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JIM'S SHIPMATE



With fiendish glee in their faces the savages advanced towards the bound man, poised their spears to strike. Luttrell shuddered, but flinched not. Brave to the last, Jim's shipmate would die—if die he must—without faltering.

No. 406

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THE UNION JACK



Vol. XVI.—No. 406.

A LONG NOVEL IN EACH NUMBER.

JIM'S SHIPMATE.

Grand Complete Novel, by the Author of "Every Inch a Sailor,"
"The Heart of the World," "Pressed Into Piracy," &c.

CHAPTER 1.

Jim Leslie Ships Aboard the "Cockatoo"—Bound for Rio.

A bright-faced, curly-headed boy of sixteen stepped upon the dirty and shabby deck of the "Cockatoo."

"Is Mr. Rawlings here?" he asked, addressing one of the busy seamen.

"Yonder, by the capstan,"

"Thanks."

The boy was walking aft when the seaman he had spoken to, moved by a sudden impulse, laid a detaining hand upon his shoulder.

"Are you going to ship on the 'Cockatoo' kiddy?" he queried.

"Yes."

"Then don't do it. Cut and run while you have the chance. Take an old salt's advice, and—"

"Tom Bunting, have you got nothing better to do than chatter you lubber! Get in your jawing tackle. What does that kid want?" came a harsh voice from aft.

Bunting gave the lad a droll look, and turned to his work again, while the new recruit made his way to Mr. Rawlings, the chief mate of the "Cockatoo."

"If you please, sir, I am Jim Leslie, and Captain Knox has sent me aboard."

"Another of 'em?" growled Rawlings, ill-humouredly. He was a tall, lank man, with prominent cheek-bones, square jaw, and piercing eyes, and Jim Leslie was not wrong in setting him down at first glance as an "ugly customer."

"Another helpless cub for me to make a man of!" Mr. Rawlings continued, scowling at Jim. "You'll be sick for the first week, and lazy for all the rest. Nice work for a chief mate! I reckon if I ever become a landsman I'll look out for a job as nursery-governess. By thunder, I'm having training for it!"

To this tirade Jim made no reply. Clearly, Mr. Rawlings was a man with a grievance.

"Can you work?" exclaimed the mate. "I warn you that you won't get any coddling aboard the 'Cockatoo.'"

"I am ready to work," Jim answered quietly.

"Ah, you are one of the soft-spoken breed, I see. You won't lad your soft saviour go down with John Rawlings, so you can save your breath to cool your porridge. Go and ask us to let you do something to do; and, mind, I shall keep an eye on you, and if I find you skulking—"

Apparently what Mr. Rawlings would do in that case could not be adequately expressed in words, for he left his sentence unfinished.

Jim, glad to get away from the mate, sought the bo'sun, who speedily set him to work cleaning and scraping. His sailor's bar—let he did not own a chest—was thrown into the dim depths of the fore-cabin, and Jim had no opportunity of going to stow away.

Tom Bunting looked at Jim several times, and each time shook his head sagely, as who should say, "You'll repent soon of not taking my advice."

Jim was half inclined to take it yet. But he had signed for the voyage to Rio, and he did not like the idea of deserting. He was a sturdy British sailor, and, young as he was, he was

"true blue," plucky, and resolute, and able to make the best of a bad job. But, though he decided to stick to the "Cockatoo," he was somewhat troubled in mind about old Bunting's warning, and Mr. Rawlings's mysterious reference to him as "another of 'em." Another of what? He could not guess what the chief mate meant.

The "Cockatoo" was to sail that day, and the cargo was all stowed; but the crew were as black as sweeps, and as busy as bees, for on the day of sailing there were a thousand and one things to be done.

Mr. Rawlings was in a vile temper, shouting orders and oaths, and in consequence many of the seamen were in a mood of sullenness.

Captain Knox came aboard, and the tug ran alongside at the same time, and the capstan was manned at once.

Down the Thames, in the wake of the little black tug, the "Cockatoo" glided—a splendid and stately ship, towering majestically above the colliers, barges, and wherries.

It was dark when the "Cockatoo" passed Margate, and the lights, red and green, were set going at the ship's sides as she made for the Downs.

It was then that the sailors collected in the galley to partake of hard biscuit and weak coffee, and glad enough they were even of that.

Jim Leslie was tired and famished. He fell rather than sat upon a bench by the galley fire, and began to gnaw at his hard tack. Jim had been to sea before, but his last captain had been very unlike Captain Knox.

Knox was an economist, and sought to curry favour with his owners by keeping down the expenses; consequently, the "Cockatoo" was undermanned, and the men badly fed.

"Soak it in your cordee, younker," Tom Bunting kindly advised. "It'll soften the grub and drown the weevils."

Jim took his advice, and managed to make a meal; and then he amused himself by looking over his companions, curious to see the kind of men he was to sail with.

He noticed, with some surprise, the number of lads of about his own age; they were quite as numerous as the men. He guessed now the meaning of Mr. Rawlings's remark—

"Another of 'em!'"

"What are there so many youngsters aboard for, Mr. Bunting?" he asked the old salt.

Bunting grinned.

"That's Cap'n Knox's economy, Jimmy. He never ships a man if a boy'll do. See? He pays a boy next to nothing, gives him ditto to eat, ditto to drink, and gets out of him the work of an ordinary seaman."

"Was that why you advised me to cut and run?"

"Jest so. It's a dog's life here. But now you'll do wisely

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to make the best of it. You're shipped now for Rio, and you'll gain nothing by sulking."

"Out of that, you kid!" exclaimed a heavily-built and coarse-featured young man, shoving Jim from behind. "You've had enough of that there stove. Scoot!"

Now, Jim would have yielded his place readily in response to a civil appeal, but bullying was a thing he knew it would never do to submit to. So he did not move, but merely turned his head to look at the speaker.

"I'll see you hanged first!" he said calmly.

"You've no call to interfere with Leslie, Wilcox," exclaimed Tom Bunting. "The place is his'n."

"You mind your own business! Kid, come out of it!" And Wilcox grasped Jim's shoulder, and jerked him off the bench.

In an instant Jim tore himself free; and, clenching his fist, gave Wilcox a drive in the chest which sent him reeling backwards.

"Take that, you bully!" he exclaimed. "And if you want any more take off your jersey, and come on!"

Wilcox was eighteen, and nearly a head taller than Jim. He was not long in accepting the challenge.

"All right," he said, with a grin. "I'll take some of the cheek out of you, my boy!"

"Back up!" cried the seamen, crowding round, biscuit or pannikin in hand, to see the fun.

In such confined quarters there was no room for wild rushing, or Wilcox's extra size and weight might have given him an easy victory. The combatants faced each other, hemmed in by the ring of seamen, and fought almost without stirring their feet.

Neither had much skill in boxing. Wilcox was longer in the reach, but Jim was quicker, and more alert. It was, therefore, almost an equal contest, to be decided by grit and endurance.

Wilcox, who had just come in hungry for his supper, and was anxious to get to it, attacked Jim fiercely, and the boy suffered a good deal. But he gave back as good as he received, and after six rounds both were pretty well pated.

"Chuck it!" then said Wilcox, with a grunt. "I'm tired out with the slogging on deck, or I'd not leave a bone unbroken in your carcass!"

Jim was so fatigued that he could hardly stand, but his spirit was indomitable.

"Chuck it if you like," he replied; "but you won't have my seat."

Wilcox turned away sullenly.

"I'll pay you for this later on," he said, savagely.

So Jim resumed his place by the galley stove, much praised by the sailors for his pluck. Tom Bunting patted him on the back.

"You'll do, my lad," he said. "You stood up to him like a man, and I reckon he'll let you alone arter this."

Jim was considerably hurt, but not dissatisfied. As soon as turning-in time came he went with the rest of his watch to the fore-castle, and his first thought was for his bag, which he had not seen since it was tossed into the fore-castle earlier in the day.

He found the bag, but it was torn open, and its contents were "scattered far and wide." Jim was too tired to get into a rage, and besides, it was no use grumbling. So he collected all he could find of his property, replaced it in the bag, and then slung his hammock and tumbled into it.

He fell asleep at once, and slept like a top, until awakened by a sudden and terrible shock.

He started out of his slumber to find himself lying upon the cold planks, with an ache in his shoulder.

Someone had cut down his hammock by the head. He stared round. The fo'c's'le was dim, almost dark, only a glimmer of light coming through the open door. His mates appeared to be all asleep; but as he rubbed his bruised shoulder he heard a subdued chuckle from Wilcox's bunk. Then he was at no loss to guess the author of his fall.

"By George, I'll make him smart for it!" muttered Jim wrathfully.

He dressed himself, and went out of the fore-castle, and fetched a bucket of water from the galley, in which the cook had washed the utensils used at the seamen's last meal. He came back quietly into the fo'c's'le, stepped up to Wilcox's bunk, and "sloshed" the bucketful of dirty water all over him. There was a wild howl as Wilcox leapt up in his shirt, dripping with water, and of course he bumped his head against the bunk above, uttering a fresh yell of pain as he did so.

As he scrambled out of the bunk, Jim slammed the bucket down over his head, and went on deck while his enemy was struggling to get it off.

Wilcox's cries awoke his messmates, and loud was their laughter as they saw him, soaked with water, and his hair matted by the ooze from the bottom of the bucket.

"Where's that young demon?" he howled. "I'll back him for this!"

"Serve you right!" said Tom Bunting. "You can let me mock down, I suppose, and might be broken for such. You serve you right, you spiteful varmint!"

That, and the jeer of the rest, showed Wilcox how low was the sympathy he might expect.

Vowing vengeance upon Jim, he dried himself, and got back into his bunk; but he did not get much more sleep before the starboard watch came down, and he had to obey the boat-swain's call to the deck.

CHAPTER 2.

The Captain's Tyranny—Jim's Shipmate in Irons—A Plan of Revenge—On the Verge of a Crime.

By the time the "Cockatoo" was in the Channel the crew had made the discovery that the voyage was likely to be an extremely hard one.

The captain was a Tartar, the chief mate a bully; the mates were short and the work hard, and as there were too few hands to do the work, every man was overdriven, hulled, and worn out.

Discontent was very strong in the fo'c's'le, and Jim heard many savage mutterings and threats of vengeance, but he did not pay much attention to them at first. He noticed, however, that they grew more earnest every day, especially amongst the rougher characters.

Of these there were plenty to make mischief. The captain's ideas of economy prevented him from shipping free-class seamen. Excepting for Tom Bunting and Robert Luttrell, the crew was a "rotten" one, as shippers say. There was more than one thief in the fo'c's'le. Jim missed half his clothes after the tearing open of his bag, and saw them, later on, on the limbs of two or three of the blackest sheep aboard. He took it quietly for the sake of peace; but he wished himself anywhere but in the fo'c's'le of the "Cockatoo."

Luttrell was the man he liked best of his shipmates. Luttrell had been born in a far higher rank of life, but had "come a cropper," as he laughingly said. After commanding his own yacht he came down to working as a common hand before the mast. His own fault, probably, but it was a sad thing to see. His face was refined, his accents cultivated, and about him was the air of a gentleman—not the least affectation or pride, but the stamp of "race."

Jim took a great fancy to him, and he to Jim, and they often talked together. Luttrell sympathised with Jim's ambition to become something better than a common ship's boy, while Jim listened with delight to Luttrell's stories of yachting, racing, and life in London.

Often Jim observed Luttrell quivering with rage under the brutal abuse of Knox or Rawlings, and he saw that the sensitive man felt this far more keenly than the hard work or the bad food.

