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AMONG THE DARK MOUNTAINS

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NOT TO BE BAULKED EASILY $\substack{Page\ 230}$

AMONG THE DARK MOUNTAINS

Or, Cast Away in Sumatra

BY

DAVID KER

Author of "Blown Away from the Land"

Illustrated by Frances Ewan

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PREFACE

All the adventures in this story are taken from life, and most of them occurred to myself. The tale as a whole represents fairly enough the state of Sumatra when Mrs. Ker and I visited it in the year of the great eruption, and does no more than justice to the extreme kindness of the Dutch colonists.

DAVID KER.



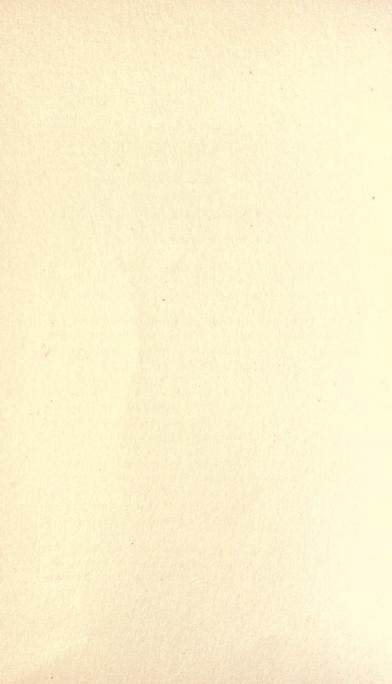
CONTENTS

	Pag	
I.	Besieged by a Shark	
II.	THE LONELY FIGURE ON THE CLIFF 20)
III.	OVER THE PRECIPICE)
IV.	MARMADUKE GETS HIS WISH	5
v.	FALLEN AMONG SAVAGES	1
VI.	A GRIM WARNING 65	2
VII.	IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT 68	3
VIII.	Swept to their Doom	3
IX.	THE ISLAND CITY	3
X.	Tidings of Evil)
XI.	A NEW WAY OF BEING PRESENTED AT COURT 10%	7
XII.	A MALAY KING AT HOME	1
XIII.	THE DEADLY CALM	3
XIV.	A BEWITCHED VESSEL	5
XV.	THE TIGER OF THE GOLDEN MOUNTAIN)
XVI.	Cast up by the Sea	7
XVII.	Over into Sumatra	2
VIII.	In the Slough of Despond)
XIX.	A MALAY TOWN)
XX.	On a Sumatran Plantation 203	2
XXI.	Calling on the Rajah	,
XXII.	DEATH'S AMBUSH	2

viii	AMONG THE DARK	MO	UNT	AIN	S				
									Pag
XXIII.	FACING A MONSTER						•		230
XXIV.	EVIL TIDINGS							1.	234
XXV.	UP INTO THE MOUNTAINS.								240
XXVI.	AN EASTERN MONTENEGRO								246
XXVII.	LIVING DEATH								25
XXVIII.	THE MYSTERIOUS SOUND .								261
XXIX.	MEETING AN OLD FRIEND.								26
XXX.	WALKING IN DARKNESS .								270
XXI.	THE STROKE OF DOOM								276
XXXII.	THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 26,	1888	3.			0			289
XXXIII.	A BLACK SABBATH								298

ILLUSTRATIONS

NOT TO BE BAULKED EASILY Frontispiece	Facing Page
"No coffee, eh?"	80
"He just took hold of My hand and pressed it to his forehead"	144
HE CAUGHT HARIMAU'S ARM JUST AS THE LATTER WAS ABOUT TO MAKE HIS SPRING.	272



AMONG THE DARK MOUNTAINS

CHAPTER I

BESIEGED BY A SHARK

HESE are the Arabian deserts, I suppose; and they do look dismal enough for anything. But why on earth do they call this the Red Sea? It's as blue

as a sailor's jacket, so far."

"Why, bless yer, sir, you can call a sea anythin' you like, but 'twon't make it so. You don't s'pose that the Black Sea 'ud dye you black, like a hink-bottle, if you was to fall into it; or that the Yellow Sea's like a pot o' mustard, or the White Sea like a bowl o' milk! I've knowed a sea where the water was as thick as treacle, so as our oars stuck fast in it every stroke we pulled; but it wasn't treacle, for all that. Why, I've actually knowed chaps as was wicious enough to call me a liar; but, thank goodness, it couldn't make me one!"

"Of course not, Mr. Graves; whoever said so libelled you most shamefully," answered, with commendable gravity, one of the two boys whom the ancient mariner was addressing. "But don't you think yourself that in that yarn of yours last night you made the sea-serpent just a few miles too long?"

"Wait till you see him, and then you can judge for yourself," retorted the undaunted Graves. "Why, Mr. Marmaduke, d'ye think as how your father, Lord Heathermoor (long life to him!), would ha' made me steward of this 'ere yacht o' his'n if so be as I was a man whose word couldn't be depended on? No, no, the truth afore all things—when you can't think of nothin' better."

