipman. "I declare Harrington hasn't had his eyes off that vessel since we first sighted her, two hours ago!"

"I wanted to see if someone I know is on board," explained Harrington.

"Why, who on earth do you expect to see aboard a slaver?"

"The man who cut out the 'Seabird' at Fernando Po," replied Edward. "That brigantine is the 'Seabird.' I am certain of it."

"What was the name of the fellow?" asked Tom Williams.

"I do not know; but he is a Spaniard. I got a description of him from a man who escaped after the fight."

The affair to which the midshipman alluded was the cutting out of the brigantine in the harbour of the island of Fernando Po. The "Seabird" had been tender to the frigate "Aspasia," and was commanded by Lieutenant Harrington, Edward's father. Captain Vincent had, with a band of desperadoes, surprised the brigantine in the night, and succeeded in getting off with her. The English crew had been cut to pieces by the overwhelming numbers of the outlaws, who were four to one, and who had made the attack while most of the Englishmen were in their hammocks. The few who escaped had flung themselves into the water and swum ashore.

Of his father young Harrington never heard after the night of the cutting out. Whether he had perished in the conflict, whether he had tried to swim ashore and had fallen a prey to the sharks, or whether he was a prisoner in the hands of the robbers, Edward did not know.

The "Aspasia" had been undergoing repairs at the island during the outrage, and immediately the work was completed she had sailed in search of the purloined vessel, but without success so far.

Rodrigo Vincent, after the successful robbery, had laid up the "Seabird" in a lonely bay on the Gold Coast, and completely altered her appearance. Her bulwarks, masts, blocks, even her waterways, were painted in different colours, and other changes made in the look of the vessel. But Edward, who knew the brigantine as well as he knew the frigate, was not to be deceived by these alterations. He knew that the fugitive was the "Seabird," and he had hopes of at last finding out the fate of his father—to avenge him, if dead; to rescue him, if living. This hope dispelled the melancholy which his anxiety concerning his father's fate had caused, and he was less thoughtful and sad as he watched the brigantine.

"Cheer up, Harrington!" quoth Tom Williams, with an attempt at consolation. "I'll bet you'll find your dad aboard the 'Seabird' alive and kicking, and as ready to take his allowance of grog as ever!"

"Fire!" called out Captain Waterton to the gunner at that moment.

And the boom of the cannon again resounded over the water. A cheer rose involuntarily from the deck of the cruiser as the result of the shot was seen.

The ball had crippled the lee studding-sail boom of the "Seabird," and two large sails now hung loosely against the masts, useless. The brigantine immediately lost way, but the skill of the seaman-like commander at once repaired the disadvantage.

"Starboard—starboard!" he cried to the helmsman.

And Carlos at once obeyed.

The brigantine had been making east by north; the shift in the wheel turned her east by south, so that the force of the wind was removed from the crippled studding-sails to the uninjured canvas on the port side. This manoeuvre executed, the brigantine recovered her way, and sped on almost as fleetly as before.

"Lay aloft there, my lads!" shouted the slaver captain—"lay aloft, and repair the studding-sail boom and secure the sails!"

The slavers sprang into the rigging, and were ascending rapidly, when another shot came from the "Aspasia," which, striking a sailor who clung to the shrouds, killed him instantly. The fearful fate of the seaman scared the others, who hesitated to ascend.

"Aloft, you lazy, cowardly rascals!" shouted Vincent in a rage. "Up with you, every mother's son of you!"

He drew a pistol from his belt as he spoke, and flourished it fiercely. The frightened sailors, not daring to disobey, sprang aloft, ran out on the yards, and commenced securing the flapping studding-sails.

"Those English gunners take infernally good aim!" said Lieutenant Leon, as another ball ricocheted over the water and pierced the bulwark of the brigantine. "If we do not get out of range pretty soon, they will make a sieve of our ship!"

"We can stand this peppering, so long as it comes to nothing worse," the Spanish commander replied. "But we shall lose some of our sticks if they give us a broadside."

"They won't do that," said Ricardo Leon.

"How do you know that?"

"They don't know if there are any slaves aboard. A broadside would butcher the niggers, if they were on board, so the cruiser won't give us one till they know for certain that our 'black ivory' isn't here."

"They might guess it, since when they sighted us we were bound for the coast, while a laden vessel would be heading from it."

"That's so; they might guess it. But the British commanders are too foolishly tender-hearted to risk a mistake, so we can reckon on escaping a broadside," said the subordinate villain.

"We shall be lucky if we do. We are only two miles now from the mouth of the Salvas, and, once there, we can defy any vessel drawing more than two fathoms!"

"The 'Aspasia' is nearer than she was, though. They are coming up hand over hand!" said the lieutenant.

"That's because our studding-sail boom was hit. They won't get in another blow like that. I hope the firing won't alarm our guest in the cabin, though; I don't want her to be frightened. It was beastly unlucky to run across this confounded cruiser, just when we've nearly reached our destination. But we'll elude them yet."

CHAPTER II.

THE CHASE.

The injury done to the spars of the brigantine by the shot from the frigate, although not of a very serious character, yet caused her to lose ground in the race, and it soon became evident that the man-of-war was slowly but steadily overhauling her.

This was remarked with satisfaction by all on the decks of the "Aspasia," and with sullen fury by the men of the "Seabird."

The bow-chasers of the frigate continued to send forth shot after shot, and with such precision that the sails of the fugitive soon presented the appearance suggested by Ricardo Leon—the appearance of a sieve. No more important spars had, however, yet been struck, and the slaver captain watched the cloud of canvas over his head with an anxious eye, fearful that each successive shot of the frigate might disarrange some part of the fabric. But no such fatality occurred, and at last, to the infinite satisfaction of the slavers, the mouth of the Salvas-River was reached, and the brigantine, passing easily over the sandy bar, sailed into the broad, shallow stream.

"Now John Bull will have to give up; he is beaten!" exclaimed the captain exultantly. "Aloft, my lads! Take in the royals and studding-sails. We shall have to be careful in this sandy pond."

As the "Seabird" glided up the river, rapidly leaving the blue ocean behind, the cruiser came to an abrupt stop outside the barrier of sand that choked the mouth of the river.

Captain Waterton was both perplexed and enraged. While the frigate was rounded to he discussed the situation anxiously with First Lieutenant Trysail.

"It appears impossible to take the 'Aspasia' up this cursed creek," the commander observed. "Nothing but a boat attack will serve us now. What do you think, Trysail?"

"I think as you do, sir. We shall have to attack in boats."

"'Tis a pity," resumed the captain regretfully. "If we had our tender with us. The 'Seabird,' stolen by that scoundrel at Fernando Po, would be able to go up this river and bring him to account."

"If my eyes do not deceive me, sir, that is the 'Seabird' itself."

"The 'Seabird'? Why, its appearance is totally dissimilar!"

"Yes, it has been painted afresh, and some of its rigging fresh rove; but I know the cut of its jib, sir."

"Call Harrington—his father commanded the 'Seabird,' and he

was second in her for some months. He ought to know her well."

Edward came at a sign from the first lieutenant. Touching his cap, he waited for his commander to speak.

"Harrington," said the captain, "you are well acquainted with the appearance of the 'Seabird'; tell me if you think yonder vessel is she?"

"Yes, sir," replied Edward immediately.

"Have you examined her attentively?"

"Yes, sir, through my telescope."

"That will do."

Edward, touching his hat again, retired.

"What boats shall I order out, sir?" asked Mr. Trysail.

"The pinnace, the barge, and the cutter," replied the captain.

"You will see that the carronades are put aboard."

"Ay, ay, sir."

The first lieutenant gave the necessary orders, and the three boats were manned and plumped into the water. The captain, aware of Edward's anxiety to discover the fate of his father, kindly gave him permission to go in the pinnace, which was commanded by Trysail in person. The barge was under the direction of the third lieutenant of the "Aspasia," Mr. Harrington, and the cutter was in the charge of a master's mate named Tillet.

The sailors took their places in high glee, but with disciplined quietness, with their cutlasses and pistols buckled on, and the marines with their muskets and bayonets. When all was ready, the masts of the pinnace and the barge were stepped, the sails hoisted, and, with the cutter in tow, they glided over the sand-bar.

A parting cheer sounded from the "Aspasia," which was answered by the men in the boats, as the little flotilla started up the river. Captain Waterton watched the little vessels as they proceeded slowly up the stream until a bend concealed them from sight.

Edward Harrington felt his heart beat high as the three boats commenced their passage up the river. At last he considered he had a chance of ascertaining the fate of his father, whom he loved with the filial affection of a thoughtful lad. His mother had died soon after his birth; he had never known her, and his father was the only relative he possessed, except a distant connection, a sort of tenth cousin, who resided in Cape Colony. This relative was a young girl, whom Edward had never seen.

The banks of the Salvus were clothed in green, giant palms spread their feathery frondage over the stream, mirrored below in the clear water. In the greenish liquid bright fishes darted to and fro, and in the mud on the banks the seamen perceived great, misshapen hippopotami.

Occasionally the British bluejackets caught a glimpse of the brigantine's sails, gleaming white through the intervening foliage, and Trysail, with immense satisfaction, remarked that they were gaining upon the chased.

"If the brigantine is lighter than the frigate, our boats are lighter than the brigantine, my boy," he said to the midshipman who accompanied him. "We shall be upon them very soon, Harrington."

"I think the brigantine has stopped, sir," said the young man.

"Stopped! The rascal cannot mean to fight while a chance remains to avoid it. But, by George, he has!"

The boats, now abreast, had emerged into a long, straight reach, and the fugitive came into full view. Captain Vincent had brought his vessel to a stop, and the Englishmen saw a boat shoot out from her side, and pull rapidly up the river.

"What can that mean?" muttered Trysail. "Going for reinforcements, perhaps. There may be another slaver in the river."