"I shall kill one of them soon!" Luttrell broke out suddenly, once, coming into the fo'c's'le with his face crimson, and tears of rage in his eyes.

Jim had no need to ask what was the matter. The voice of Rawlings had been heard for ten minutes, shouting abuse at the "fine gentleman."

"Like to see you do it!" grunted Wilcox. "If you was all of my mind then sea-lawyers wouldn't be allowed to go on on this here lark."

"Wot kin we do?" said Tom Bunting.

"Lots of things, if this fo'c's'le had the pluck of a mouse, which it hasn't."

"Bah! You creep and cringe fast enough when old Knox opens his jaws."

"If some of you'd back me up—"

"That's a good idea!" cried Luttrell, his eyes glittering.

"Who'll stand by me to go aft and give the bullies a talking-to?"

"I will," said Jim instantly.

"And I," Tom Bunting added.

Five or six more volunteered.

"And you, Wilcox," said Luttrell maliciously; "it's your idea, you know. You can be spokesman, if you like."

For very shame Wilcox could not refuse to join the deputations, much as he would have liked to do so. But he declined to do the speaking, for he knew well that whoever voiced the grievances of the crew would be a marked man for the rest of the voyage. But Luttrell had unlimited pluck. He took the place of peril.

When the party went aft, Mr. Rawlings met them with a stare and an abusive inquiry as to what they wanted.

"We want to speak to the captain, sir," said Luttrell. "We have a remonstrance to make."

Mr. Rawlings looked as if he were going to have a fit. He burst into a yell of laughter instead.

"A remonstrance! Oh, blow my topsails, it's too good! Certainly, gentlemen, the captain's at your orders. Captain

One Halfpenny.

Knox. I have the pleasure of announcing a deputation from the fo'c's'le," he called through the cabin skylight.

Captain Knox came on deck with a bound.

"What does this mean?" he demanded.

The chief mate's clumsy sarcasm had made the seamen feel uneasy; the captain's evident rage made them wish themselves safely for a hard again. But Luttrell never flinched.

"If you please, captain, we wish to remonstrate against the continual abuse to which we are subjected," he began.

That took the captain's breath away. He could only glare at Luttrell in mute rage for some minutes. Then he burst out furiously:

"You hound! You dare to talk to me like this on my own quarterdeck? Mr. Rawlings, clap that scoundrel into irons at once, and dump him into the hold."

Rawlings, grinning, fetched the irons, and Captain Knox leveled a revolver at Luttrell's head.

"Resist, and I'll lay you dead on the deck!" he cried. And in his rage he would certainly have done it had Luttrell offered resistance.

"You coward!" Luttrell said. "You may clap me in irons if you like, but as sure as there's a sun that shines above us I'll be revenged upon you!"

Stung to ungovernable fury, the skipper reversed his pistol, and dealt Luttrell a savage blow with the butt. The man dropped as if he had been shot.

A low murmur broke from the seamen.

"Get back for a'rd, all of you!" roared the captain.

They slowly went, all but Jim Leslie. He could not leave Luttrell in that state. Rawlings was putting the manacles on the insensible sailor's limbs.

But Jim's concern for his friend did not soften the skipper. He gripped him by the collar, and slung him down to the main deck, where he lay dazed and aching for several minutes before he could creep away.

Luttrell, heavily ironed, was placed in the noisome hold in the intense darkness, his only companions the rats.

There was much excitement for a'rd over this unlucky affair. Jim mooted a scheme for defying the captain, and rescuing Luttrell by force, and was laughed at.

"We can't do nothin' short o' chuckin' the captain overboard," said Tom Bunting gloomily, "and if we do that they'll hang us."

The crew were ripe for mutiny, but they lacked nerve and a leader.

For the next two days Luttrell was kept in the hold, his only fare biscuit and water, and very little of that. It was only because his useful hands were needed on deck that the captain then released him.

"Hav' you had a lesson, you speechifying hound?" the skipper demanded, as the pale, emaciated victim of his cruelty was brought on deck.

"Luttrell, weak as he was, was still defiant.

"I'll be revenged yet!" he muttered feebly.

Captain Knox raised his clenched fist.

"Don't, captain!" said Rawlings, for once merciful. "I believe a blow would knock the life out of him."

"I'll tame him!" growled the captain, lowering his arm.

"Don't let him skulk work and play the invalid, Rawlings, or you'll hear from me."

So Luttrell went back to the fo'c's'le, the ghost of his former self. His shipmates were full of sympathy, but he hardly answered them when they spoke. Even to Jim he said little. He remained silent, brooding, and a wild, fierce glitter at times shot into his eyes.

Jim knew that he was thinking of revenge, and became seriously uneasy lest he meditated some desperate deed. He unobtrusively kept a watchful eye upon Luttrell.

Knox and Rawlings directed most of their bullying against Luttrell, and he never appeared on deck without being stormed at and abused; but he endured it all quietly, without a word in reply. Captain Knox flattered himself that he had tamed the "fine gentleman," little dreaming of the terrible purpose that was forming in the heart of Luttrell.

One night Jim, after vainly trying to coax Luttrell out of his seething gloom, got into his hammock, not to sleep, but to keep an eye secretly upon his shipmate. Luttrell had been more morose than ever that day, and Jim feared that the crisis was coming.

"What can I do?" the boy murmured miserably. "He intends some terrible harm to the captain, I know. How can I move him? Ah, there's Violet!"

Violet was a name Luttrell often had spoken in his former confidential chats with Jim. She was his sister, a girl of fifteen, yet at school, and Luttrell's only near relation. Jim knew that Luttrell, out of the wreck of his fortune when he came to grief, had provided for Violet in a small way, but still hoped to do "something" which should place her in affluence.

Luttrell's voice always softened, and his face became tender, when he spoke of Violet, and Jim knew that he was very fond

of her. If anything would move him from his dark purpose it would be the name of his sister.

A low sound of grating and rubbing came to Jim's ears. He listened intently. His heart beat like a hammer as he discovered that the sound was made by Robert Luttrell sharpening a knife in his bunk. The hour had come!

Jim heard Luttrell slip out of his bunk, and at once left his hammock.

"Luttrell! Luttrell!" he cried, in a shrill whisper.

Luttrell, with one foot on deck, stopped, with an oath upon his lips.

"Is that you, Jim?"

"Yes. Stop a minute." Jim reached his side, and grasped him by the arm. "Luttrell, I know what you are going to do, and you shall not do it!"

"Let me go!" Luttrell muttered fiercely. "I swore that Captain Knox should pay with his life for the blow he gave me, and, by Heaven, he shall!"

"Don't! Remember Violet!"

"Why do you speak of her?" snarled Luttrell.

"What will she think if her brother is hanged for murder?" continued Jim.

Luttrell was silent. In the gloom, Jim saw his form shake under the stress of the struggle that was passing within his breast.

"You are right, Jim," said Luttrell at last, in a low voice. "For Violet's sake I will not stain my hands with blood."

"Give me your word."

"I give you my word."

"That's all right, then. The time will come when you will be thankful that I was awake to-night."

Jim went back to his hammock. He knew he could trust Luttrell to keep his promise.

CHAPTER 3.

Fire at Sea—The Loss of the "Cockatoo"—In Open Boats—Picked Up by a Mysterious Craft.

Captain Knox never knew how near he had been to death that night, nor did he learn that Jim Leslie had saved his life.

His tyranny continued, and the crew settled down to bear it with dogged endurance. Their remonstrance had ended so disastrously that no one thought of making another.

But Luttrell, though he had given up his idea of killing the captain, had not abandoned thoughts of revenge. Jim often saw him in whispered consultation with some of the worst men in the crew. Once he asked him point-blank what it was he was plotting.

"Justice, not revenge," Luttrell answered. "The captain and the owners have robbed us, you know that. They cheat us of food, of sleep, of health. I am going to inflict a loss upon them that will make a big hole in their profits, the blood-suckers!"

"What do you mean to do?" Jim asked, uneasily.

"Never mind. You sha'n't be a party to it."

Jim knew it was useless to expostulate or plead. He turned away in sad silence. He would have been glad to see the captain punished for his cruelty, and the owners for their meanness. But he was terribly disquieted by the thought of Luttrell committing a crime. But for this one reckless and daring spirit the crew would have gone on patiently under the yoke, as many another crew has done, and is doing, to avoid the dreadful consequences of mutiny. But Luttrell was a firebrand, and Captain Knox was guilty of folly as well as brutality in driving him to desperation.

Jim waited in painful anticipation of a catastrophe. It came at last.

The "Cockatoo" was in the latitude of Cape Verde. It was a clear, moonlight night, and the wide Atlantic was shimmering like a vast sheet of silver.

The starboard watch was below, the port being on deck, so Jim and Luttrell were together there.

The second mate was in charge of the middle watch. Jim saw him sniffling and looking puzzled.

"Robinson thinks he can smell something," Tom Bunting remarked. "I s'pose it's the salt pork. You can sniff it at a cable's length. Cooky said to-day that when he put it in the pot he had to hold it with a fork lest it should jump out."

Jim laughed.

"It isn't that," he said. "I've noticed a smell of something burning, and—"

"Leslie, go and see if the cook has set anything on fire," called out the second mate.

Jim went, and returned to report that nothing was amiss. But the smell of burning was now plainly perceptible to all, so Robinson called up the captain and the chief mate.

"The ship is on fire somewhere," was the instant decision of Captain Knox. "Throw open the hatches, and search for the fire. Tumble up!"

"Ay, search," muttered Luttrell grimly. "But when you find it you will not put it out."

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Jim heard him, and looked up quickly. The pale, refined face was now ablaze with exultant triumph.

Then Jim knew the truth.

"Good heavens, Luttrell—you—you did this?" he gasped.

"Oh, no, I only planned it. Four hands started the fire in various places in the hold. Don't be frightened, Jim. No one is in any danger. The boats will hold us all, and we are in the regular track of ships. We shall be picked up in twelve hours at the latest. Only the 'Cockatoo' and her cargo will be destroyed, and we shall be released from servitude."

The opening of the hatches was not a wise move, for it allowed fresh air to get to the fire. What had been only a smouldering, half-choked fire, became now a roaring blaze. The cook was in the plot, and he had provided cans of oil for pouring over the cargo, and as this was mainly of wooden articles, there was little hope for the "Cockatoo" from the first.

Volumes of thick smoke poured out of the main hatchway and out of the fore-cabin, where the incendiaries had gained admission to the hold by cutting through a bulkhead.

Captain Knox, stricken with terror, looked about him in dismay. He saw the seamen grinning with unconcealed delight, but he had no heart left for bullying.

"Better order the pumps, sir," Rawlings suggested.

This the captain did. The crew obeyed his orders, but so slowly and clumsily that it was evident they had no wish to save the ship.

Something was wrong with the pumps; Luttrell had taken care that there should be. There was a breakdown. When it was set right the men worked slowly, getting in each other's way, and soon the pumps jammed.

Captain Knox was white with fear and rage.

"I see that you are determined that my ship shall burn," he exclaimed. "Well, you'll answer for it when we get ashore."

"Perhaps you'll never get ashore, then," said Wilcox. And a voice was heard advocating that the bully should be "chucked" into the hold to burn along with his ship.

"Shut up!" Luttrell exclaimed, in a voice of authority. "None of that, shipmates. If the captain tries to excuse his carelessness to the owners by throwing the blame upon the crew he'll have to prove it, won't he? And I don't see how he'll do it."

"I believe some of you set the ship on fire," Captain Knox cried passionately.

"Believe what you like, but order out the boats now, or we'll do it ourselves," returned Luttrell, coolly.

Suddenly the captain directed the lowering and provisioning of the boats. There was no chance now of saving the "Cockatoo," even if the crew had been willing. The flames were already bursting up through the main deck, and it was clear that the hold, down almost to the orlop deck, was ablaze.

Three boats were lowered, and, as no more time was spent in attempting to subdue the fire, there was leisure to place in them all that would be needed.

"Come into my boat, Jim," Luttrell said; and he took hold of the boy's arm.

Jim passively accompanied him, but he said nothing. He was very white. The shock of finding Luttrell an incendiary had almost dazed him; he felt that Luttrell's wrongs, great as they were, did not justify so terrible a vengeance. Luttrell quite understood what was in his mind, but he had no time then for discussion.

The boats—by no means crowded, for the "Cockatoo" had been woefully undermanned—pushed off. The smallest contained Luttrell, Jim, Wilcox, Bunting, and two more seamen, with the second mate in charge. The skipper was in the long-boat.

The little flotilla pulled away from the side of the "Cockatoo" to be out of the reach of the sparks, which now began to fall.

The flames were climbing the masts and shrouds, and spreading along the yards. Sails, cordage, timber blazed up. The poop was a mass of fire, the fore-cabin in the same state. It was a beautiful as well as a terrible sight to see the flames devouring the noble ship bit by bit.

Jim saw an expression of regret flit across Luttrell's handsome face. Truly it was not pleasing to view the destruction of the stately monarch of the waters.

The main-deck collapsed with a crash, and a myriad sparks shot skyward. Down came the mainmast into the sea, hissing as it plunged. Dull smoke crawled in rings over the face of the water. The mizzen mast followed, but it fell lengthwise in the ship, adding to the fuel of the fire.

"Canvas out!" came the order from the captain's boat, and the little sails were set.

The breeze caught them, and the boats moved rapidly over the calm, scarcely heaving sea.

But in the distance the glow of red against the moonlit sky could be seen for hours.

When, towards dawn, it was lost sight of, a great sense of loneliness fell upon the seamen.

The sea was terribly close, and, so near to its surface, the immensity seemed vastly increased. The lapping of the water against the wood was a sound of ill-omen. The waves had closed over the ship, how soon would it close over the boats? A mood of dull depression settled upon the men of the "Cockatoo."

The moon sunk, and an hour of darkness preceded the dawn. In this time the boats separated. Voices were faintly heard at first. Captain Knox's orders to each boat had been to make for the Cape Verde Isles. If no vessels were met within the islands might be reached in a week or so. But on such a frequented sea everyone was certain of seeing a sail soon.

At dawn Jim looked round, and saw neither of the other boats.

"We're alone," he said, with a sort of subdued excitement and excitement. It was a novel experience to him to be alone on a wide, wide sea.

The sunshine was bright; heat and light soon infused new spirit into the seamen. Their depression passed away; they realised their new freedom from servitude, and were happy. The rations were more liberal than those they had on board the "Cockatoo." There was no work to do. It was no longer necessary to row. So long as the fine weather lasted, the boat's crew had only a pleasant holiday to look forward to.

Still, a careful look-out was kept by the second mate. About noon he swept the sea with his glass for the twentieth time, and uttered an exclamation.

"A sail!"

A sense of disappointment was experienced by the seamen. They were by no means anxious to be picked up yet. But Robinson steered the boat to cross the bows of the stranger.

As soon as she came in sight to the naked eye, Jim saw a square-built barque, of unmistakably American construction, bearing down with all sails set.

Uniting their voices, the seamen sent forth a loud and prolonged "Ahoy!" At once curious faces were seen over the sides and bows of the barque. The wind was blowing very hard over the barque's deck towards the boat, which was the reason that the English seamen heard a dialogue spoken on the ship while it was still at a considerable distance. On a smooth sea sound is carried far.

The first voice was apparently replying to someone's request that sail should be shortened for the boat.

"Darned if I will, Ephraim Jones!"

It was a rough, coarse voice, with a strong nasal twang.

"But, Captain Gubbins, consider—"

"Consider he blamed!"

"But we are in want of hands."

"Ah!"

"And they look a likely set."

"But they are Britishers by their look, and so we can't expect 'em to jine in our little game, I s'pose—was, I reckon."

"Guess they'll follow their interest, same as you or me. We are on a voyage fur dollars, and there's a share for every man. Besides, you needn't tell them the game. Take aboard those who will join your crew, and when they've signed articles they'll be in it deep enough to be unable to draw out."

"Waal, that's so."

The course of the barque shifted. The voices were no longer heard in the boat. The seamen looked gravely at each other, wondering what it all meant.

"They're shortening sail, mates," observed old Tom Bunting, after a tense pause.

"I don't think it will be best to go aboard," Mr. Robinson said hesitatingly. "There will be other sail—"

"Boat ahoy!"

"Ahoy the barque!"

"Get alongside."

Robinson, still undecided, obeyed the direction. The Yankee captain put his head over the side by the main chains. The seamen saw a lean, skinny face, with lantern jaws and long nose and twinkling eyes.

"Whar did you spring from, shipmates?" demanded this apparition. "Davy Jones's locker, hey?"

"We are of the English ship 'Cockatoo,' burned at sea last night," replied Robinson.

"Waal, I'll take aboard jest so many of yer as are willing to jine my crew. Ain't got room fur passengers or idlers. Now, who yaups?"

"Surely you will not be inhuman enough to refuse—"

"Inhuman be blowed! Ain't there ships erround here by ther dizzun? There's a British brig an hour or so ahead me; we passed her on this very tack, and if you lie by you kin not fail to spot her, I s'pose—was, I reckon. And ef you'd put eyes in your numskulls you'd see the smoke of a steamer over yonder."

"Then we won't trouble you, skipper," replied Mr. Robinson.

"Stay!" interrupted Luttrell. "I am willing to accept the offer he makes to us."

Mr. Robinson looked at him sternly. "I have no authority to prevent you," he said; "but you are aware—"

"I am aware that I am tired of being in an open boat. Captain, I am an able seaman. Will you take me?"

"I suppose—well, I reckon," replied Captain Gubbins.

"I'm with you, Luttrell," said Jim.

"Don't come," whispered the sailor. "It will be as dangerous aboard that barque as it was wretched on the 'Cockatoo.' Don't come."

"That's the very reason why I am coming."

"All right, Jim. You know how sorry I should be to part with you," said Luttrell, looking pleased. "Captain, this lad is my messmate, and where I go he goes."

"Plenty of room for him. Any more?"

"Yes, there's me," said Wilcox, getting up.

The other seamen were mute. From the words of the Americans, accidentally overheard, they knew that the barque was not bound upon an honest voyage. Some of them were not particularly scrupulous, but, with certain rescue now in sight, they had no wish to run into unknown dangers.

Tom Bunting tried to persuade Jim to remain, but the boy was resolute. He divined that Luttrell had in his mind some secret plan, and he meant to share the perils of his shipmate.

Luttrell was the reverse of pleased when Wilcox added himself to the number of volunteers. But he made no objection, for he knew it would be useless.

The trio shook hands round with the rest, and climbed to the chains of the barque.

The boat turned away; the barque resumed its course. Jim, straining his eyes after the boat, saw it grow to a speck towards the thickening smoke of the steamer. Captain Gubbins was watching it through a glass. He lowered it presently.

"The steamer's stopped for 'em," he said. "Now, my hearties, your mates are safe, and you belong to the crew of the 'Tuscarora'—that's my ship, this morn'. So you'll jest trot aft after Mr. Jones, an' sign your names. I had to clear outter Charleston mighty sudden, and came away a few hands short, which is why I have wasted time picking you up. But you'll make yourselves useful to me, I expect—well, I reckon."

CHAPTER 4.
On the Gold Coast—The Gun-Runners—Luttrell's Resolve—The Explosion—At the Mercy of the Ashantees.

The first few days aboard the American craft formed a very pleasant contrast to the miserable weeks spent on the "Cockatoo."

There was plenty to eat and drink, which was a matter of considerable importance. The work was hard, for Captain Gubbins was short-handed; but that was due to his leaving Charleston in a hurry, while part of his crew happened to be ashore. The three sailors, therefore, were an acquisition.

Jim had heard of the free-and-easy relations of some American skippers with their crews, but the state of matters aboard the "Tuscarora" astonished him. Officers and seamen drank grog together, and conversed in the most familiar way. But he soon learned that this was not entirely due to the want of discipline. The crew had shared in the enterprise upon which the "Tuscarora" had sailed, and "Jack" was as good as his master on that account.

What this enterprise was long puzzled Jim. He talked about it to Luttrell, but never to Wilcox. The latter was distrusted by the two friends. On board the "Cockatoo" he had been a bully; here they believed he was a spy, on the look-out for something to report to the skipper.

"We are merely marking time, Jim," Luttrell remarked one day, in the third week of their new voyage. "I have made sure of it. For eight days the 'Tuscarora' has been

beating on and off, off and on. Captain Gubbins is waiting for something."

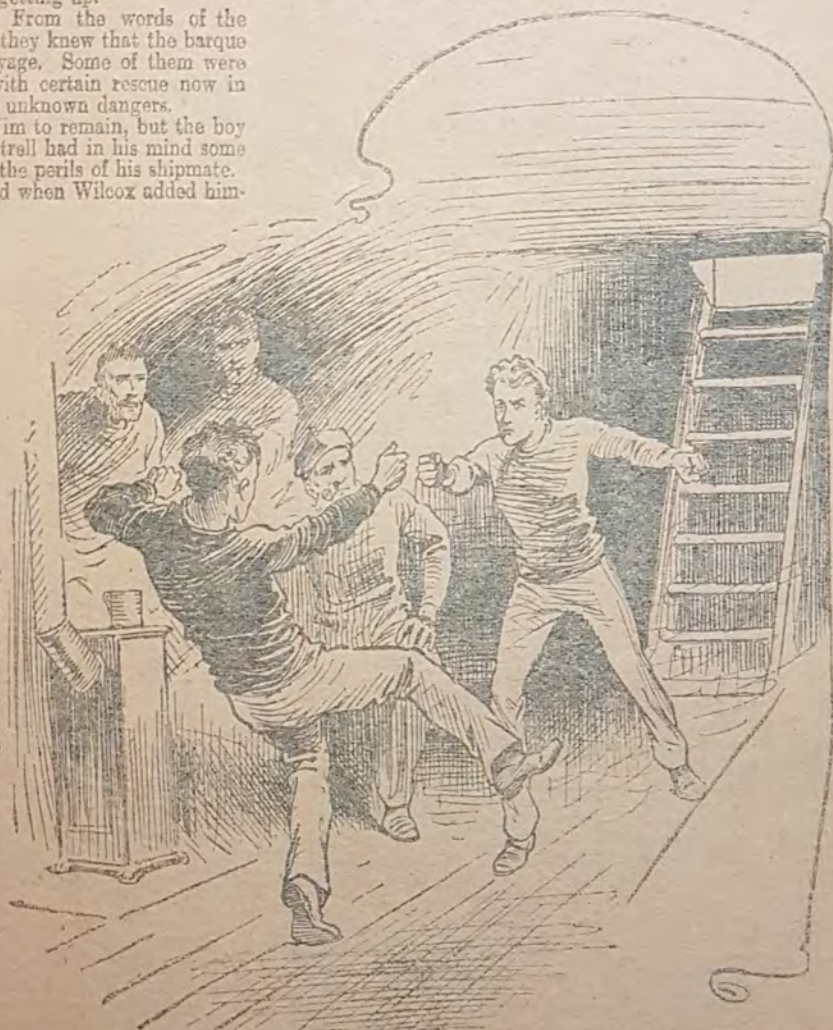
"A rendezvous of some kind, I suppose. He is clearly not bound to any port. What can be his object?"