The boats advanced steadily, and rapidly approached the brigantine. The bluejackets saw that the slaver had a couple of twenty-pounders bearing full upon the boats, and that her deck swarmed with men, armed for a fray.

The English force numbered thirty-five, all of them strong-limbed, stalwart seamen, brave as lions, and well-armed. The slavers counted forty or more; but they were a mongrel crew of mixed nationalities, with nothing in common but their rascality. They were mostly Spaniards and South Americans, with a few Yankees from the slave-states, and half a dozen Malays.

In a fair fight it would be easy to predict the victory of the British bluejackets; but the disadvantages against which they had to contend rendered the result of the affair doubtful. The slavers had closed all the portholes except the two from which the cannons protruded, and everything which could possibly serve as an aid to boarders had been carefully removed. The "Seabird" was laid alongside a sandbank, so that the attack could only be made on one side, and riflemen had been posted in the tops to pick off the Englishmen as they climbed the sides. These arrangements rendered the task of Trysail a formidable one; but he did not hesitate to assail the slaver.

"Load the carronades," the first lieutenant said, after taking a survey of the position of the slaver. The gunners obeyed. Each of the boats was provided with one of these small pieces of ordnance, and the pinnace had two. Only a hundred yards now separated the boats from the object of their attack, and Trysail,

thinking that perhaps the slavers wished to surrender, hailed the "Seabird."

"Brigantine, ahoy!"

"Ahoy the boat!" came back the reply.

"Is that vessel the 'Seabird'?"

"Find out!"

"That is what we intend to do. Will you let us come aboard peaceably, or shall we use force?"

"I reckon you had better use force," was the cool reply.

"You refuse to surrender?"

"We do."

"Give way, my lads!" cried Trysail. The canvas had been taken in, and the seamen, bending to their oars, rapidly propelled the boats towards the brigantine.

"Keep off, or we'll fire into you!" shouted Rodrige Vincent.

"Fire!" ordered Trysail to his gunners. And the four carronades sounded.

"Fire!" the slaver captain cried in his turn. And the two twenty-pounders on the deck of the "Seabird" rattled out their charges of musket-balls and pieces of old iron, with which the Spaniard had ordered them to be loaded, to do the greatest possible execution among the assailants.

Several of the English seamen were struck by the slaver's missiles, which did far more damage than the balls from the boats' carronades. Before the slavers could recharge the guns, the boats were alongside, and, with a ringing cheer, the blue-jackets commenced the attack.

CHAPTER III.

THE STOCKADE.

The pinnace had glided under the bowsprit of the "Seabird," and collided with the brigantine, and the active sailors were swarming over the fore-castle before the slavers discovered at what point they intended to commence the assault.

Led by Trysail and Harrington, the stalwart seamen burst upon the slavers with resistless fury, and their sudden rush drove the "Seabird's" crew into the waist. The barge's crew were clambering up the quarter, and the cutter was pulling round the stern, when a pig of lead, hurled by a slaver from the deck, stove in the bottom of the boat, and sent it to the bottom, leaving the crew floundering in the water.

The immersed sailors climbed into the barge, and reinforced the crew of that vessel, who had not yet gained a footing on the deck of the "Seabird." Captain Vincent, seeing the English in possession of the fore-castle, rapidly gathered a force to assail them. Ten men kept the barge crew at bay, while the captain, followed by thirty others, met the British seamen in the forward part of the brigantine. A terrible conflict was waged on the deck. Both parties were equally determined to win, and what the English lacked in numbers they made up in pluck. The position of the musketeers in the tops was disadvantageous to the boarders, who were exposed to an incessant shower of bullets from above. Blood flowed freely, ghastly wounds were given and received, and soon corpse after corpse encumbered the planks, now slippery with blood.

All at once, in the midst of the fight, while engaged in a hand-to-hand combat with Trysail, the slaver captain uttered a shrill whistle. A man rushed to the hawser, which held the brigantine to the anchor, and cut it with a single blow of the axe he held. Carlos, at the helm, gave a turn to the wheel, the riflemen aloft ceased firing, and trimmed the sails, and the "Seabird" began to move swiftly up the river under the propulsion of the stiff sea-breeze.

Trysail, surprised by the sudden motion of the vessel, glanced around; and his adversary took advantage of his momentary unguardedness to stretch him on the deck with a blow of his cutlass.

"Fight on, my lads, fight to the death!" shouted poor Trysail, as he went down.

Furiously by the fall of their chief, the bluejackets redoubled their efforts, and pressed the slavers so hard that for a moment it seemed as though the English would be masters of the vessel. But then the detachment of the slavers, who had been engaged in repelling the attack of the sailors in the barge, being relieved of their foes by the flight of the "Seabird," came to the assistance of their comrades, and again turned the tide of battle. The unexpected movement of the "Seabird" had left the barge far behind, and, although the sailors pulled their hardest, they could not overtake the brigantine.

Edward Harrington was now in command of the boarding party, since the death of Trysail. The young fellow found himself opposed by the burly second-lieutenant of the "Seabird," a Portuguese named Miguel. He crossed blades with the slaver, but his puny midday's dirk was of little use against the long cutlass of the Portuguese. The slaver grinned maliciously as he thrust at the breast of the midshipman, thinking to transfix him without difficulty; but Edward parried the thrust, and, rushing forward, closed with the slaver.

The Portuguese grasped him fiercely, and felt for his knife; but before he could draw it, Harrington, using his dirk as a dagger, stabbed him in the side, and Miguel, uttering a fearful cry, fell at full length on the deck. In his fall he dragged down Edward, and it was lucky he did so, for Ricardo Leon had taken aim at our hero with a pistol, and fired as Edward fell. The bullet missed Edward, but he was not fated to escape unscathed, for the slaver captain made a cut at him, and laid him senseless beside Miguel.

"No quarter!" shouted the Spaniard, pressing forward at the head of his men. Fifteen of the British seamen still continued the fight; six lay on the deck, with a dozen slain slavers. The English, outnumbered and decimated, began to give way at last, and retreated slowly towards the bow. A last desperate stand was made round the foremast, where the bluejackets stood like lions at bay, maddened by the prospect of defeat.

Their gleaming eyes and rage-inflamed faces, their untiring arms and blood-dripping cutlasses, looked so formidable, that the slavers drew back from the attack as the Britons gathered at the foremast for a last stand. But the shouts of the Spaniard, and his intrepid example, urged them on, and a final furious struggle took place; the slavers fighting with the confidence given by superior numbers, the British fighting with the fury of despair, waging a last combat with fate. But courage was useless in the unequal battle, and one by one the Englishman were struck down or thrust overboard.

At last only one remained, he was a man of herculean stature, a powerfully built, broad-shouldered Scot from the Isles, named Donnel.

Standing with his back to the mast, he wielded his long, heavy cutlass with such effect that for a full minute he kept the whole pack of rascals at bay. Captain Vincent, who was a brave man himself, and admired courage in others, crossed swords with the big Scot, determined to take him prisoner, and persuade him to join the "Seabird's" crew. How the affair would have ended we cannot say, for a slaver in the rigging above dropped a heavy pistol upon the head of Donnel, stretching him senseless upon the deck.

"Bind that fellow, and let him live!" said the Spaniard. And Donnel was made a prisoner. Edward Harrington, who was still insensible, was also made captive, and the rest of the English, living and dead, were thrown remorselessly into the river.

"Food for the fishes!" said Vincent brutally. "Now, my lads, cast the pinnace adrift."

"Why not capture it?" queried Ricardo Leon.

"We cannot afford to lose more men, and the men there would offer a desperate resistance. Moreover, the pinnace is useless to us."

Nine or ten of the Britons had reached the pinnace, and they were unable to resist when the slavers separated the vessels. While the "Seabird" sailed up the river, the defeated bluejackets picked up the wounded men who had been thrown into the river, and then dropped down the stream and rejoined the barge.

The command had devolved upon Halyard, the third lieutenant of the "Aspasia," the second lieutenant being still aboard the frigate.

Halyard was a grizzled, sturdy seaman of forty-five; a true British bulldog, who never owned himself beaten. Although half his men had been killed or disabled, the tar had no idea of giving up the contest. After attending to the wounds of the injured sailors, who numbered nine, he explained his plans to the rest. There were still fifteen men uninjured, nine or ten having been slain.

"My lads," said the bluff seaman, "we could not show our faces aboard the 'Spasia' again unless we take the slaver. Half of us have gone under, and our officer is killed, and nothing can compensate for the loss but the capture of the brigantine. Who is ready to follow me up the river?"

A cheer broke from the sailors; not a single dissentient voice was heard, even the wounded men were willing to risk another combat. In spite of the rash foolhardiness of the adventure, the bluejackets were eager to follow the bull-headed lieutenant. Halyard transferred all the wounded men to the pinnace, under the charge of three who were only slightly injured, and were still able to attend to their duties. The rest, sixteen, including the lieutenant, manned the barge, and pulled up the Salvas in pursuit of the slaver brigantine. Tillet, the master's mate, who had commanded the cutter, was left in charge of the pinnace.

The sail was hoisted, and the boat skimmed rapidly along the sunny stream. So light and buoyant was the little cockleshell that it fairly flew before the wind, seeming to graze the surface of the river like a bird. Swift as the brigantine was, the little bark rapidly overhauled her. Captain Vincent saw the boat in pursuit, and a scornful smile curled his lip.

"Those English can't understand what a defeat is," he said to his second in command. "They are bound to get themselves killed before they realise that they can't take the 'Seabird.'"

"The stockade will settle their business," observed Ricardo Leon.

"They are nearly abreast of it now," Carlos remarked.

The stockade to which the slaver alluded was a log-house erected on the bank of the Salvas, armed with four cannon of large calibre. Our readers will remember that just before the English attacked the "Seabird," the slaver captain had despatched a boat up the river. This contained a messenger to the garrison of the little stockade, cautioning them to be on the alert to guard the passage of the "Seabird." The little fortress was garrisoned by a score of white men, ruffians all, who acted as negro-kidnappers during the absence of the brigantine. They were assisted by thirty negroes, who they had trained in the use of arms, and who were devoted to them.