"From what we happened to hear before coming aboard, Jim, it is plainly evident that it is some underhand business, in which he could not expect Britons to join. He is hanging about the coast of British West Africa. Can it be that he is holding some illegal trade with the natives?"

Jim looked startled.

"I came on board the 'Tuscarora,'" continued Luttrell, "with the idea of finding out what Captain Gubbins's scheme was, and baffling it if it was in any way directed against our country. Jim, I know now that I did wrong in destroying the 'Cockatoo,' and I thought of risking my life in this service as an expiation."

"It was noble of you."



In an instant Jim tore himself free, and, clenching his fist, gave Wilcox a drive in the chest which sent him reeling backwards. "Take that, you bully!" he exclaimed. "And if you want any more, take off your jersey, and come on."

"If it were not for Violet, I should not care how soon my life were taken," Luttrell continued. "I have made a mess of it, anyhow."

"It's never too late to mend. You are only twenty-six now; plenty of time to make another fortune," said Jim, with the confidence of youth.

Luttrell smiled a little sadly.

"I used to think like that, Jim. But it's over now. However, what concerns us now is, what are we to do if we find that, as I am beginning to suspect, Captain Gubbins is taking a cargo of firearms and ammunition to the blacks of the Gold Coast?"

"We'll prevent him somehow."

"Dare you risk almost certain death, Jim?"

"I'll risk anything with you."

"All right; I knew you were true-blue. If my surmise is correct, I shall find a way of spoiling his little game."

A couple of days later the "Tuscarora" sighted the coast of Guinea, a few miles from Cape Three Points.

"It's lucky the fine weather's hold out, cap," Ephraim Jones remarked to the skipper. "This ain't the kind of coast to hang around on if it turned foul."

"I 'pose—well, I reckon," assented the captain—that was always his formula when he wished to be emphatic—"an' that'll be a moon to-night, Ephraim Jones, which I reckon is mighty lucky. For the Leopard Crick ain't jest the easiest sorter caboose to slide into."

"You haven't let the Britishers into the secret yet, cap. You'll hev to now."

"Yass. Guess I'll speechify now."

The crew were called together by the boatswain to hear Captain Gubbins' "speechify."

"Shipmates," said the Yankee skipper, "some of yew know wot we've come hyer for, an' some of you don't. Wot I'm sayin' is fur the information of them as don't. We hev got a bully outfit o' rifles, cartridges, an' gunpowder, down in the hold, and ef they're safely delivered to the nigger chief in Baliboola it means gold-dust and ivory ter the tune of a hundred thousand dollars, ter be divided accordin' to agreeement. But ef we can't deliver 'em, they're so much stuff left on our hands. Ter git through the job safely we shall hev ter keep our eyes peeled, fur the Britishers hev got their eyes open, which is a thing I'm astonished at. There was a telegram came to Charleston which might hev had us stopped, ef I hadn't cleared out like greased lightning! An' I shouldn't be 'prised to see a gunboat hoverin' 'bout hyer on ther watch. So look alive, all of you! That's all."

This long speech Captain Gubbins punctuated with expletives, and when he had finished he went below for a drink.

"You were right, Luttrell," Jim said, as soon as he and his shipmate were alone. "He is running a cargo of arms to the Ashantees, and he has got to be stopped!"

Wilcox came slouching towards them.

"Look here, mates," he said, "there's a big profit in this biz, and don't you begin any nonsense about it. Money is money, from blacks or whites. I warn you that I stand by the skipper."

"Whatever I thought, I shouldn't like to try to tackle the whole crew," Luttrell laughed. "The best thing we can do is to say nothing, and get what we can."

"Oh, if that's how you take it, all right!"

Wilcox's suspicions seemed to be set at rest.

When night fell, the "Tuscarora" ran in close to the coast, and entered a swampy creek, where the mangroves along the banks, and the high trees further inland, effectually concealed her from view landward or seaward.

It was a clear, calm night, with a full moon shining gloriously in a cloudless sky.

A better night could not have been wished for the enterprise of the "Tuscarora."

Captain Gubbins and Ephraim Jones went ashore, and Jim saw them join a group of blacks, who were waiting under the palm-trees.

Jim borrowed a glass, and had a look at the natives. They were Ashantees, he heard the seamen say. Wild and ferocious they looked, with their black skin, rolling eyes, and tangled hair. And these savages, transformed into fiends by the battle-fever, were planning a new revolt, perhaps, and in their advance upon the white settlements were to be provided with modern arms by these greedy smugglers. Jim inwardly vowed that it should not be. How Captain Gubbins was to be baffled he did not know. He trusted to Luttrell for that.

Gubbins returned in high good-humour. Jim heard him say that the dust and ivory were all ready, and that he would clear a profit of a hundred per cent, or more upon the voyage.

The longboat was lowered, and placed bow to the land, stern to the barque, thus forming a bridge through the slippery ooze of the river's brim.

Then the tackles were prepared, the cases were hoisted out of the hold, and one by one taken ashore.

Busily worked the crew; but the labour was hard and long, and by dawn not half of the consignment had been landed, though there were a crowd of blacks ashore assisting. Jim and Luttrell helped, of course; there was no shirking. Wilcox once or twice looked at them suspiciously; but they appeared to be heart and soul in the work.

"I've an idea," Luttrell said to Jim, when they knocked off at last, thoroughly fatigued. "But you know how savage these fellows will be when they find their expected profits vanish in smoke, so I have no expectation of getting away alive. I have thought it over, Jim, and I am prepared to die. But you—"

"I'll die with you, Luttrell!"

"That will serve no useful purpose, Jim. One death will be sufficient. Besides, there's—there's Violet." The voice of the brave sailor faltered and broke.

"I want you to escape, Jim," he went on, after a moment's pause. "The next time we land, instead of coming back, slip

away into the wood. By following the coast east you will make Three Points, if you hold out so long. If I live I will join you there. Then, when you are in England again, you will go to Violet—you know where to find her—and tell her how I died; and you will be a friend to her, Jim, if the winds one."

"I swear I will!" cried Jim. "But—"

"Promise me to do as I ask."

He was so much in earnest that Jim promised, though he hated to leave his friend at such a time.

Quietly the boy prepared for the flight. He easily arranged a few ship's biscuits and a knife, concealing them in his clothes, with the little money he had.

There was no further opportunity for talk, but the shipmates were able to exchange a last hand-grip before Jim went ashore.

There, amongst the mangroves, he found it easy to slip away unseen. His heart was heavy as lead as he went. He felt that he would never see Luttrell again. The Yankee crew, though a rough set, were not villains; but, exasperated by the loss of a whole voyage's profits, were they not sure to murder Luttrell, or, at least, to give him up to the Ashantees' vengeance? Jim felt that his shipmate's fate was sealed. Tears trickled down his cheeks as he tramped through the tropical forest.

Luttrell remained alone with his enemies. His heart was not light, but he kept a face of unconcern.

The cases taken from the "Tuscarora" were piled in the forest, under a large tree, and last of all came a dozen barrels of powder. It was upon these latter that Luttrell had his eye. By means of them he meant to destroy the whole consignment.

A long season of intense drought had dried up the forest, and the herbage and fallen leaves needed but the application of a match to set them ablaze.

That was Luttrell's plan; a terrible and desperate one, but impossible of failure.

The blazing bushes and grass would render an approach to the powder too dangerous to be thought of. The destruction of the combustibles, and the dislocation of the firearms by the force of the explosion, could not be prevented.

Luttrell believed he had quieted Wilcox's suspicions; but he found that the rough kept very near him; and when the landing was finished, and Luttrell lingered ashore, Wilcox lingered too. Plainly he was watching.

"Haden't you better go aboard, Wilcox?" Luttrell said tranquilly.

"Not till you do," was the surly retort.

"Then take that, hang you!" cried Luttrell, dealing him a fierce blow, which sent him reeling backwards into the creek.

Wilcox came up, covered with slime, and gurgling for breath. As he scrambled ashore he yelled: "Look out! He means to blow up the powder!" for he saw a matchbox in Luttrell's hand, and the brave sailor's purpose dawned upon his mind all at once.

The Yankee sailors gave a shout; but they had no time for interference.

Luttrell struck a dozen matches in a bunch, and scattered them with a jerk of his hand, and the dry grass and fallen leaves, inflammable as tinder, at once flared up. Then with a crashing blow from an axe he had concealed under his jacket he split one of the powder-barrels, so that the black grains came pouring out upon the ground.

"To the water, for your lives!" shouted Luttrell, throwing himself into the creek.

The terrified seaman followed his example, while the Ashantees, with loud cries, fled at mad speed into the depths of the forest.

On the deck of the "Tuscarora," Captain Gubbins stamped, raved and beat the air with his clenched fists. He had not received yet the price of his cargo, and he knew he would not receive it now. Several canoes, laden with tusks, had almost reached the "Tuscarora," but at sight of the fire the Ashantees turned and paddled up the river for their lives.

Wilcox dragged himself upon the barque.

"It was Luttrell!" he cried. "See, he's swimming up the creek! Kill him!"

"Bring the cuss hyer!" yelled Captain Gubbins.

Luttrell made a gallant swim for escape; but several of the sailors were in his path. He was seized, and hauled back to the barque, where he was pulled on board, drenched and half-drowned.

It was just then that a spark caught the spilt powder. There was a rush of flame and a deafening roar, followed by explosion after explosion.

The effect of this could not be felt on the "Tuscarora," but bullets from the exploding cartridges began to fly, and regular volleys hailed in all directions. The seamen flung themselves upon their faces for safety; and while the deceptions

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continued, from the prostrate Yankees came a flow of ceaseless "cuss-words."

As soon as it was safe to rise, Captain Gubbins got up and looked shoreward. He saw a charred debris, half buried by fallen trees—melancholy relics of a cargo which had cost him thousands of dollars.

"Waal," he cried, his face convulsed with rage—"waal, I reckon, mates, we've had this hyer v'yge fur nothin'! Wot shall we do to the cuss wot hev ruined us?"

"Lynch him!" rose the savage cry.

"You bet we will, I s'pose—waal, I reckon."

Luttrell was dragged before the enraged skipper, in the rough grip of the seamen.

"You cuss—you miserable cuss!" cried Gubbins. "Wot did you do that fur, hey?"

"To save many innocent lives," Luttrell answered coolly.

"You were going to arm those black fiends, to make a few thousand dollars. You didn't care how many English settlers fell before those rifles in the next native outbreak. Well, I did care. I am an Englishman. Now hang me if you like!"

Luttrell's coolness fed the fire of the skipper's rage. He stamped like a madman.

"Rig a rope an' noose, my hearties!" he cried. "Quick about it, and he shall pay the piper, I s'pose—waal, I reckon."

The rope was slung, and the skipper himself placed the noose round Luttrell's neck.

"Now, you cuss; mebbe you're sorry you played traitor on a captain as meant you fair!" he exclaimed.

"I did not play traitor. I entered your ship only to baffle you. I am sorry to cause you loss, but it is your own fault, for trying to make money by scoundrelly means. I knew you would murder me, and I am ready to die, so go ahead!"

The sailor's pluck excited admiration, and some of the Yankees began to bethink them that this summary execution was a serious matter, and might have serious consequences.

"Say, cap," ventured Ephraim Jones, "it won't bring the cargo back to hang the cuss, but it may get our necks inter the noose if we ever get found out. Why not pass him on to the Ashantees? They'll make him squirm!"

The skipper looked savage for a minute; then he chuckled.

"They'll do!" he said grimly. "The niggers are bound to him back to see of there's anything left, and if they find the cuss tied to a tree they'll take him to their town and treat him to their fiend's tortures. D'y'e hear, you cuss? The blacks shall hev the finishing of you, and they'll make a long job of it, I s'pose—waal, I reckon."

Luttrell for the first time changed colour. He knew what demons the Ashantees were to their prisoners.

"Ah, we ain't so bold and brave now?" sneered Gubbins.

"That touches you, does it?"

"Do as you like. I ask for no mercy!"

"'Twouldn't be very much use if you did!"

Luttrell was hauled ashore, stuck against the nearest intact tree to the scene of the explosion, and bound there so securely that there was no chance of his getting away.

"The Ashantees'll be hyer afore dark," were Captain Gubbins's last words; "and ef they don't come, you'll be chewed up by lions or serpents. Guess you wish now you had minded yer own business, hey? I s'pose—waal, I reckon."

The gun-runners returned to their vessel, and Gubbins, anxious to get away from the scene of his blighted hopes, weighed anchor at once.

A terrible despair settled upon Luttrell as he saw the barque move out of the creek. Many of the seamen had given him pitying glances but they could not help him. Jim must by this time be miles away up the coast.

In the excitement following the explosion no one had noted Jim's absence, and it was not until the "Tuscarora" was leagues from the Guinea coast that he was missed.

Luttrell had hope of neither escape nor rescue. He could only wait for death, knowing that it would come in some fearful form.

The explosion had almost extinguished the fire, but Luttrell could see flames creeping along in various directions, feeding upon foliage and dead leaves, and leaving the huge trees with blackened trunks and their lower branches charred.

An hour passed. He was tired, cramped, parched with thirst, and longing for death to end his misery.

Splash!

It was the paddle of a canoe in the stream. The blood rushed to his heart. The Ashantees were coming!

He saw three brawny negroes land, and come towards the place where the consignment had been stacked, doubtless with the intention of searching the debris for anything that might have escaped destruction.

A loud yell broke from them as they caught sight of Luttrell. They may or may not have known him as the cause of their loss; but he was a white man, defencelessly exposed to their cruelty. That was enough for them.

With fiendish glee in their faces the savages advanced towards the bound man, poised their spears to strike.

Luttrell shuddered, but flinched not. Brave to the last, Jim's shipmate would die—if die he must—without faltering.

CHAPTER 5.

A Friend in Need—in the Nick of Time—A Close Shave.

Jim had promised Luttrell to make for Three Points, and he kept his word, though it went bitterly against the grain to leave his shipmate in such an extremity.

Keeping the sea—his only guide—in view upon his right hand, he tramped on eastward.

He had covered about five miles, when, fatigued by the difficult passage of the forest, he threw himself upon the ground to rest.

As he lay there he heard, like a roll of distant thunder, the faint echoes of the far-off explosion of the powder-barrels. He knew at once what had happened.

"Luttrell has done it. But has he escaped? Or"—Jim rose, agitated by hope and fear; the doubts tortured him—"at this very moment they may be murdering him! Oh, why did I leave him at all? I'll return."

"Saay, youngster, whar did you spring from? And wot's the rumpus, anyway?"

Jim started and stared, as a tall man clad in tanned leopard-skin stood before him. A glance at the stranger was reassuring. His face was plain, homely, but honest and good-humoured, and the sight of a white man's face was so welcome to Jim then that he forgave the pug-nose and wide mouth.

"Who are you?" was his natural question.

"Ben Dodds is my name. I belong to Three Points. Got a leetle place there; trade with the natives; Brammagum beads and looking-glasses for ivory and gold-dust. Good biz, only you generally git yer throat cut in a native raid afore you've made enuf to retire on." And Ben Dodds wagged his bullet-head seriously. "However, that ain't the pint. Whar did you come from, and wot for aire you looking so down in the mouth?"

Jim, noting the sturdy build and determined face of Ben Dodds, as well as his magazine rifle, conceived a wild hope that here was someone who could help Luttrell.

He poured out his story in hasty sentences, and Ben Dodds listened in astonishment, frequently interrupting him with loud exclamations of a very emphatic character.

"By Jupiter, kiddy, your shipmate has got a nerve on him!" he said. "They'll knife him, to a certainty!"

"Will you—"

"If he's on the ship, I don't see what can be done; but he may have cut an' run. If you like, we'll take a trot thar, and see. He's done me a good turn, for if the niggers had rose, they'd hev burned my leetle place fast go off. I came out to-day to shoot deer, but I reckon I can risk to-morrow's dinner fur once."

The trader set off with lengthy strides. Jim forgot his fatigue in his eagerness to go to his shipmate's aid. He kept up with Dodds, not without difficulty. As they drew near the stream the trader suddenly stopped.

"Did you hear anything, sonny?"

"Nothing."

"Well, I did. There's a canoe on the river. Keep as quiet as a mouse and close to me, or there'll be trouble."

They advanced more slowly. The clearing of the undergrowth by the fire left long vistas between the giant trees, which had resisted the licking flames. A view of the creek was soon obtained.

"The ship's gone!" said Jim, with a chill at his heart.

"Look! there's the niggers! See 'em landing, the ugly scoundrels? I've half a mind to take a potshot at one of 'em for luck. Why, what are the beggars yelling for?"

The Ashantee yell had burst out abruptly.

"That sounds as if they meant murder. They ain't seen us. Wot the—"

"Look!" panted Jim, "there's a man tied to a tree! Oh, Heaven! it's Luttrell! and those fiends—"

"By thunder, they sha'n't touch him!" cried the trader, lifting his rifle to his shoulder.

The sharp crack was followed by a wild scream from an Ashantee, as he sank writhing upon the charred earth, stirring a cloud of ashes in his death-throes.

The other two, with their spears still uplifted to drink the blood of Luttrell, glared round in wild amazement.

The rifle cracked again, and a second dying man dropped close to the first.

"How's that fur high, Eddy?" asked Ben Dodds, with perfect coolness, as the last Ashantee turned tail, and bolted for his canoe.

"Mr. Dodds, let that poor wretch go!" exclaimed Jim, as the rifle was aimed at the flying savage.

Ben Dodds calmly fired, and lodged his bullet in the brain of the Ashantee before he replied.

"Can't do it," he answered. "We want his canoe to get along the coast to Three Points. Them three bounders ain't the only ones wot hev come back yere on the prow. Shouldn't like to try an' git home through the woods. Not much! Tain't with the Ashantees I trade, you know. They'd cut me up as soon as look at me."

While Ben Dodds was explaining, they were both advancing swiftly towards Luttrell. Jim opened his knife, and began to saw at his shipmate's bonds.

Luttrell was dazed—almost stupefied. Death had been so near that he could not quite realise that it had passed without touching him.

"Luttrell," cried Jim, "you're saved, man—don't you see? The niggers are killed, and you are safe."

Luttrell drew a deep breath. "I had given myself up," he said slowly. "I shall never forget this service, Jim!"

Freed from the cords, he stretched his cramped limbs, which were full of shooting pains. Ben Dodds placed a flask to his lips.

"Drink, man!" he said. And Luttrell took a pull, which put new life into him.

Ben Dodds hurried them to the canoe. "See, thar's a canoe comin' down the creek now. Can either of you paddle?"

"I can," said Luttrell. "Take your rifle, and I'll see to the craft. They're after us, the black rascals!"

The Ashantees had caught sight of the whites, as a loud, discordant yell soon proved. As the Englishmen fled seaward, the natives came speeding upon their track.

Luttrell, in spite of his cramp and fatigue, paddled well. The canoe passed the sandy bar, and darted out upon the calm sea, red in the sunset. But the Ashantees were quicker. The pursuers drew rapidly nearer, and spears, hurled by brawny arms, whizzed through the air.

Ben Dodds, aiming his rifle with calm precision, pelted bullets at the Ashantees till his magazine was empty.

Three of the paddlers sank down, dead or dying, and the canoe turned suddenly broadside to the current, and drove upon the bank. There it stuck fast in the mud, and the enraged yells of the Ashantees were blood-curdling to hear.

Ben Dodds chuckled grimly. "I reckon they won't trouble us any more," he said. "Now I'll relieve you of that paddle, friend."

Luttrell very willingly gave it up. He was aching in every limb.

"I don't know how to thank you!" he said. "You have saved my life."

"Well, it's my belief you've saved mine, by keeping arms out of the hands of those fiends; so we're about quits on that score," said Ben Dodds.

Dodds showed himself as expert with the paddle as with the rifle, and long before the Ashantees had extricated their canoe from the mud the Englishmen were beyond the reach of pursuit.

It was dark when they reached Three Points.

Ben Dodds's house was one of a group, inhabited by a dozen traders like himself.

It was by no means a model dwelling, but Ben compensated for that by his unbounded hospitality. He made his guests as comfortable as he could, and, after their late experiences, and with recollections of the "Cockatoo" still in their minds, the shipmates were disposed to think themselves in clover.

CHAPTER 6.

Malta—A New Voyage—A Jolly Skipper and a Doubtful Crew—The Wreck—A Critical Moment.

The Mediterranean stretched blue and bright under a scorching sun. The streets of Valetta were hot, dusty, and unendurable. Many of the sailors ashore in the Maltese port sought the shelter of the orange-trees along the country roads beyond the town. And among these strollers in navy blue were two splendidly-built British seamen, one of twenty-eight years, the other eighteen. The former was Robert Luttrell, the latter Jim Leslie. Both older, browner, sturdier than when we saw them last, but still shipmates true.

They had stayed some months at Three Points, hunting with Ben Dodds, or dawdling by the sea, waiting for the vessel which brought supplies to the little settlement thrice a year. When it came, they bade farewell to their kindly host, and took a passage to Cape Coast Castle. There they had no difficulty in getting berths on a sea-going craft. They sailed together on a voyage to the Cape, and then to Bombay; and after that, on a return voyage to England, their vessel was so knocked about in a storm in the Red Sea that it remained for refitting at Port Said. The two shipmates embarked on a Maltese felucca, laden with dates, for Palermo, but a gale drove it into Valetta, and, as their Maltese skipper was a bully, they remained there. The felucca sailed without them,

and they stayed on at Valetta, looking out for an English ship. But they were in no hurry to sail.

"We have put a little tin by in the last two years," Luttrell said, "and we're entitled to a holiday. Are you anxious to see England again, Jim?"

"Rather!"

"Then we'll only take a homeward-bounder," Luttrell decided. "There's no hurry, I shall be glad to see the old country. Violet must be quite a woman now. She'll hardly know me."

To Jim, his confidant, he had talked so much of his sister meeting with her.

Every day the shipmates strolled out into the country, and they enjoyed their holiday immensely.

Upon this especial day they had bargained for the hire of a couple of ponies from a Maltese dealer in the suburbs, and were anticipating the excursion with great satisfaction, for "Jack ashore" is never so happy as when on the back of a quadruped.

They obtained the ponies, and mounted. It was Jim's first experience in this line, so it was fortunate that his pony was of the meekest and mildest description.

Luttrell was a good rider; he had owned half a dozen hunters in his palmy days.

"This is glorious!" he said, as they rattled along under the shady trees. "What do you think, Jim?"

"Ripping!" Jim answered, with enthusiasm.

They prolonged their excursion so far that it was dusk when they approached Valetta on their return.

There was a rider in advance going the same way, and by the "cut of his jib" the shipmates knew that he was a sailor. He was a burly man in blue serge, with a peaked cap shoved far back on his head.