When the boat came within range of the stockade, the slavers opened fire. The building was so completely screened by trees and thick tangled vines, that the bluejackets did not perceive it until the hum of the cannon-balls gave unpleasant intimation of its proximity. The first shot struck the mast of the boat, which immediately went by the board, and the canvas flapped into the muddy water. A musket-shot from the "Seabird" killed the steersman, and the boat swung round broadside to the stream.

Halyard uttered a curse, and sprang to the tiller, when the four guns of the stockade sounded in unison, and the heavy shot went through and through the boat. Two men were struck down, and Halyard, seeing the impossibility of success, reluctantly gave the order to retreat. The sailors, disappointed and savage, pulled down stream, while the balls from the stockade splashed around them in the water.

"That will be a lesson for them!" exclaimed Captain Vincent, with savage satisfaction. "The commander of the frigate won't be so anxious now to attack the 'Seabird.'"

Ricardo Leon shook his head doubtfully.

"These fellows are not so easily beaten," he said. "There will be another attack to-night, depend upon it."

The defeated boat's crew pulled back to the pinnace, and both vessels returned to the cruiser, which they reached late in the afternoon.

CHAPTER IV.

HELD BY THE ENEMY.

When Edward Harrington came to his senses he was no longer aboard the "Seabird." He was lying on a pile of skins on the ground, and his first glance round showed him that he was inside some building. A fine-looking man of forty-two or forty-three, was bathing his head in cool water, assisted by a young lady of some seventeen or eighteen summers. An exclamation of surprise escaped Edward as he beheld the two.

"Father!" he cried joyfully. "Thank Heaven you live!"

"My brave Ned," said the lieutenant, "I am glad to see you open your peepers. I had begun to think that you were booked for Davy Jones."

"Am I wounded, then?"

"You are, Ned. You've had a narrow squeak, too; the blade grazed your skull, and stunned you. An inch to the right, and you would have been gone."

While his father was speaking, Edward's eyes were fastened upon the face of the girl. As we have said, she was between seventeen and eighteen years of age, and was in the flush of girlish beauty. Her form was slender and well-proportioned; her hair black, long, and abundant; her face was oval, with clear-cut features, small cherry mouth, and expressive brown eyes. These latter were filled with a look of tender compassion as she looked at the wounded midshipman.

"This is your Cousin Gertrude, Edward," continued the lieutenant.

"Cousin!" ejaculated Edward, as he took the little white hand that was cordially extended to him.

"Our relationship is not so near as that," said the girl, with a smile. "We are distant relatives, Mr. Harrington."

"We'll call it cousin," said the bluff lieutenant. "I would take a lawyer to determine the exact degree of relationship, so we'll let it go as cousin."

Edward and Gertrude could not help exchanging a smile as the seaman pronounced his views. The midshipman recollected that he had a distant relative named Gertrude Alden, resident in the Cape Colony, whom he had never before seen. How she had come to that hut on the banks of the Salvas, in West Africa, was more than he could guess.

"How did the fight end?" he asked, as his thoughts went back to the battle on the deck of the brigantine.

"The slavers must have got the best of it," said the elder Harrington. "I was in the cabin with my niece, and we heard the fighting overhead, and saw the retreat of the boats from the cabin windows."

"Did many of our fellows get hurt?"

"At least a dozen, I think, for we heard the splashes in the water as the slavers threw them overboard."

"Poor fellows! Are there any prisoners besides me?"

"I saw one only, Donnel, the coxswain of the captain's boat."

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"But where are we now?" exclaimed Edward, looking round with a puzzled expression. "On the bank of the creek?"

"Yes. This hut is inside the stockade."

"They have a stockade, then?"

"Yes, with guns."

"Where is Donnel?"

"Still aboard the brigantine, I think. After the defeat of the boat attack, the slaver came to anchor abreast of the stockade, and we were taken ashore and thrust in here. I do not know

at him in inquiry. Gertrude Alden shrank back involuntarily behind the stalwart form of the English officer. The slaver smiled grimly as he noted the action.

"Do not be frightened, my pretty bird," he said. "No harm is intended you. If it was, this English hound could not protect you!"

"He would try, though!" said the officer grimly, and he clenched his fist.

"And he would fail," said the Spaniard. "But no more of



The two twenty-pounders on the deck of the "Seabird" rattled out their charges of musket-balls and pieces of old iron.

if we are to remain together, or if we shall eventually be separated. We must hope for the best."

"We must hope for the arrival of the 'Aspasia,'" returned the midgy.

"The frigate draws too much water to enter the Salvas."

"True, she cannot get over the sand-bar; but I think that at full flood-tide she may be able to do so."

"Heaven grant she may. Her guns would soon knock this shanty down about the ears of the rascals who live in it. But, listen! someone is at the door."

The door of the hut was flung open as the lieutenant spoke, and the captain of the "Seabird" strode into the apartment. Mr. Harrington rose and faced him coolly, while Edward looked

this; I do not come to harm you. On the contrary, I wish to serve you."

"You are extremely kind," said Harrington, with a sceptical smile. He placed no trust in the friendly professions of the slaver captain.

"Do you desire your freedom?" queried the slaver.

"That's an idle question. Of course we do!"

"I will set you at liberty, if you choose."

"Unconditionally?"

"Hardly. There is, of course, a condition attached."

"I thought so."

"It is a simple one, however, and need not alarm you," said Vincent.

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"Let us hear it."

"By all means. I shall speak plainly to you, for if we do not come to terms you will forget all I have said to you." And the Spaniard tapped his sword-hilt significantly. The lieutenant shrugged his shoulders. The threat did not terrify him.

"Come to the point!" he suggested bluntly.

"Immediately. If I set you at liberty, you'll return to the frigate 'Aspasia.' There you will inform the commander that the slaver brigantine 'Seabird,' has, by means of a lagoon which connects this river with another, returned to the Gulf of Guinea."

"That is not true."

"No; that's why you are to tell it to your captain!"

"And," said the English officer, with difficulty suppressing the anger which this base proposal excited in his breast, "what reason is there for thus deceiving the commander of the 'Aspasia'?"

"I shall have to wait a week for my cargo of slaves, which is not yet quite ready. I do not wish to be troubled by further boat attacks, nor to be exposed to the danger of the 'Aspasia' herself coming up the river."

"And is there another creek by which you can regain the sea?" asked the officer, wishing to gain as much information as possible, in case he succeeded in effecting his escape and returning to the cruiser.

"There is. I conceal nothing from you, you see. All I ask of you amounts to this. You will send away the cruiser, for her captain won't try to come up the river if he thinks I'm gone."

"So that you will have plenty of time to embark your victims and sail?"

"That is it. It isn't much, you see."

"And you dare to make this proposal to a British officer?" said Harrington, trembling with rage. "Villain! had I a hundred lives, I would sacrifice them all rather than be guilty of such treachery!"

The Spaniard listened to this angry outburst quite unmoved.

"So you refuse?" he said.

"I refuse!"

"Remember that your son is in my power. Will you see him hang at the yardarm of the 'Seabird'?"

"Rather than fail in my duty," said Harrington firmly, though his face became ashy pale.

"Young man," continued the slaver captain, addressing Edward, who had lain on the couch of skins, and listened to the foregoing conversation in silence, "what do you say? Will you do what I wish, and go free?"

"He will do as I do!" answered the lieutenant.

"Silence! Let him speak for himself!" exclaimed Vincent.

"Speak, Edward! I can trust you," said Harrington.

"You can trust me, father," said the young man firmly.

"Your answer is mine. Death before dishonour!"

"You're a pair of fools!" quoth the captain of the "Seabird." "There is one other thing you have not thought of."

"And what is that?" "Yonder girl."

Gertrude started as the slaver spoke, and looked at him nervously.

"What of her?" asked Harrington in a low voice.

"Suppose she has to suffer for your obstinacy?"

"You could not do that."

"And why not?"

"You cannot be so wicked as to injure her for what we have done?"

"You are entirely mistaken. Listen! Refuse my offer, and you and your son shall hang at the yardarm of the brigantine before morning, and as for this girl—"

"Stop!" cried Harrington, with such a terrible expression on his face that the Spaniard sprang back and half-drew his sword. The next moment he appeared ashamed of his trepidation, and rattled back his cutlass into the scabbard with assumed carelessness.

"I'll leave you now," he said, "to reflect on what I have said."

"But," exclaimed Harrington, "you would be foolish to trust me to carry out your wishes. If you think I will fail in my duty to my country, do you think I would keep my promise to you?"

"I would keep Miss Alden as a hostage for your good faith."

"Oh! so you would not let me take the lady to the frigate?"

"I wouldn't trust you far enough."

"Neither would I trust you, even if I were base enough to agree to your proposals. You would play me false, scoundrel that you are!"

"I'll give you a few hours to think over it," replied Vincent.

"When I return presently, you know what to expect if you are not wise enough to accede to my proposition."

The slaver departed, bolting the door on the outside, leaving the three occupants of the hut staring at each other in dismay.

"We must decide, and quickly," replied Harrington. "One thing is certain, we cannot betray the captain of the cruiser, as this scoundrel wishes. Let us think on our situation, and reflection may bring us a means of circumventing this detestable villain!"

Long they pondered over the knotty question. Various plans were proposed, considered, and rejected as impracticable. They were still puzzling over the question when steps approached the door again. Half a dozen bearded slavers entered, led by Ricardo Leon.

"What do you want?" asked Lieutenant Harrington.

"This young lady," replied Leon.

"You mean to take her away from me?"

"Captain Vincent has ordered me to conduct her to another hut."

"Why?"

"That's not my business, nor yours. Come, my girl."

Harrington placed himself before Gertrude. Edward, in spite of his injuries, jumped up and stood beside his father, ready for a tussle.