Luttrell and Jim were hastening a little, for the sake of his company on the road, when, with startling abruptness, two men sprang out from the trees, and rushed at the horsemen.

One man seized his bridle, making the horse rear, and the second rider was flung backwards to the ground. The second man ran at him, flourishing a long knife.

With one accord Luttrell and Jim lashed their ponies to a furious gallop, speeding to the rescue.

"Ye darned landlubbers! Ye murdering villains!" roared the assailed sailor, jumping up before the threatening knife could touch him. "Be jabers, an' it's meself as can knock yez into the middle of next week! Come on, ye spalpeens!"

The two Maltese were not slow to "come on." And, though the Irishman did not seem a whit afraid, it would have gone hard with him had there not been help at hand, for he had only his riding-whip to oppose to two long poniards.

Before the footpads knew that other travellers were nigh the sailors were upon them. Jim, owing to his want of skill, dismounted headlong, tumbling over; but Luttrell sprang nimbly to the ground, and rushed upon the Maltese. The butt of his riding-whip fell crashing upon a Maltese head, and a stunned rascal dropped into the road, and lay motionless.

The other whirled round, dodged Luttrell's slash, and then leaped at him, fiercely stabbing.

Luttrell jumped back, dodged in his turn, and then struck again, sending the footpad's poniard flying from his hand.

"Now I have you!" cried the English sailor. And, dropping his whip, he closed with the Maltese.

Jim and the Irishman were coming to his help, but he told them to keep off.

The Maltese, in fact, though he fought like a wildcat, was a child in the hands of the stalwart Englishman.

Luttrell twisted him fairly off his feet, and flung him heavily to the ground. He lay there gasping, with every particle of breath knocked out of his body.

"Begorra, and wasn't that nate!" cried the Irishman, tending a large hand to Luttrell. "Sure, it's the best thing I've seen since I sailed from the Shannon. I am Mick Mulligan, skipper of the 'Sweet Norah.' I rather think the brig would have sailed without me but for yez. It's glad I am to see yez."

"Yes; you came near being settled, and that's a fact," the sailor answered. "Shall we convey you back to port, captain?"

"Glad of yer company, alanna. But what is it we'll do with these murderin' spalpeens?"

"Leave 'em where they are. There's no need to get mixed up in a police affair."

They remounted, and rode into Valetta.

En route Captain Mulligan told them all about himself and his ship. He was a jolly Irish sailor, and fond of the sound of his beautiful brogue, and by the time the quay was reached they knew all about the Mulligan family, and the good tea "Sweet Norah." Norah, it appeared, was the name of the sharer of Captain Mulligan's joys and sorrows, and he had, therefore, given it to his vessel.

A fortnight from now No. 408 of the UNION JACK will be published, containing the New Serial—
—an amazing story. Remember the date—February 14th (St. Valentine's Day).

At the quay, Captain Mulligan invited the sailors on board the "Sweet Norah." Luttrell declined.

"The fact is, captain," he said, "that my mate and I are only foremast hands, and—"

Captain Mulligan started.

"Ye wasn't always wan, him," he said shrewdly.

"That is correct."

"Ye're a jistleman?"

"I hope so."

"Well, come aboard with me. Ye saved my life. Know anything about navigation?"

"I commanded my yacht—when I owned one."

"Be jabs! You're the man I want. My chafe mate was studied yesterday in this cut-throat town. If you know enough to take his place ye shall sail in the 'Sweet Norah.' We'll find something for ye're mate to do."

Luttrell's face flushed with delight.

Such an opportunity he had often longed for. Now at last he had a chance of retrieving his fallen fortunes.

"Heaven bless you, captain!" he said, in a trembling voice.

"Fair, it's little after yer savin' the loife av me."

The "Sweet Norah's"

boat was waiting for the

skipper. They were soon

aboard the brig. A fine,

seamlike craft was

the "Sweet Norah," one of

the best that ever sailed out

of the Shannon.

There was a light in the

main cabin. Captain Mulligan

and his guests went

down. A man was seated

before the stove talking to

another who was leaning

against the bulkhead. Both

were Italians.

As the captain entered

they looked round. Their

dark faces changed colour.

An angry frown wrinkled

Mulligan's face.

"Fair! ye take it purty

way in yer captain's quart-

ers while he's ashore!" he

exclaimed.

The man by the stove

rose quickly.

"Pardon me, captain,

I—I—"

"Didn't expect to see

me, hey? No, I think

you couldn't have;

though I raly don't see

why ye should suppose

I'd stay ashore later, Mr.

Riccardi."

"Has—has any trace

been found of poor Sig-

nor Thompson's mur-

derer?" stammered

Carlo Riccardi.

"No; he's got clane

off. And you, Pietro

Quevada, how long is

it I've allowed you to

lounge in my cabin?"

The Italian carpenter

of the "Sweet Norah"

sailed out of the cabin

without replying. The

mate remained, looking

the reverse of

comfortable.

"Mr. Riccardi," continued

Captain Mulligan, "this

is Mr. Luttrell, that Oi

hav engaged in the

place of poor

Thompson."

Riccardi's jaw dropped.

He seemed like a man

stricken

with dismay. Jim thought

he had expected to succeed

the dead chief mate him-

self. Other thoughts were

in Luttrell's

mind. His auspicious

went further.

The second mate stam-

mered out something, and

made his

escape. Outside the cabin

he ground his teeth and

cursed

aloud.

We need not give the

details of Captain Mulligan's

talk

with Luttrell. The sailor

was engaged to take the

place of

Thompson; and Jim, it was

agreed, was to sail in the

brig

as an apprentice. This

chance of rising, which

want of money

had kept him from obtain-

ing before, was welcome to

Jim;

dearly delightful, as he

and his shipmate were

still to remain

together.

The cabin formerly occupied by the chief mate was allotted to Luttrell and Jim, and they slept that night on board the brig.

The next day, when they saw the crew, a surprise awaited them. There were two familiar faces—the faces of Wilcox and Ephraim Jones of the "Tuscarora." The Yankee was boatswain of the brig. He whistled when he saw Luttrell.

"Sazy, pardner, hev you dropped from the clouds!" he exclaimed. "Guessed them Ashantees had chawed you up long ago!"

"It wasn't your fault that they didn't."

"Nix. I guess this yere kid is 'sponsible fur yew still amblin' round this 'ere airth. But I tell yew, I am mighty glad ter see yew alive, and that's the truth. You did make us mad; but afterwards we was all sorry we left yew fur the niggers. Fact! Even old Spose-waal-Freckon looked ashamed of hisself the next day, though you hed spoiled his little game."

"All right, Jones," said Luttrell good-humouredly. "Let bygones be bygones, as we're to sail together."

"Do ye belong to the 'Sweet Norah,' then?"



One man seized his bridle, making the horse rear, and the unskilled rider was flung backwards to the ground. The second man ran at him, flourishing a long knife. With one accord Luttrell and Jim lashed their ponies to a furious gallop, speeding to the rescue.

"I am chief mate."

"Thunder! So I'm under your orders? Yaas, let bygones be bygones, by all means!" Ephraim exclaimed, with much earnestness.

Wilcox, remembering his conduct on board the "Tuscarora," expected little tenderness from Luttrell. But the new chief mate of the "Sweet Norah" said nothing to him, ignoring him utterly, and this indifference was a relief to the rascal.

The crew of the brig numbered twenty, of whom seven were Italians or Sicilians, for Captain Mulligan had lost that number of seamen by accident or desertion during a year in the Mediterranean, and had not replaced them. The majority, however, were British, mostly Irishmen, and a fine set of fellows they were.

The "Sweet Norah" sailed from Valetta, her destination being Famagusta, in Cyprus.

On the second day the breeze freshened, and by night a gale was blowing. Captain Mulligan then had an experience

of his new officer's abilities. Luttrell proved himself invaluable. The brig rode out the storm, which lasted two days, and left a heavy swell upon the sea when it subsided. The "Sweet Norah" had not lost a spar.

But other vessels were abroad upon the seas which met with worse fortune.

"A signal of distress, sir!" Jim exclaimed, as Captain Mulligan came up from breakfast.

Afar on the swelling waters could be seen a drifting and dismantled hulk. It had been a stately ship the day before; now it was a waterlogged wreck, only keeping afloat till the billows should part it amidships.

A Union Jack, nailed to the stump of the bowsprit, fluttered in the wind. Clearly, it was placed there as a signal of distress. The fore-castle was high, the stern being half submerged, so that the flag could be seen at a considerable distance.

"It'll be stiff work getting a boat to her," Luttrell remarked. "But you'll try, captain?"

"Faix, an' I will! It's meself that will go; and I leave yez in command of my ship, ma boucal."

With Captain Mulligan in the stern, and sturdy British seamen at the oars, the "Sweet Norah's" boat approached the drifting wreck.

The crew seemed to be gone, for as the rescuers drew near only three forms appeared upon the fore-castle.

"Women, by George!" said Luttrell. "Heaven help our brave sailors, and grant a rescue!"

Two were women—girls—the other a sailor. They made frantic signals to the boat. Captain Mulligan waved his hand to reassure them.

Luttrell and Jim were gazing intently at the boat, when Ephraim Jones joined them.

"Saax, Mr. Luttrell," began the Yankee, "wot do yew think of the look of this hyer crew of ours?"

"What do you mean, man?"

"I mean that there's mischief afoot!"

Captain Mulligan had naturally picked British seamen to man his boat, and there were only three Britons left in the brig, besides the officers.

The seven Italians had collected near the second mate, who was talking eagerly with Pietro Quevada.

All Luttrell's unspoken suspicions of Riccardi came rushing into his mind.

The way Riccardi had received the captain the night he came aboard had first roused Luttrell's distrust.

Without reasons which would warrant him in putting so terrible an accusation into words, Luttrell suspected that it was Riccardi who had contrived both the assassination of the chief mate and the murderous attack upon Captain Mulligan.

His object, of course, must be to obtain temporary command of the "Sweet Norah"—a temporary command which he would change into a permanent one by getting rid of the British seamen, and filling their places with his own associates.

The rescue of Captain Mulligan and his return to the brig had shattered this scheme.

But here was an opportunity of retrieving the failure. With the captain and most of the crew gone to the wreck, what was to prevent a forcible seizure of the "Sweet Norah"?

The idea, in fact, had leaped into the mind of the Italian mate. He longed for revenge upon the Englishman who had baffled him.

But he knew that Luttrell carried a revolver, and was a dead shot, and so he hesitated. There was plenty of ferocity in his breast, but little courage. Yet the opportunity seemed too good to be lost.

"There's mischief afoot," repeated the Yankee. "I've guessed for a long time that there wuz some blamed secret among them Eytalians. They mean mischief, I jest calc'late."

Riccardi caught Luttrell's eyes fixed upon him, and he looked very uneasy.

He went below, with an air of assumed carelessness.

"I hardly think they will dare anything openly," Luttrell said musingly. "But bring our fellows aft, Jones, and keep an eye upon the Dagoes."

"You bet your sweet life I will; and I'll keep my sixer handy, too!" declared Ephraim, emphatically.

Luttrell turned his eyes to the wreck again.

The sailor there had tied a rope to the foremast stump, letting the end fall over the bows.

Down the rope he was assisting the descent of one of the girls.

"Brave chap!" said Luttrell. "I say, Jim, isn't there something familiar about that seaman?"

"By George! it's Tom Bunting!" cried Jim excitedly.

"I thought so. Hurrah!"

It was indeed Bunting. The brave old salt reached the

leaping water with his burden, and Captain Mulligan made the boat approach perilously near the wreck to recover them. Both were drawn safely aboard. Then the Irish skipper himself went up the rope nimbly, to bring down the other.

Luttrell was watching, with all his eyes, when Jim suddenly gripped his collar, and dragged him backward so violently that he tumbled over.

A heavy block crashed upon the deck where he had been standing, and that explained the cause of Jim's startling action.

Luttrell understood; and as he regained his feet his eyes gleaming with rage, turned aloft.

Pietro Quevada was astride of the cross-jack-yard.

"He dropped it!" cried Jim. "I caught sight of him only just in time."

Had the block struck Luttrell's head he would have been killed instantly.

He levelled his revolver at Pietro Quevada.

"Mercy, signor!" yelled the Italian. "It was an accident."

"The lyin' cuss!" ejaculated Ephraim Jones. "He meant to kill you, sure as thunder. Blow his brains out!"

"Come down, you cowardly scoundrel!"

Quevada obeyed, in fear and trembling.

"Jones, trice him up! If he resists, stun him!"

"You bet," chuckled Ephraim.

And Quevada in a minute lay on the deck trussed up like a turkey.

There was some growling among the Italians, but Luttrell's fierce eyes and drawn pistol were quite sufficient to prevent an outbreak.

"The other lady's in the boat," said Jim. "Now they're pulling back. Buck up, shipmates! Hurrah!"

It was a hard pull back to the "Sweet Norah," but it was done, and rescuers and rescued were helped aboard.

The two girls—both of them very pretty, one about seventeen years old, the other something over twenty—were pale and weak, but still tired.

Luttrell, Jim noticed, stared very hard at the younger girl. Suddenly he clasped her in his arms.

"Mr. Luttrell, phwat the dickens are yez doin'!" exclaimed Captain Mulligan. "How do yez dare insult the poor colleen, an' sho—"

But the "poor colleen" did not seem to feel insulted. She rested willingly in Luttrell's strong arms, and let her poor tired head sink peacefully upon his shoulder.

"It's all right, sir," said Luttrell, half laughing and half crying. "It's my sister!"

"Begorra, that alters the case intiroely," said the pacified skipper.

CHAPTER 7.

The Shipmates in Love—The Plot of Carlo Riccardi—The Revolt of the Italians—A Fight to a Finish.

It was some days before Violet Luttrell recovered sufficiently from the shock of the shipwreck to tell her story.

Then she related how she came to be on board the "Eurydice," the vessel whose voyage had ended so disastrously.

Her companion, Isabel Alton, had been her best friend at the school where Luttrell had left her.

Isabel's father was a merchant in Cyprus, and he had sent for her to join him there, instructing her to engage a companion to accompany her.

As Violet was eager to contribute to her own support, she accepted the appointment.

She did not know where to write to Luttrell, but she left a letter for him at the school, to be delivered when he returned to England.

Luttrell, immensely delighted as he was to see his sister again, was by no means pleased to find her in the position of companion to Miss Alton; but Violet soon reassured him upon that point.

"Isabel is my dearest friend. She wished to keep me with her, and I am only called 'companion' to save my independence. She is everything that is good and lovely."

And Luttrell, as he saw more of Miss Alton, came to esteem her quite as much as Violet did.

Isabel was a sweet and graceful girl—not quite so beautiful as Violet, but very charming indeed.

She was very cordial to her companion's brother, and Luttrell and she became great friends.

Jim Leslie, however, liked Violet the best. Isabel was older than he, Violet younger. Perhaps that made a difference. And perhaps Luttrell's long, confidential talks about Violet's perfections had prepared Jim to think very highly of her. At all events, in the course of a few days the young sailor was wondering how he had ever considered life worth living before he knew Violet.

Violet, of course, was very kind to Jim, of whom Luttrell had made frequent mention in his letters home. Jim, as an

"apprentice," had a good deal of leisure, and he spent a great deal of it with Violet. He told her of her brother's business on the Gold Coast, and of their many perilous adventures by land and sea. And Violet listened with eager, intense interest, secretly admiring the frank and handsome sailor, who touched so lightly upon his own share in the exploits he described, but gave such generous praise to his associates.

It was from Tom Bunting that the story of the wreck was obtained. The old tar waxed eloquent upon the subject.

"The craft was a clinker, mates; but the crew—shiver my timber, such a crew! All of 'em lascars and coolies and cheap furriners. And in the gale the ship was nowher. Twenty British tars would hev pulled her through. But there wuz only sixteen hands, all cheap furrin trash; so the sea jest did wot it pleased with us. Fust the masts went, and kept thrumming alongside, till we sprung a leak under the quarter. Then there was a rush for the boats. The sea was runnin' high, and they was all swamped but one, and that one the skipper, and when the skipper tried to make 'em clear out for the ladies, they knocked him overboard. I kinder thought it wuz a British seaman's dooty ter stand by the skipper, so I stuck to the 'Eurydice.' And it wuz lucky I did, for the boat was swamped afore it wuz a cable's length from the ship. That's how I came to be erlone on the craft with the ladies. Dunno how she floated, but she wouldn't hev lasted much longer. The cabin wuz afloat, and we had to creep into the fo'c's'le, and we had been there ten blessed hours, expectin' to go to Davy Jones every minute, when we saw your craft, Mr. Luttrell. By thunder, and we wuz glad to see it, too, I tell yer!"

Luttrell was glad to have old Bunting on board the "Sweet Norah," for he knew Tom to be a keen and knowing fellow, and he was in need of advice. His suspicions of Carlo Riccardi weighed upon his mind. Luttrell, Jim, Bunting, and Ephraim Jones often talked the matter over.

Captain Mulligan had put Quevada in irons for his attempt upon Luttrell's life. But the Irishman, one of the simplest and most unsuspicious of men, was inclined to believe Quevada's assertion that the dropping of the block was an accident.

"If he had succeeded in killing me," Luttrell said to his council of three, "there would have been an outbreak at once, and ten to one the Italians would have seized the vessel. Then the boat would have been abandoned, and it would not have kept afloat many hours upon such a sea. But it's useless to say so to Captain Mulligan. He would laugh at me, and think I was full of old woman's fears."

"But as the matter stands now, I calculate the Eytalian's won't kick over the traces," Ephraim Jones remarked. "Half a dozen rich low-down scallywags wouldn't dare begin a fight again odds, Mr. Luttrell."

"No. I partly think that Carlo Riccardi has abandoned his idea. He is a coward. But a treacherous rising, a free use of poniards in the dark, might yet place the 'Sweet Norah' in his hands."

"We are only three days now from Famagusta," Jim observed. "He will have to buck up if he means mischief."

"I'll tell you what," old Bunting remarked, "if there's any game afoot, one thing's sartin, and that is that that boulder Wilcox has got a hand in it."

"Kerret!" exclaimed Ephraim. "You rockerlect, Mr. Luttrell, that he joined old S'pose—waal-I reckon and his crowd as in you in the gun-runin' biz? Tharfor he wouldn't think twice erbout follerin' the Eytalian lay out of it sooted his book."

"I believe he is scoundrel enough!" Luttrell assented.

"Now I've an idea," continued Bunting. "I'll lay for to make him give himself away to me by puttendin' to jine in his gang—see?"

"If you could gain his confidence you might bowl him out," Luttrell said thoughtfully.

"Oh, I'll manage it A I, Mr. Luttrell!"

"Then I will decide not to speak to the captain until you have something definite to report. If I state my suspicions now he will laugh at me. And yet if I allow matters to drift, and anything happens, he will consider me to blame for not warning him."

So Bunting set to work to worm the truth out of Wilcox. He appeared to make pretty good progress. Wilcox talked very freely.

The next day Bunting found an opportunity of speaking to Luttrell unobserved.

"There is something afoot, sir, and Wilcox is in it. He's admitted as much. He asked me if I would stand by him and others in a dangerous but profitable game. I s'pose that can only mean one thing."

"What we want to know is the time when we have to look for a revolt," said Luttrell.

"I'll diskriver that soon, sir, never fear!"

That night, in the middle watch, Bunting had news of great importance to communicate.

"It's to be to-morrow night, sir. Wilcox has told me everything, and has let Riccardi know that he may rely upon me to join him. Wilcox is to heave a plank into the sea, and I am to give the alarm. 'Man overboard!' and when a boat is lowered, the Italians will use their knives on all the English that remain aboard, and then run the boat down."

"By Jupiter! it's not a bad plan," Luttrell exclaimed. "Riccardi is by no means a fool."

What course he ought to take required some thinking out; but, as twenty-four hours had yet to elapse ere the revolt was to be attempted, there was no hurry to decide.

When the watch changed, all the Italians came on deck, excepting Quevada, who was still in irons. To prevent bickering, Captain Mulligan had placed the foreigners all in one watch.

Luttrell went down to supper, leaving Carlo Riccardi in charge of the deck, the captain being below. Whenever Riccardi was officer of the watch, Ephraim Jones and Jim always remained at hand to keep an eye upon him. If the second mate was conscious of this surveillance, he did not let it appear.

Jim was looking at the stars, and mentally comparing them with the eyes of Violet Luttrell, when he heard Carlo Riccardi stamp violently upon the deck.

He started, and looked at the mate.

Riccardi was springing at Tom Bunting, knife in hand. And Jim's horrified glance also took in a scene further on. Two Englishmen were at the wheel, and at the very moment Riccardi stamped, the two seamen were stabbed by Italian poniards.

Bunting, taken utterly by surprise, made no effort to defend himself, but he mechanically dodged the descending blade, falling down the companion-ladder in doing so.

"And you, you brat—!" hissed Riccardi, making for Jim.

Jim was unarmed. He made a nimble spring into the hatchway, and went down headlong.

Ephraim Jones snatched at his pistol-pocket; but the murderers of the helmsmen were upon him, and he had no time to fire.

Barely eluding the slashing daggers, he sprang into the mizzen chrouds, and clambered frantically up, never stopping till he was safe in the crow'snest.

Meanwhile four Italians had attacked the watch below. Some were in the galley, some in the fo'c's'le. The latter were pitilessly butchered, without a chance of resistance. But their terrible cries, ringing through the ship, brought out the four who were in the galley.

The poor fellows, unarmed and unprepared, fled from the savage scoundrels, who rushed upon them with brandished steel; but as they ran aft they were met by Riccardi and his companions.

Two shrieked for quarter; the other two fled into the rigging, where they heard the voices of their comrades die away in moans of agony.

"The ship is ours!" cried Carlo Riccardi. "Follow me, my comrades, and let us strike the last blow."

The mutineers, with exultant cries, crowded into the companion-hatchway.

It only remained to finish off the two or three Englishmen in the cabins, and the revolt would be a complete success.

But this was a harder task than Riccardi looked for.

Luttrell knew how he had been deceived, when Bunting and Jim came rolling down into the cuddy.

Bunting, instead of fooling Wilcox, had been cleverly fooled by him. Riccardi, by leading Luttrell to suppose that the revolt was twenty-four hours distant, had been able to take the English utterly by surprise.

Luttrell cursed his blindness as he heard the shrieks and groans on deck.

The massacre did not occupy more than three minutes, so cunningly had Riccardi laid his plans, so faithfully did his associates carry them out.

By the time Luttrell had roused the captain, and the four men had armed for battle, the mutineers were crowding down the companion-way.

Violet and Isabel, in wildest terror, had emerged from their cabin, which opened into the cuddy.

Luttrell bade them retire. They did so, and, locked in each other's arms, sobbed together in their terrible fear.

Roused from slumber by the rush of feet, the yells of victorious murderers, the groans of dying men, it was natural that the dread of the girls should be extreme.