"Take her, my men!" ordered Ricardo. "If those two are fools enough to resist, knock them on the head."

"Stay!" exclaimed the girl tremulously. "Mr. Harrington—Edward—do not resist! They are too many for you. I must go; I will go quietly."

"Never!" cried Harrington, and he precipitated himself upon Ricardo, who was thrown to the ground by the sudden assault. His drawn cutlass was seized by his assailant, who wielded it furiously, cutting down one man and thrusting through another, until the rest, recovered from their momentary consternation, rushed at him and grasped him fiercely, hurling him to the floor half stunned. Edward, weak from his wound, was seized by a burly Yankee, who held him a helpless prisoner. Gertrude uttered a scream, as Ricardo Leon, rising black with rage, gripped her arm, and dragged her from the hut. She cast a despairing look at her friends as she was torn away, and Ricardo Leon bore her half-fainting from the spot.

"You shall die for this!" the slaver cried as he retired.

The seamen took up the two men wounded by Harrington, and carried them away, casting fierce looks at the prisoners, but not daring to injure them against the orders of Rodrigo Vincent.

"Curse the luck!" Harrington cried in despair. "They have taken her away. We cannot aid her now!"

"But we can punish the piratical scoundrels!" cried Edward, between his teeth. "Father, we must escape from this den."

"Nothing can be done till after dark," replied Harrington gloomily. "The rascals cluster in this stockade like bees in a hive. If we got outside we should be recaptured immediately."

"Is there a sentinel at the door?"

"Yes, a black savage, who would be glad to get a chance to hack us to pieces. If we try to get out, we must let the door severely alone. But when it is dark we must make the attempt."

The minutes seemed to fly on leaden wings as the sun sunk towards the horizon. Edward, impatient of the forced inaction, and thinking of Gertrude Alden, whose sweet face had made a deep impression upon him, passed the time in evolving sundry plans for the projected escape, none of which seemed to promise much chance of success.

"By the way," the midshipman said suddenly, "how is it that Miss Alden came to be a prisoner in the hands of these slave-dealers?"

"Very simply," replied his father. "You remember how the brigantine was cut out at Fernando Po by this fellow Vincent?"

"Yes. What anxiety I felt while your fate remained uncertain."

"I know you did, my boy," said his father, pressing his hand. "Well, after the capture, Vincent laid up the 'Seabird' on a lonely beach, and altered her appearance, and then steered for this river, which seems to be his headquarters. I gathered from what I've heard the sailors say, that the Spaniard used to possess this vessel; it was captured by a cruiser, and I commanded it as tender to the 'Aspasia,' and the fellow, no doubt, regards the cutting-out as merely a way of getting back his own."

"All the same, he'll swing for the massacre of her crew, when Captain Waterton gets hold of him."

"That is true, Ned. Well, on his way here, the slaver fell in with a drifting boat, that was the day before yesterday. In it was a young girl insensible from exhaustion. She was brought aboard, and after recovering told that her name was Gertrude Alden. Of course, she was horrified on hearing the kind of vessel she had fallen into, and finding there was a British naval officer on board, placed herself under my protection. While we were on the high seas there was a continual risk of capture by the cruisers on the station, and the Spaniard did not care to harm either of us then, for he knew what would await him in the event of capture if he did, for there would be certainly someone among his crew who would tell tales to save himself."

"But now you're on shore he has no such fear?"

CHAPTER V.

THE ESCAPE.

"What is to be done?" Edward said, as the door closed behind the burly form of the slaver captain.

"That's it. He is beginning to show the cloven foot all at once."

"And how did Gertrude come into the predicament from which Vincent rescued her?"

"She has told me that, her parents being dead, and she without resources, she had resolved to return to England. She accompanied a friend as companion; but the ship was caught in a hurricane, and went down with all on board."

"How, then, did she get into the boat?"

"The captain placed her in it, intending to follow with others; but the waves bore the boat away before they could enter, and she fainted. The boat lived through the storm; but she must infallibly have perished of hunger had she not been picked up by the 'Seabird.'"

"And now he means to keep her a prisoner?"

"Yes; I fear greatly for her, Ned. This slaver is scoundrel enough for anything."

"It is dark now," observed Edward, after a long pause, during which each was occupied with painful thoughts. "The attempt must now be made, if at all. I have noticed that some of the rafters here are loose; perhaps, if I could reach the roof, I could remove one and thus open a passage."

"There is nothing to stand upon to reach the roof; it is nine feet from the ground," replied Lieutenant Harrington. "I could lift you on my shoulders, it is true; but only one could escape that way."

"Then it won't do!" replied Edward decisively. "Both or neither."

The lieutenant remained for a few minutes buried in thought.

"Edward," he said at last, "I think you had better go."

"Not without you, father."

"Yes, without me, my lad."

"Never!"

"Listen, Ned!" resumed Harrington gravely. "Both cannot go, therefore one must. You have most chance of getting through the roof; you must go."

"I will not desert you, father."

"You must go!" repeated Harrington firmly. "Consider, my boy. You cannot aid me by staying, that's certain, and by going you may fetch help to save Gertrude and me."

"Then, you go, and I will stay, since one must."

"No, that will not do. I am neither young nor active, and I could not climb as you will have to do. You must go, Ned!"

"I tell you I won't leave you, sir!" exclaimed the brave lad.

"Come, Ned, do not force me to use my authority as your superior officer, and order you to go!" said the lieutenant, with a sad smile.

"Are you determined, then?" said the young man.

"Quite."

"Then I suppose I must go!"

"That's right. Believe me, you can help me far more effectually by going than by staying. Now, I'll lift you on my shoulders, and you can attack the roof."

The sturdy seaman braced his athletic form, and easily bore the weight of the lad, who stood on his broad shoulders, held by the ankles by the firm hands of the lieutenant. Edward found the roof of the hut composed of thin planks, weather-beaten and half-rotten. By using his pocket-knife he cut away the wood around a loosened plank, and, having detached it, passed it to his father. The removal of the plank left an orifice of an oblong form in the roof, about two feet by one.

"Can you get through?" asked the lieutenant in a low, cautious voice.

"Yes, father."

"Then go at once! We must not delay, for the moon will soon be up, and her light will betray our movements."

"I am going," said Ned, putting his arms through the orifice, and resting them on the outside of the roof. "Good-bye, father!"

"Good-bye, my lad, and Heaven bless you!" murmured the sailor fervently.

The weight was removed from his shoulders, and, looking upward, he saw the lithe form of his son outlined against the sky, which, though dark, was lighter than the interior of the hut.

Edward gained the roof without difficulty, and started to crawl to the side of the building.

He knew there was a sentinel posted at the door of the cabin, so he crept towards the rear. The roof sloped in that direction, which made his task the more difficult. The rafters, half-decayed as they were, did not seem capable of supporting his weight, and once or twice the wood creaked ominously. Each time the rotten wood cracked Edward listened in an agony of apprehension, fearing that the sound might reach the ears of the negro sentinel. He had nearly reached the edge of the roof when one of his hands sank through the mouldy wood, and he nearly pitched off the roof. He quickly recovered himself, but the mishap had caused the roof to shake, and for a moment he feared it was about to fall in.

As he crouched there with bated breath, to his horror he

heard soft steps approaching. Someone was walking round from the other side of the hut. It could only be the sentinel, who had heard the noise.

"All is up!" muttered the midshipman.

And then, with the calmness of one who has lost hope, he awaited the appearance of the sentinel.

The man appeared. Edward could distinguish the white cotton garments he wore, and the shining tip of a long spear he carried in his hand. Remaining mute and still, he glared down at the shadowy form of the black, who, for his part, stared intently up at the roof. Edward heard him mutter something unintelligible, and he knew that the savage had seen the figure crouching on the sloping roof.

The midshipman expected to hear the negro give the alarm, but he remained silent. Grasping his long spear by the extremity of the staff, so that he could reach the midshipman, the black thrust up at him fiercely.

Edward, by a rapid change of position, avoided the lunge; but in doing so lost his hold upon the sloping roof, and tumbled off. Down he went, alighting on the head of the black, who had not time to get out of the way. The shock sent the man reeling, and he fell at full length, as well as Edward.

The active reeler was the first upon his feet, and before the half-dazed savage could rise Edward snatched up his spear and pinned him to the earth.

A frightful yell burst from the negro as the spear-point pierced his chest, and, writhing on the ground like a wounded snake, he expired.

The cry of the dying sentinel was answered by a shout from one of the huts, where some of the slavers were carousing.

A dozen men rushed towards the spot, weapon in hand.

Edward was about to go to the door of the hut, and open it for the liberation of his father; but Ricardo Leon and a few others, suspecting an attempted escape, at once sped to the hut, and as Ned stepped towards the door he heard the slavers fumbling at the bolts.

There was nothing for it but flight. He could not hope to cope with the armed crowd that was hurrying towards him. Seizing the spear which had let out the life of the negro, he wrenched it from the wound, and started off at a run in the direction of the river, as near as he could guess it.

"One of the prisoners is gone!" shouted Ricardo Leon from the interior of the hut. "Search for him everywhere!"

"Guard the gate of the stockade!" sounded the sonorous voice of the slaver captain. "He cannot have got outside the palisades. Find him, and kill him if he resists!"

Edward heard these words, and he came to an abrupt halt. He remembered that his father had told him that the hut he had just left was inside the wall of the stockade. He was, then, surrounded by the palisades, which had but one gate, and that was guarded.

For a moment his heart sank; but he was too stout-hearted to give way to puerile despair, and he roused all his courage for an endeavour to cut his way through the cordon of his foes.

"As the gate is guarded, retreat is cut off that way," he reflected. "It is certain that they will be too many for me at that exit. What, then, remains? I must scale the wall, that's all."