It was Luttrell who was the soul of the resistance offered to the mutineers' attack. Jim ably backed him up. Bunting was too bruised and shaken and Captain Mulligan too bewildered to be of much use.

Luttrell faced the Italians without a tremor, and fired with deadly effect.

We don't want to keep on worrying about it, but we must beg you to be sure to get No. 408 of the UNION JACK. Ready everywhere on February 14th (St. Valentine's Day).

The first mutineer in the caddy fell headlong with a bullet in his back, and the second reeled backwards a moment later, and fell dead by the mainmast.

At the same time Jim fired, and a mutineer received his bullet in the chest and dropped morially wounded. The villains had not expected so vigorous a reception. Surprised, irresolute, unarmed men they could assail without faltering.

But from the steady fire of Luttrell and Jim they recoiled, panic-stricken.

There was a wild scramble to escape from the narrow stair to the deck above.

Luttrell rushed forward, and fired after them. The man his bullet struck came tumbling down, howling like a wild beast. He clutched Luttrell's leg and dragged him down.

Dying, but ferocious still, he tried to stab the Englishman. Jim grasped his wrist in time, and Captain Mulligan gave the wretch a crashing blow upon the head which finished him. Luttrell had thought of a sally—a bold attempt to retake the ship—but this delay, brief as it was, rendered that impossible, for the Italians took advantage of it to batten down the hatch. The four Englishmen were thus securely imprisoned in the caddy.

"Four of the scoundrels dead!" said Luttrell, blood-thirsty for once. "I suppose that they have released Generala; but that will only make five of them, including Wilcox. I feel assured that none of the other seamen are concerned in it. There are enough of us to finish them if we could only get at them."

"Fair, it's astounding I am intirely!" Captain Mulligan exclaimed. "Sure, I should as soon have looked for Davy Jones as a mutiny aboard my ship. By the howly saints, I'll make them spalpeens smart when I get at them!"

"But how to get at them; that's the difficulty," said Luttrell.

And out of this difficulty no one at present could find a way.

The fighting over, Violet and Isabel came out of their cabin, anxious for the safety of their friends.

"Sorry yez should be startled loike this, ladies," said Captain Mulligan; "but it's them Italian bounders that hev broke out like demons."

Confound the howlin' blag-gards!"

"Don't be afraid, dear Violet," said Luttrell. "And you, Miss Alton, have confidence."

"I have confidence in you, Mr. Luttrell," Isabel answered, half unconsciously.

In the hour of danger her whole heart went out to this brave, sturdy sailor. Luttrell's eyes sparkled. He had learned to care for Isabel, and he believed now that she did not regard him with indifference.

Jim tried to reassure Violet, and he succeeded. He was so much in earnest that his voice grew quite tender, which made Violet blush; then Jim, being still a boy, blushed too, and both felt strangely conscious.

Luttrell, glancing at them, smiled softly. He knew what was in their hearts, though they scarcely knew it themselves. And he was not displeased.

The "Sweet Norah" was still moving swiftly through the water, but her course had been slightly altered. Luttrell soon guessed the object of Ricciardi.

"He hasn't enough men to tackle us with any chance of success," he said. "He wants reinforcements. He is going to pass Cyprus, and run on to the coast of Syria. No doubt he knows numbers of Levantine cutthroats, of whom he can obtain help to finish us."

"By the howly saints, he mustn't be allowed to git the 'Sweet Norah' into the Levant!" exclaimed Captain Mulligan. "I suppose that was his idee from the first. As he can't kill us, he's goin' to carry us there to be killed, the murthin' thraitor!"

"We must retake the ship or die. We'll retake it!" Luttrell said resolutely. "We can't get out at the hatchway, but there are the cabin windows. I believe I could climb over the stern—"

"If you were seen—"

"It would be death. But I do not think they will look for so desperate an attempt, especially if you make an assault upon the hatch at the same time."

"It is madness!" cried Violet, greatly agitated, as was also Isabel Alton. "You shall not run such a fearful risk, Robert."

Jim—Mr. Leslie—don't let him go!"

"Not at all," Jim answered. "He shall go, and I shall go with him!"

"No, no!" cried Violet.



Grimly silent, with set teeth and bated breath, Jim and his shipmate worked their way upward. Up, up, till Luttrell's firm grasp was upon the taffrail, and his head rose to view the deck. Then the helmsman saw him, and uttered a cry of amazement, and ran at him with a knife.

"Yes," said Luttrell quietly; "you shall come, Jim. Captain Mulligan, you are too heavy for such a climb; Bunting is too sore. We will go! Once we reach the taffrail all will be well. All our men cannot have been murdered. I have no doubt there are some hidden in the rigging, who will join me as soon as I appear."

Luttrell and Jim had their way.

Captain Mulligan and Bunting ascended the companion, and began hammering at the hatch. Carlo Ricciardi, in fear, lest the armed Englishmen should succeed in breaking out, directed his men to drag a chain cable to the hatch and coil it there.

Meanwhile, Luttrell and Jim removed their boots and jackets, stuck their revolvers into their belts, and got out of

One Halfpenny.

the stern windows. Ropes were tied to their belts, in case they should fall into the sea. The two girls watched them in terror. Their own fate depended upon the success of this attempt. But it was of the danger the shipmates ran that Isabel and Violet thought.

The stern of the "Sweet Norah" was of the ornamental sort, and there were projections enough for the two bold sinners to seize with clinging hand and foot.

What slight sounds they made were drowned by the wash of the sea and the clinking of the iron chain which the crew were coiling upon the hatch, and the thundering blows of Mulligan and Bunting beneath it.

Grimly silent, with set teeth and bated breath, Jim and his shipmate worked their way upward.

Up, up, till Luttrell's firm grasp was upon the taffrail, and his head rose to view the deck.

Then the helmsman saw him, and uttered a cry of amazement, and ran at him with a knife.

Luttrell threw himself desperately forward, and rolled over on the deck. He was up again, like a Jack-in-the-box, and met the Italian with a blow that sent him reeling. The slashing knife scratched his arm.

"Look-out!" yelled Wilcox. "They're coming up over the stern!"

They were his last words. For Luttrell had his revolver out now, and his first shot laid the traitor dead upon the deck.

Jim was over the rail by then, and he sprang to Luttrell's side as the Italians rushed to the attack.

"Kill them!" yelled Carlo Riccardi furiously.

Then down the shrouds came skimming the lanky form of Ephraim Jones to join in the fray. The two English seamen followed, with their clasp-knives open.

The Italians were four, and matters for a moment looked doubtful.

Luttrell shot one rascal down, and Jim killed another with a bullet through the heart.

Then the poniards of Riccardi and Quevada were at their very throats.

But at that critical moment, Ephraim Jones gripped Riccardi, and dragged him backward, away from Jim.

Luttrell, who was attacked by Quevada, parried his slash with his pistol-barrel, and closed with him.

Quevada, snarling like a mad dog, tore at him with his teeth, for Jim gripped him, and wrenched the knife from his hand.

But his struggles terminated abruptly, for a sailor's clasp-knife found his throat, and he sank upon the deck, bathed in blood.

"Now, ye critter, chuck it!" gasped Ephraim, finding Carlo Riccardi almost too much for him. "Ye aire beaten, fer an' squar, and thar ain't no sense in denyin' it. Hyer, somebody lend me a hand with this scallywag; p'raps the sea'll cool him a bit!"

The sailors readily lent a hand, and the leader of the mutineers went flying over the taffrail. There was a splash and a gurgling scream, and then the Mediterranean closed for ever above the head of Carlo Riccardi.

Loud rang the victorious cheer of the Britons.

"Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!"

Below, in the cuddy, Isabel and Violet wept with joy and relief, for they knew the tones of the two shipmates, and knew that neither had fallen in the fight.

Of Jim and his shipmate we have little more to relate, for the day of their struggles was over. With Luttrell as chief mate and Jim second they were fairly on the way to prosperity.

At Famagusta—which port the "Sweet Norah" reached with a sadly diminished crew—the two girls went ashore. But the shipmates did not lose sight of them. Captain Mulligan's trade was still in the Mediterranean, and the "Sweet Norah" frequently visited Cyprus. The course of true love ran smooth, and ere long Isabel was betrothed to Luttrell, and Jim Leslie told his love to Violet, and was not repulsed.

And at length, when Luttrell rose to command, and Jim became chief mate under him, two weddings were celebrated upon the same day.

THE END.

(Don't miss "JACK HARDING'S QUEST," the rattling Complete Novel by Eric Metcalfe, in next Friday's UNION JACK.)

The Complete Novel in next Friday's UNION JACK—"JACK HARDING'S QUEST"—will be by Eric Metcalfe, Author of "The President's Double."



I think every reader of the UNION JACK will be surprised and delighted when No. 408 appears. I want to impress upon you all that No. 403 will be on sale at all newsagents' on Friday, February 14 (St. Valentine's Day), and that, as it will contain the first instalment of the most amazing serial story we have ever published, there is sure to be a great rush for the number. I advise regular readers who have not already done so to give a standing order for the UNION JACK; then they will not be disappointed.

Long Days.

The longest day, so far as we are concerned in this country is the 21st of June, H. R. The shortest is the 21st of December. Of course, in different countries the date varies, as also does the length of the day. For instance, at Stockholm, Sweden, it is eighteen and one-half hours in length.

At Spitzbergen the longest day is three and one-half months. At London and Bremen the longest day has sixteen and one-half hours.

At Hamburg and Dantzic the longest days have seventeen hours.

In Norway the longest day lasts from May 21st to July 22nd, without interruption.

At St. Petersburg and Tobolsk, Siberia, the longest day is nineteen hours, and the shortest five hours.

At Tornea, Finland, June 21st brings a day nearly twenty-two hours long, and Christmas one less than three hours in length.

At New York the longest day is about fifteen hours, and at Montreal, Canada, it is sixteen hours.

"Be careful, there!" called a policeman to a man who was speeding his horse in the street. "What for?" asked the driver, as he pulled up.

"I'll have you up for fast driving!"

"What is fast driving?"

"Why, over eight miles an hour!"

"I say, old fellow, take me into court, won't you? If you will only get it into the papers that this horse was going over four miles an hour I can sell him for ten pounds. If you will, I'll try and do you a good turn some day."

Puzzling Names.

George S. has been struggling hopelessly with a number of surnames which he cannot pronounce. He has made up a list of these, and wishes to be enlightened as to the pronunciation of each. Below I give the names and ways of pronunciation:

Talbot is pronounced Tolbut.
Bulwer is often pronounced Buller.
Cowper is pronounced Cooper.
Wemyss is pronounced Weems.
Knollys is pronounced Knowles.
Brougham is pronounced Broom.
St. Leger is pronounced Sillinger.
Hawarden is pronounced Harden.
Colquhoun is pronounced Cohoon.
Cirencester is pronounced Sissister.
Grosvenor is pronounced Grovener.
Beauchamp is pronounced Beecham.
Abergavenny is pronounced Abergenny.
Majoribanks is pronounced Marchbanks.
Bolingbroke is pronounced Bullingbrook.
Cholmondeley is pronounced Chumly.

The term "tweeds," which is used for a well-known kind of woollen cloth, J. B. F., is said to be a corruption of "tweels." The latter word was blotted or imperfectly written on an invoice, and so gave rise to the now familiar name of these goods. "Tweel" was read as "tweed" by the late James Locke, of London, a pioneer of the trade, and it was thought so appropriate, from the goods being made on the banks of the Tweed, that it was at once adopted, and has been continued ever since. Tweed cloth is cloth woven diagonally.