In less than a minute he had reached the wall. It was built of thick poles, stuck upright in the ground close together, and interlaced with strong withes. It offered neither hand nor foot hold. Edward saw the top lining the sky. It was about fourteen feet high. He halted almost in despair. It was plain that he could not climb the palisades.

The shouts of the slaver crew rang through the enclosure, and the hunted midshipman saw the gleam of the flaming torches carried hither and thither by the search-party. At any moment he might be perceived by the outlaws. Each second was precious, and yet he stood still, baffled by an insuperable difficulty.

But danger sharpens the wits; as the proverb says, "Necessity is the mother of invention."

The midshipman, after a long "think," at last hit upon an ingenious expedient for scaling the wall. The spear he had taken from the slain sentinel was twelve feet long; the head was an elongated barb, ten or twelve inches in length, made of good steel, which would bend but not break. The midshipman, struck with a bright idea, bent the steel point into the shape of a hook. It immediately sprang back, but it did not become quite straight again. The metal was good, but it was not of the best quality, and the midshipman at once saw that it would answer his purpose. He bent it again, and tied it in the shape he desired with his belt. Then he waited, crouching in the shadow of the palisades to avoid being seen by the searchers. Once or twice the slavers passed close by him, but he remained unseen, and in five minutes he rose to make his attempt.

Unfastening the belt, he found that the steel was firmly fixed in the shape he had made it, and he was now in possession of a hook with a handle eleven feet in length.

Hooking the bent steel over the top of the palisades, he pre-



Down he went, alighting on the head of the black.

pared to climb the staff. To a landsman this would have been a difficult and dangerous feat; but to a seaman, used to perambulating the ropes and yards of a vessel, it was merely child's play. Hand over hand the agile middy clambered up the pole, and a minute sufficed for him to reach the summit of the barricade.

Sitting astride of the wall, which was only of the thickness of the upright poles—about six inches—the young man drew up the spear-shaft, and, hooking it upon the other side of the palisade, slid down it to the ground.

But he was not destined to get away easily, in spite of the successful escalade of the stockade wall. Some of the slavers had seen him on top of the barrier, and Captain Vincent immediately despatched Ricardo Leon, with several others, to intercept him.

Still holding his spear, Edward sped away in the direction of the Salvias, whose hoarse murmur he could hear close at hand. A short run brought him to the bank. He glanced round, in the hope of finding a boat, and, to his joy, perceived a small canoe attached to a tree on the beach. To cut the cord, spring into the boat, and push out into the middle of the river took Harrington a second or so, and as the yelling mob of slavers came dashing down to the bank of the river, the midshipman floated slowly down the stream.

CHAPTER VI.

THROUGH FLOOD AND FIRE.

As the slavers perceived that the daring middy had for the moment eluded their vindictive fury, a shout of rage arose from the disorderly mob.

"A boat—a boat!" shouted Ricardo Leon. "Who can find a boat?" "Ahoy, the 'Seabird'!" thundered the Slaver captain. "Lower away a boat! Do you hear? Look alive there!"

"Ay, ay, captain!" came an answering shout from the deck of the brigantine.

And a cutter splashed into the water. The sound told Edward that the slave-ship was between him and the ocean, and he realised that he would have to pass the vessel to reach the blue water. There lay a paddle in the bottom of the canoe. The midshipman seized it, and paddled away down the river, keeping a sharp look-out for the "Seabird." The darkness was so thick that he could not see two yards in advance. This rendered his voyage extremely perilous, but it saved him from the bullets of the outlaws, who were now blazing away across the broad stream, in the hope of hitting the fugitive by a chance shot.

The sound of Ned's paddle reached the ears of some of the ruffians, and half a dozen balls whizzed by him in dangerous proximity to his person. The youth ceased paddling, and merely used the paddle to steer the boat, trusting to the sluggish current to take him down the Salvias. He heard the sound of oars, as the slaver's boat rowed hither and thither in the gloom in search of him, with two men in it holding lighted torches—one in the bow and one in the stern.

"They are bound to see me," the midshipman thought. "I must pass the boat and the ship to reach the sea, and it is like running a gauntlet."

He did not, however, cease to hope. Silently the canoe glided down the river.

All at once a dark, towering shadow loomed up in front of the youth, and only a rapid twist of the paddle saved him from colliding with the hull of the brigantine. The splash in the water was heard on the deck of the slaver, and a pig of lead plumped into the water, so near that the liquid was splashed over Edward, nearly swamping his frail barque. This formidable missile was followed by some scattered musket-balls, which plashed into the dark waters all around the canoe.

Edward wielded his paddle with quick strokes, striving to get round the hull of the brigantine, to pass the vessel.

The boat's crew, attracted by the uproar, were returning to the side of the ship, and Harrington saw himself in imminent danger of recapture.

"As a last resource, if everything else fails, I can take to the water and try a swim," Edward thought, his courageous nature rousing to meet the peril which threatened him.

He had now reached the stern of the "Seabird," and was passing beneath the cabin windows, when a dozen muskets were thrust out of the openings, and a deadly fusillade burst upon him. Startled, he dropped his paddle.

The boat, unguided, crashed against the solid hull of the ship and capsized. Over went the light cockleshell, and the midshipman was precipitated into the water. As his head rose above the surface again, he threw out his hands instinctively to grasp some support, and his fingers closed on a rope which had been left dangling over the vessel's side by the slavers in their hurry of lowering the boat.

As he gripped the cord, a daring thought flashed through the mind of the young reefer.

It struck him that if he could get aboard the brigantine unobserved, he would be able to conceal himself in the darkness there until the search had slackened, and then a short swim would bring him to the shore, and he would have a chance of reaching the frigate. No sooner did the idea occur to him than he acted upon the thought.

In the half of a second he reached a porthole, into which he noiselessly climbed, drawing in the rope after him, lest it should betray his way of leaving the river. He found himself in the cabin of Captain Vincent—a comfortable, well-furnished apartment, lighted by a swinging, silver lamp.

The apartment was vacant, and the midshipman had time to look round and determine upon his line of conduct. He knew

that at any moment someone might enter and discover him, and he quickly decided what to do.

The portholes of the cabin were draped with crimson curtains, as also were the walls of the luxurious cabin, to exclude observation and to cover the bare boards. The room rather resembled a fashionable salon than the cabin of a slaver brigantine. The floor was covered with a thick carpet, on which were to be seen the marks made by the middy's wet boots and dripping garments.

These, however, were hidden by the curtains which hung round the porthole, and Edward, observing that if he advanced into the interior of the cabin he would leave conspicuous evidence of his visit, decided to remain where he was, concealed behind the heavy crimson curtain.

Having arrived at this conclusion, the midshipman sat on the carpet, with his knees drawn up to his chin, and completely enveloped by the hangings. In his right hand he still held the paddle belonging to the wrecked canoe. He had preserved it, in case he should be attacked, it being his only weapon, and though not a very efficient one, still better than nothing.

He had sat in this position for about a quarter of an hour, when he decided that it was time to make a move.

The shouts of the searchers had gradually died away; the boat had been found bottom up, and the slave-traders were satisfied that the middy had perished in the muddy waters of the Salvas creek. All the uproar caused by the escape had subsided, and young Harrington thought he could now retreat from his refuge with safety.

He was fatigued with remaining in a crouching attitude, and was beginning to get cramped. He rose with the intention of repassing through the port-hole, when he heard steps outside the door of the cabin, and a hand on the lock; it was too late for retreat. He had just time to sink down again into his hiding-place, when the door was thrown open, and Captain Vincent and Ricardo Leon entered the cabin.

Through a narrow opening in the curtains the hidden youth saw the two officers of the "Seabird," and he realised that his stay in the brigantine would be indefinitely prolonged by the presence of the slavers.

The slaver captain seated himself at a table, while the lieutenant remained standing, apparently waiting for orders from his superior.

"Leon," said the captain, "You have kept the prisoner on board, have you not?"

"The big sailor, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Yes, I've put him in the hold."

"Is he in irons?"

"No; but he is securely bound."

"Send him in here. You can free his legs; but let his hands remain tied, for he is a hot-headed Briton, and may become awkward if we leave it in his power to be so."

"Very well, captain," and the lieutenant left the cabin. Edward Harrington had heard every word of the foregoing dialogue, and he guessed that the "big sailor" alluded to was no other than Malcolm Dannel, the tall native of the Western Islands, who had been taken prisoner by the slave-traders on the deck of the "Seabird," after the fight.

He was right, for in a few minutes Ricardo Leon and Carlos entered, with the big seaman walking between them, towering a head above them, though neither of them were small men. Rodrigo Vincent pointed to a seat, where the two guards placed the prisoner, who sat down with admirable coolness.

"You can go," said the slaver-chief, addressing his subordinates, who at once quitted the cabin, leaving him alone with the Scot, except for the presence of the concealed midshipman of the "Aspasia." Captain Vincent sat with his back towards Edward, and the coxwain sat facing him, so that the young reefer could see the honest, thickly-bearded face of the broad-shouldered seaman.

"My man," began Vincent, "do you know who I am?"

"The commander of this vessel, I reckon."

"That is so. I have a proposition to



Standing on his father's shoulders, the young middy began hacking at the roof.

make to you, which, if you are wise, you will think fit to accept."

"Make it," was the laconic rejoinder.

"At once. I wish you to join my crew."

"Anything else?"

"Nothing. You are just the kind of seaman I require; if you wish to put your name on the books of the 'Seabird,' you shan't have anything to grumble at in the way of wages. You will, moreover, have a share in the profits of the voyage."

"You want me to turn slaver?" queried the Scottish seaman calmly.

"That's it; you shall lose nothing by it, be assured."

"Oh, I've no doubt I should get money by it; but what about my soul?"

"Your soul!" ejaculated the Spaniard, in astonishment at the unexpected question, staring at the coxswain blankly.

"Yes. What is to become of that? All the money you can give me won't save it."

"Hang it! I'm talking about you, not about theology."

"And I am thinking about the hereafter!" replied the sailor, laughing at his tempter. "All the blood-money you can offer me won't buy my conscience; I prefer to keep my soul pure, even at the expense of life."

At these words, so remarkable in a member of a class of men noted for thoughtlessness, Edward Harrington felt a thrill of admiration. Vincent, different-minded, was furious at being so coolly refused by a man who was at his mercy.

"Answer me!" he cried. "Will you join my vessel or not?"

"I beg to be excused," replied the British seaman tranquilly.

"For the last time!" exclaimed the Spaniard, drawing a pistol from his belt, and levelling it at the breast of the sailor.

"I refuse!" replied Donnel, looking at the villain unflinchingly.

"Then die!" cried the enraged slaver. And he was about to press the trigger, when he felt a stunning blow on his head, and he rolled off his chair and lay on the carpet, stretched at full length, quite insensible.

Edward, thoughtful and careless of the consequences of his act, had rushed forward and dealt the blow, just in time to save Donnel's life. The sailor started up in surprise, while Edward, dropping the paddle, with which he had dealt the blow, and which had been broken by the concussion, stooped over the slaver to make sure that his insensibility was genuine.

A glance showed the midgy that the Spaniard was indeed stunned; indeed, he thought it probable that the injured man would never wake again.

"You here!" exclaimed Donnel. "I thought you were dead, sir."

"So did this rascally slaver," replied Ned. "But, you see, I am alive, Donnel. But we must get out of this, or his men will discover us."

"My feet are tied, sir."

Edward took Vincent's cutlass, and severed the bonds of the sailor.

"We shall have to swim," he said. "But as we may be attacked, we had best arm ourselves. Take this cutlass, and I'll borrow this fellow's dagger. I have a mind to give him six inches of it, and put him past doing mischief; but I can't kill him while he's helpless. However, that crack on the nut will last him some time. Come along!"

"Are we to dive out of the port-hole, sir?"

"Yes, that's the way I came in."

"There is a rope, then?"

"Yes, there's a rope, which we shall slide down."

The two men did so without difficulty, and gained the river, under the shadow of the 'Seabird's' long, dark hull.

"Shall we swim down the river, or to the land?" whispered Donnel.

"To the land."

"Would it not be quicker to—"

"No, for the flood-tide is coming in, and we should have to struggle against that to reach the ocean."

"Of course, sir. I forgot that."

Silent as fishes they swam to the bank, and, wading knee-deep in thick yellow mud, they reached the dry land, fortunately without encountering either crocodiles or hippopotami.

"We are on the south bank of the river," remarked Edward.

"So we must keep the water to our right to get to the Atlantic."

"Yes, sir. But hark! what's that?"

"That" was a loud cry which came from the slave-ship.

"The condition of the skipper has been discovered," said Edward. "Let us hurry, for these rascals will soon be upon our track."

"They're upon it already, Mr. Harrington," returned Donnel, whose keen ear caught the sound of oars on the river.

Side by side the fugitives rushed through the thickets, speeding along at the greatest speed they were capable of. Splash through mud and mire, pool and bog, they went at a headlong rate, and soon left far behind all sight and sound of the slavers.

"I think we are safe now!" panted Edward, slackening pace

when they were about a mile from the brigantine. "We must be near the sea now."

"Yes, sir," answered Donnel. "The moon will soon be up, and then we can see our way. We must be close to the shore."

The two men proceeded at a more moderate pace, and ten minutes later the moon's white rays illuminated wood and river, and they saw the place where the Salvas rolled its broad flood into the ocean, the extensive sheet of bright water glistening in the lunar beams.

And less than half a mile from them floated a huge object, the sight of which caused both to utter ejaculations of joy.

"The 'Aspasia'! The 'Aspasia'!"

CHAPTER VII.

CAPTAIN VINCENT'S RESOLVE—FACE TO FACE WITH DEATH.

The injury done to Captain Vincent, and the escape of Donnel, had been discovered on board the 'Seabird' very quickly after the departure of the two Englishmen.

Ricardo Leon, curious to know what his commander could have to say to the British sailor, had remained near the cabin door, and after a while the silence in the room had caused him surprise, and he tapped discreetly at the door. Receiving no answer, he ventured to enter, and was amazed to find the Spaniard stretched on the carpet insensible, and the Scottish seaman gone. The lieutenant immediately gave the alarm, and search was made for Donnel, which was kept up for an hour without success.

The captain lay for two hours in a comatose state, caused by the terrific thump he had received, and when he at last recovered his senses, he remained dazed and helpless for an hour. Carlos, who was an experienced old seaman, and knew a little of rough-and-ready surgery, examined his wound, and pronounced that no damage was done to the skull, beyond a contusion.

Vincent heard this with satisfaction, for he had feared that his skull was fractured, and, knowing that his pain would pass away in time, he endured the terrible headache caused by the blow with exemplary fortitude, consoling himself for his sufferings by the thought of the vengeance he meant to take. Ricardo, who was devouring with curiosity to know how the affair had chanced, questioned the Spaniard on the subject.

"I was going to kill the prisoner," Vincent told him, "when I felt a frightful crash on my head, and I lost my senses."

"But who hit you?"

"Someone who was hidden in the cabin."

"But there was no one here when Carlos and I went out."

"No one except the prisoner," confirmed Carlos.

"It was that accursed reefer!" ground out Vincent through his teeth.

"Not Harrington?"

"Yes, Harrington!"

"But he is dead!"

"We thought so, but we were mistaken; we must have been. I can guess it all easily. 'Tis simple enough."

"Hanged if I can see it, then, if it is simple!"

"You always were a fool!" was the polite reply. "Can't you see that broken paddle on the floor? It was broken on my skull. That paddle belongs to the canoe the midshipman of the frigate stole."

"That's proof," said old Carlos.

"Proof positive. Besides, there's a rope hanging outside the port-hole, and wet marks on the carpet inside. You can see that!"

"I admire his pluck," Ricardo remarked. "Who could have guessed he would dare to venture aboard the brigantine?"

"That's where his wit comes in. He knew we should never think of looking for him in our own vessel."

"True. Well, he has got off, and so has your giant."

"But his father, and the girl he called his cousin, are in my hands!" the Spaniard replied, with a sinister smile. "I can reach him through them."

"What will you do to them, captain?"

"Kill them!" was the reply.

"The girl, too, captain?" asked Ricardo Leon.

"Both. Now leave me; my head is splitting, and I want to try to get a little sleep."

"Shall I call you in the morning, Captain Vincent?"

"At daybreak."

The slaver captain threw himself upon his bunk, and the two subordinates left him, and went on deck.

"Don't you think there's danger of the midshipman piloting the frigate up the river, Senor Leon?" inquired Carlos.

"Yes, Carlos, I do, and if I were the captain I would at once sail for the creek he talks about, which communicates with the Papajo River, and gives us a passage to the ocean."

"That's impossible, senor."

"And for what reason?"

"The creek leading from the Salvas to the Papajo is not yet open."

"Not open!"

"No. 'Tis the floods from up-country that render the creek navigable. I doubt if you could get a long boat through the passage now."

"What infernal ill-luck!"

"Captain Vincent expected it."

"What! He knew the creek would not give us a passage out of this river?"

"He knew it would not be open yet."

"And when will the floods come that open this confounded passage?"

"In a week or so; perhaps less, perhaps more."

"But in a week we may be all in gaol at Sierra Leone."

"That's possible," returned the imperturbable Carlos. "But, of course, the senior captain did not count upon the inopportune appearance of this English ship. It will take us a week or more to get the slaves aboard, and then we could escape. So long as the Englishman stays at the mouth of the river, we can snap our fingers at him, but—"

"But if he comes up the river we are lost."

"Perhaps not. Another boat attack need not frighten us."

"It is not that I dread. I know the frigate, with a skilful captain, could get over the sand-bar at the mouth of the Salvias, and, once in the river, the water is deep enough to carry her as far as our anchorage."

"That's true; but if she comes in sight we can warp the brigantine a little further up the river."

"The water is too shallow further up to carry us out of reach of her guns," replied Ricardo Leon gloomily.

"At the worst, we can abandon the ship and take to the woods."

"That's better than being taken prisoners, it's true; but I've no ambition to become a wild man of the woods."

"Well, let us hope the frigate won't get into the river," said the philosophical Carlos, as he went to his hammock. Ricardo Leon followed his example, filled with gloomy forebodings. He was not a brave man, and the prospect of having to face a force of British bluejackets in deadly conflict was by no means pleasant to him.

The night passed uneventfully aboard the "Seabird," but at the first peep of dawn the slavers were all astir. The early beams of the rising sun showed them a sight which filled the stoutest with apprehension. Up the river, with slow and majestic motion, came the "Aspasia," with sails set, and guns run out for action. Slowly and steadily the huge vessel came on, threading her way with cautious skill through the mazes of the river.

Captain Rodrigo Vincent came upon deck immediately the ship came into view. The slaver was pale with rage.

"Bring the prisoner Harrington here!" he cried.

"Shall I fetch him from the stockade, captain?"

"Yes, but stay, wait a moment," added the captain thoughtfully. "Shall we have the lieutenant or his niece?"

"What are you going to do, captain?" asked Ricardo Leon.

"Threaten them with death unless the frigate departs."

"The English commander will laugh at such a device."

"Will he? Do you think he'll see his officer hanged before his eyes?"

"Rather than not capture us, yes."

"It may be so, but it's worth trying. Fetch the prisoner."

"And the senorita?"

"No, I'll reserve her for another emergency which I foresee."

In five minutes Lieutenant Harrington was brought from his prison in the stockade to the deck of the outlaw brigantine. He was a trifle pale, but quite calm and firm, and ready for whatever might happen. A flush of pleasure overspread his face when he caught sight of the "Aspasia."

"No doubt you think your deliverance is at hand!" sneered the Spaniard, noticing the prisoner's expression. "But you are mistaken. If that vessel, which you are so glad to see, does not return to the gulf, you will swing at the yardarm of this vessel."

"You dare not commit such an outrage in sight of the cruiser?" cried the officer, surprised and angered.

"You shall see what I dare do! Men, rig a running bowline!"

In five minutes Harrington stood on the deck beneath the arm of the mainyard, with a noose round his neck, the rope being passed over the yard above, and the loose end grasped by half a dozen slavers.

"When I give the word, haul away!" cried the slaver captain.

"If that cruiser opens fire he dies!"

"How shall we get aboard?" queried Donnef. "Do you think they'll hear us if we hail at that distance?"

"We can try, at all events," replied Edward. "Let us shout together, and our united efforts may attract the attention of the watch."

With all the strength of their lungs the two men shouted:

"Aspasia, ahoy! ahoy! ahoy!"

The sound rang far over the waters, and reached the ears of the alert night-watch on the decks of the frigate. Tearing branches from a neighbouring tree, the two sailors waved them energetically, to indicate their position to the men of the "Aspasia." At the same time they sent forth shout after shout, until an answering shout from the frigate told them they had been seen.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Donnef. "They're lowering a boat!"

"We shall be aboard in five minutes," remarked Edward gladly.

The bright moonlight showed them a boat approaching through the sand-banks, propelled by the sturdy arms of a dozen blue-jackets. When it was near enough, the fugitives waded through the surf, and clambered over the gunwale.

"So it's young Harrington!" said Halyard, who had charge of the boat.

"Yes, sir," replied the middy, saluting.

"Thought you were food for the fishes long ago."

"I was taken prisoner by the slavers, sir, with Donnef here."

"Seen anything of your dad, my boy?"

"He is alive, a prisoner in the hands of the slavers."

"We'll have him out of that before very long," said Halyard.

As the boat grated against the hull of the frigate, Captain Waterton leaned over the rail, and his surprise was great when he saw the returning midshipman. Edward, reaching the quarterdeck, made his report to the commander.

"So your father is still alive?" asked the captain, when the young man had concisely narrated his adventures.

"Yes, sir; but Captain Vincent has threatened to take his life because he would not come to you with a false report."

"I do not think you need to fear for him, my lad; the slaver would hardly dare to harm him while we are so near."

"Vincent says there is another passage by which he can regain the sea, instead of returning down the Salvias, sir," the midshipman said.

"Indeed!" the captain exclaimed. "Then there is no time to be lost. Did you observe the river, Mr. Harrington, while you were on it; in short, do you think the water will be deep enough to enable us to take the frigate up the river, to attack the slaver in his retreat?"

"Yes, sir, if you take advantage of the present flood-tide to get over the sand-banks."

"Very well, Mr. Harrington. You may go to the surgeon now, and let him look at that cut on your head."

Edward made his bow, and retired, glad enough to seek his hammock, for he was worn out with fatigue. The ship's surgeon pronounced the wound on the middy's head merely a scratch, and bound it up. Ned, although terribly anxious about his father and cousin, fell into a deep sleep immediately he got into his hammock, and did not wake till long after dawn, the captain having considerably given orders that he was not to be called up for duty.

On rising in the morning, he was assailed by his fellow-reefers, who wanted to know all the particulars of his adventures up the river.

"Depend upon it, Ned, we'll have your dad here before noon," said Tom Williams, when Edward had obligingly finished his recital. "We are already a mile up the river."

"What! Have we passed the sand-bar?"

"Rather. We went over it at high-tide by moonlight, while you were snoring away like a traction-engine."

Edward hastened on deck, and to his delight found that the "Aspasia" was sailing between the green, mangrove-lined banks of the Salvias.

"And there's the slaver!" exclaimed Tom Williams, who was the first to distinguish the brigantine through the foliage that almost hid her from view.

"Harrington," called out Lieutenant Halyard at this moment.

"The captain wants you, lucky dog that you are," whispered Tom.

Edward hastened to obey the summons.

"Harrington," said Captain Waterton, "give me a description of the slaver's stockade, as well as you can remember it."

Edward did so.

"The gate faces the river, you say?"

"Yes, sir, about ten yards from the bank."

"How many men did you see in the fort?" continued the captain.

"In the dark I could not see so much, sir; but I think there must have been less than fifty."

"And how many aboard the brigantine?"

"About forty, sir."

CHAPTER VIII.

ABOARD THE "ASPASIA"—THE DEFIANCE.

Both Edward and the sailor were overjoyed to set eyes upon the frigate once again. They were now safe, and could hope to be able to return with aid to the prisoners left in the hands of the slavers.

HAND THIS COPY TO A FRIEND WHEN YOU HAVE DONE WITH IT.

"Humph! That will do."

Edward touched his cap, and retreated to the lee side of the quarterdeck. The captain remained thoughtful for a moment, then he said:

"Mr. Halyard, you will take the two cutters, and convey seventy men to the shore. Send the boats back when you are landed, and with your men approach the stockade. Do not let the slavers observe your movements."

"Anything else, sir?"

"When I have made a breach in the stockade wall, you will attack, and capture the building."

The officer saluted and departed. When Halyard and his men were landed, and the boats were again swung up to the davits, the captain ordered the drummer to beat to quarters, and the frigate was prepared for action.

By this time they were close to the cornered slaver, and all aboard the cruiser could see the group on the deck of the "Seabird." Captain Waterton's brow darkened as he saw the British officer in his ignominious situation, with the noose around his neck. Taking his speaking-trumpet, he hailed the "Seabird."

"What do you want?" came the defiant answer of Rodrigo Vincent.

"Surrender, or I'll blow you out of the water!"

"Fire a single shot, and this man swings at the yardarm!"

There was a long pause after this answer. The sailors looked at each other in silence, wondering what the "old man" would do. The captain looked thoughtful and savage. Vincent was determined to carry out his sentence; Harrington knew it, but he did not shrink from his fate. He stood erect and calm, awaiting death with heroic fortitude. The silence became painful; it was at last broken by Harrington himself.

CHAPTER IX.

THE DILEMMA—THE CONFLICT AND THE CAPTURE—CONCLUSION.

Gertrude Alden, after being taken from the hut in which the two officers were imprisoned, was carried aboard the brigantine. Rodrigo Vincent, with the idea of turning to account the chivalrous feelings of the English commander, had ordered her to be brought on deck, and she now stood near her relative, almost fainting with anguish, her sinking form supported by Carlos and Ricardo Leon. Her eyes turned upon Harrington as he began to speak, and then entreatingly upon the face of the merciless Spaniard.

"Captain Waterton," said Harrington in a firm voice, speaking rapidly to prevent the slaver captain interrupting him, "you have heard what this scoundrel threatens. Do not regard him. The slave-ship is at your mercy. Take it, let my fate be what it will!"

This speech, worthy of a Regulus, made a deep impression upon all the listeners. The bluejackets aboard the "Aspasia" gazed at the gallant officer with admiration, and even the slavers looked uneasily at their commander. But the Spaniard did not relent.

"Captain Vincent," said Waterton, "if you surrender, you and your crew shall go free, if the prisoners are delivered safe into my hands."

"And what of my ship?"

"It must be given up to me."

"I refuse!"

"Then," resumed the English captain, "it is my duty to attack you. Your vessel must be captured. If you harm your prisoners you shall hang at this yardarm when you are taken. But before you commit this crime consider! You cannot hope to successfully resist; you know that. Then be advised, and surrender."

"Never!" cried the slaver captain. "I'll live free, or I'll die fighting!"

"Men, to your posts!" cried Captain Waterton, pale but resolved.

The seamen went to their quarters in gloomy silence; they felt that the captain could not act otherwise than as he had done, yet it was not pleasant to see their officer sacrificed before their eyes.

Edward Harrington had listened to the debate in impatient silence, his blood boiling with anger. He longed to rush sword in hand upon the deck of the "Seabird"; the habit of discipline alone restrained him from some adventurous attempt to rescue his parent, and the girl he had already learned to love.

"Stay!" shouted Captain Vincent, as the "Aspasia's" commander turned to order his men to commence the assault upon the brigantine—"stay, listen to me for a moment!"

"What have you to say?" asked the British captain pausing.

All eyes were fixed upon the dark, savage face of the slaver captain as he spoke, and no one noticed Edward slip across the deck and drop into the river through a lower porthole. The young man was determined to make a desperate effort to preserve his father's life; the renewed delay gave him time to try.

Swimming under the cover of the half-submerged mangroves, he reached the side of the slaver, and swam round the ship. On arriving at the side opposite the bank, he climbed into a porthole, and reached the interior of the vessel. No one observed him; all the slavers were too intently looking towards the frigate to notice him in the water on the landward side of the brigantine.

The midshipman, dripping with water, entered the cabin of the captain, which he rightly judged was empty, all the slavers being interested in the thrilling tableau on deck, and appropriated a pair of handsome pistols, which he had seen hanging on the wall beside the captain's bunk, during his previous visit to the apartment. With one in each hand, he crept up the hatchway, and crouched there just below the level of the deck, ready and resolved to "chip in" if the slavers attempted to execute the lieutenant.

"If you attack us," Vincent continued, when Captain Waterton had stopped his warlike preparations, and signified his alacrity to renew the discussion of the situation, "not only this officer, but this girl shall be put to death!"

"Wretch! You would not dare!"

Vincent's answer to this was a sign to Ricardo Leon, who drew a pistol, and placed the muzzle to the breast of the fainting maiden.

"Help me! Help!" shrieked the terrified girl.

"You see!" shouted Vincent exultantly, "their death is certain if you persist. Return to the sea, and leave us in peace, and both shall be given up to you unharmed. Molest us, and they die! Choose!"

Captain Waterton was a humane, kind-hearted man, but he was an experienced officer. He knew he could not neglect his duty to save the unfortunate victims of the slaver's ferocity. It was imperative that the "Seabird" should be taken, yet it was a hard struggle to resign the two helpless captives to certain death. Harrington's case would not be so hard. He would be a martyr to his duty; but that Gertrude should perish in a quarrel which did not concern her—an innocent victim to the slave-dealer's barbarity—was terrible. But Waterton could only take one course, and he took it.

"Your threats avail you nothing," he said calmly, but decisively. "The 'Seabird' is my prize; 'tis my duty to take it, and it shall be taken. Kill these prisoners if you dare; you shall expiate the crime on the gallows. Helmsman, lay her alongside. Boarders, follow me!"

A turn of the helm brought the frigate alongside of the brigantine, and from the decks of the huge vessel, the boarding-party, led by Captain Waterton in person, rushed to assail the slavers. Before this could be completed, the Spaniard yelled:

"Death! Death to the prisoners!"

The hangmen began to tug at the rope, which was to haul Harrington up to the yardarm, and Ricardo Leon cocked his pistol to carry out the demoniac order of his chief. But at this juncture an active form sprang up from the hatchway steps. A loud report rang out, and Ricardo Leon uttered a cry, and staggered back, pressing both hands to his chest, where Edward's bullet had taken effect. Before the slavers could recover from their surprise at this sudden and unexpected attack, the midshipman fired his second pistol into the group of seamen who held the rope that encircled the neck of his father.

One fell, mortally wounded, and the rest, in their astonishment, released the rope, and Harrington, whose feet had just left the deck, fell flat on the planks, unharmed. Then, drawing his dirk, the gallant lad rushed forward; his arm encircled the waist of Gertrude, and he stood over the fallen lieutenant, facing the furious slavers dauntlessly. The English sailors now came pouring over the bulwarks, with cutlasses and pistols in their hands, and, seeing the midshipman alone in the midst of the slavers, the tars gave a cheer and rushed to his aid.

"Cut him down!" roared the slaver captain beside himself with rage; "and slay the prisoners—kill them, I say!"

"Scoundrel!" cried Captain Waterton, interposing his cutlass between Edward and the Spaniard. "Face a man, if you dare!"

"I dare!" exclaimed Vincent; and his blade crossed the Englishman's.

Carlos attacked the reeler, armed with his long Catalan knife, and the young man was compelled to act upon the defensive. The others of the "Seabird's" crew engaged with the British boarders, headed by Tillet and Donnel, and a short but desperate conflict was fought on the narrow deck of the brigantine.

Meanwhile, the seamen left in the "Aspasia" poured broadside after broadside into the stockade, whose flimsy walls, unable to resist artillery, fell in splinters on every side. Walls, huts, and garrison were cut to pieces, and in five minutes the survivors of the slave-catchers, realising that their four guns were no match for the frigate's twenty-four, fled from the stockade in dismay. They only escaped, however, from the frying-pan into the fire, as the saying is, for Lieutenant Halyard and his force had surrounded the retreat, and as the fugitive garrison went out they were taken prisoners by the bluejackets.

The fight on board the "Seabird" was more deadly, and the planks were dyed with blood, and encumbered with corpses be-

fore the furious resistance of the **slavers** was crushed. Rodrigo Vincent, fighting to the last, fell beneath the sword of the British captain, and at the same moment Carlos went down with Edward's dirk through his heart. The sailors drove the disorganised mob of slavers into the forecastle, where the survivors, after the death of the captain, surrendered at discretion.

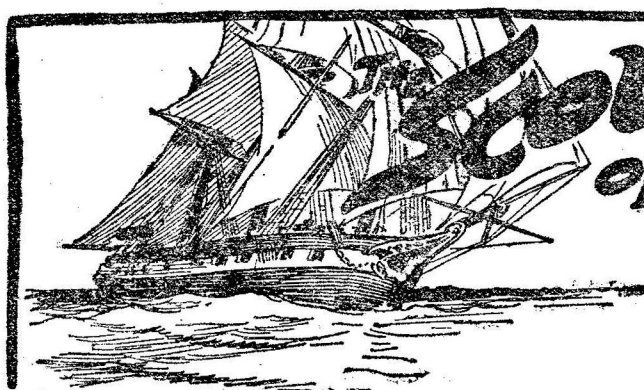
The "Seabird" was taken, and the prisoners saved, though at the cost of many valuable lives. Captain Waterton, after the fight, commended Edward for his courage and cleverness, and the middy, who had expected a reprimand for leaving the quarter-deck of the "Aspasia" without orders, was both relieved and pleased. But what made him most happy was the grip of the hand which his father gave him, and the sweet words of Gertrude Alden.

After the capture of the brigantine, the "Aspasia" headed

for Sierra Leone, where the prize was delivered into the hands of the authorities.

There Gertrude left the frigate, to the great sorrow of both Edward and herself. But their parting was not for long. The young lady proceeded to England, and shortly afterwards the "Aspasia" was ordered home. Arriving at Portsmouth, our hero found, to his delight, that his exploits in West Africa had procured him a lieutenantancy, and that his father had been promoted to the rank of commander. He at once hastened to visit Gertrude, and, finding her overjoyed to see him again, told her his love, and asked her a certain question. What her answer was may be gathered from the fact that before long the young lieutenant became a benedict, and his life's partner was the beautiful girl he had rescued from the clutches of the slaver captain.

THE END.



SCOURGE OF THE SEAS.

By HENRY ST. JOHN,

Author of "The Days of Dashing Drake," "A Middy of Nelson's Day," "Clive Hardacre," &c., &c.

You can begin this Story now by reading this.

This is the story of Frank Farleigh, a boy who has been brought up to believe himself the son of a simple fisherman. He saves the life of Captain Wilfrid Curzon, commander of the "Fearless," and Captain Curzon promises to make him a middy on his vessel. This promise, however, is never fulfilled, for Frank and an old sailor, by name Bill Woshem, are lured on to a pirate vessel, in the commander of which they recognise, to their astonishment, the very captain whose life Frank had saved.

They sail against their will in the pirate vessel, the "Vulture," known better under the title of the "Scourge of the Seas," and on board that ship Captain Curzon tells Frank that they are father and son. This Frank steadfastly refuses to believe. They then arrive at the pirates' stronghold, a lonely island in the Indian Ocean, from which place Frank and Bill, accompanied by a small negro boy, Quacko—who has already saved Frank's life twice—manage to escape.

They get safely on board a French man-of-war, which is, however, almost immediately wrecked in a storm. Those of the crew who have escaped destruction in the storm seize the ship's cutter and put off, leaving the captain, the lieutenant, a middy, and Frank, Bill, and Quacko behind. These six then manage to secure a small quantity of provisions, among which is a keg of brandy, and they put off in a small cutter just as the ship founders.

The cowardly sailors who have previously escaped from the sinking ship then come up, and demand a share of the provisions, which consist only of a very small keg of water, a bag of biscuits, and a sack of spoiled flour, beside the keg of brandy. The brandy and the flour are given them, and they go laughingly away. For three days the little boat drifts about. On the fourth day the cutter again comes into sight. Frank looks into it, then recoils with a gasp of horror, and they pull away from it.

THE FOURTH DAY—THE LAST DROP.

They were very silent, with the horror of that scene still upon them.

Bill's strength soon gave out, and the oars slipped from his hands, and floated gently away, as, overcome with exhaustion, he sank down in the bottom of the boat.

The others watched the oars slowly float away beyond their reach with a dull apathy, which prevented them from stretching out a hand, or, indeed, moving anything but their eyes.

A subdued, intermittent groaning came from the bows, where the poor little lad, in his once smart uniform, lay struggling with the bitter fire-thirst, that was slowly sapping away his young life.

Quacko, in spite of the lion's shares which he had enjoyed, was

scarcely in better plight, and he lay, with his woolly head against the hot, blistering timbers, crying weakly with exhaustion.

Would rescue never come?

Frank mustered sufficient strength to stand up for a few moments, while his eyes swept the horizon in the vain hope of that welcome sight, a sail.

But the glittering waters that danced in the sun's rays blinded him, and brought tears of weakness into his tired eyes.

He could see nothing distinctly; everything appeared blurred and misted. The horizon was no longer the sharp, defining line where sea and sky met. It was an irregular, zigzagging line, fading away altogether in a flame-coloured mist to the eastward, where the sun's rays were still strongest.

He sank down again, dispirited and hopeless, and none troubled to ask him what he had seen.

For long, long hours, they drifted on at the mercy of the tide, and as the sun mounted higher and higher in the heavens, it beat down upon them pitilessly. It shrivelled the skin off their faces, and blackened their lips; it beat upon their aching heads until it brought the hot, salt tears into their eyes.

By this time the poor little middy was free from his sufferings. He was delirious, and raved incessantly, calling again and again on the names of those whom he would never more meet on earth.

Frank arose painfully. He could not bear to listen to that pitiful, wailing voice. On his hands and knees he crept to the locker, for he had not the strength now to rise to his feet.

Bill lifted himself up on his arm and watched him in silence; but the two Frenchmen had sunk into a lethargy from which not even the thoughts of the loss of the last drop of their precious water could raise them.

Frank dragged out the key, for, empty almost as it was, he had not the strength to lift it.

Bill raised himself higher, and watched him with burning eyes as he fumbled with the spigot.

He held the little tin pannikin under to catch the feeble trickles until it was half filled, then the supply ceased. It was their last drop of water—their very last! There had been more left yesterday, but the fierce heat had dried it up.

As Frank, holding the little vessel containing the fluid—more precious a million times than the rarest gems—turned, he caught Bill's eyes fixed steadfastly on him.

He tried to speak, but he could not. His tongue, dry and swollen, clung to the roof of his mouth. All he could do was to point unsteadily towards the bows, and Bill, understanding what he meant, lay back contentedly.

Then Frank, on his hands and knees, crept painfully to where the dying French boy lay.

"Hi, Massa Frank! Hi, Massa Frank!" cried Quacko imploringly; "dat for poor Quacko?"

Frank shook his head gently, and pointed to the French boy.

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