And with this edifying precept of morality Mr. Graves turned and skated aft with the peculiar motion characteristic of a steward at sea, leaving Marmaduke Wyvil and Alfred Huntley to enjoy in all its fulness the ever-changing splendour of a panorama not easily matched even in the Eastern seas.

In fact, the two lads had been in raptures with everything that they saw during the Red Sea voyage, for, having never till now beheld either Africa or Asia, it was quite a new sensation to see the shores of both continents by turns, and sometimes both at once.

Ever since leaving Suez one marvel had followed another. They had seen the plumy crests of palm-trees seventy feet high waving over the Well of Moses, and the bold rocky headland of Ras Attakah looming through the twilight above those gloomy waters where, according to a grim Arab legend, the shrieks of Pharaoh's drowning hosts may still be heard mingling with the roar of the storm. dint of ceaseless running up and down, and constant worrying of every man on board to "tell them when it was time to look", they had succeeded in being on deck just when the vacht was fairly abeam of that solitary opening in the vast eastern mountain-wall through which one catches a passing glimpse of the great altar-shaped mass of Mount Sinai, towering above the scorched, crumbling hills of Arabia the Stony. They had enjoyed, as only English boys can, their first glimpse of a "real live desert", and had marvelled greatly (being still unfamiliar with the wonderful tropical "mirage") to see shining lakes and clustering trees amid these burning sands; and they marvelled yet more when the stately palm-trunks were suddenly seen to stoop and totter, the beautiful lakes melted

away like a dream, and, as far as eye could reach, nothing was visible save the hot brassy glare of the eternal desert.

Then came the shoals, rocks, shallows, and small islets of the perilous Strait of Jubal (or Jumble, as the sailors not inaptly persisted in calling it), where the Gulf of Suez at length comes of age as the genuine "Red Sea". As they passed Shadwan Island our heroes took care to make the steward point out to them, twice over, the fatal reefs upon which the poor old *Carnatic* had been hurled to destruction; and then the brave little yacht left all dangers behind her, and glided forth into the splendid solitude of the open sea.

And then, day after day, nothing but the same boundless expanse of water, flushing into golden glory in the first brightness of morning, lying blue and vast beneath the hot, cloudless sky of noon, or flashing back the last glow of sunset against the fast-falling shadows of night. On the third day a fresh breeze sprang up from the north-east, and Marmaduke saw with his own eyes the phenomenon at which he had so often laughed incredulously in books of travel—that, although they were out of sight of land, the weather-rigging was perfectly brown with the light powdery sand of the distant desert.

Early on the fourth morning after leaving Jubal's Strait there started up before them from the clear bright sea, black and grim against the glorious sunrise, a seemingly endless procession of bare, rocky, volcanic islets, gloomy, voiceless, lifeless as a funeral train. These were the formidable Zebayir Isles, strewn far and wide with charred rocks and black ashes, in stern warning of the unquenchable fires below.

The sight of these ocean hermits moved the good Mr. Graves to relate one of his most truthful stories.

"Now, Mr. Marmaduke, you that's always longin' for adwentures, how 'ud you like sitch an adwenture as to be wrecked on one o' them h'islands—as I was once,—with never a morsel of 'baccy, and nothin' to eat but rats?"

"Rats!" echoed Wyvil. "Well, that was paying them in their own coin, with a vengeance—just like the nigger eating the land-crab: 'Aha, massa! land-crab eat black man—never mind! black man eat he!"

"But, I say," cried Huntley, "where did you get rats from on a desert island?"

"Why, they comed off the wreck, o' course. Don't yer know as rats always leave a sinkin' ship? and where was they to go but on to the h'island?"

"True," said Huntley quite seriously. "I beg your

pardon, Mr. Graves-pray go on!"

"Well, now you'll want to know, I s'pose, how I managed to cotch them rats. I'll tell yer. There was only one spring o' water in the 'ole h'island, and so I went and filled my mouth with water, and then sat atop of the spring and held my mouth open, and when the rats came to drink I cotched their 'eads in my teeth, and killed as many as I wanted!"

"But how didn't the water run out if you kept your mouth open?" asked Alfred in a somewhat unsteady voice, while Marmaduke struggled with a suspiciously violent fit of coughing which had suddenly attacked him.

"Because I knowed when to shut my mouth, which is more'n you seems to do," retorted this modern Munchausen

as he shuffled indignantly away.

"There's no catching old Graves," chuckled Marmaduke; "he has an answer to everything. He's as good as that chap who, when they told him that facts were against him, said coolly: 'So much the worse for the facts!'"

"Or like that Yankee in the story," said Alfred, "who, when they asked him how deer with horns sixteen feet broad could run about among trees that he'd said were only two feet apart, answered as bold as brass: 'I guess that's their look-out!'"

Farther to the south they passed the frowning rocks of Jebel Zukur and Harish, among the jagged black teeth of which a few mouldering timbers stood out ominously; and then, as night came on, the cold splendour of the rising moon showed to our heroes, looming ghost-like far away along the western sky, the huge, shadowy outline of the Abyssinian mountains, overhanging the wide, smooth sweep of Annesley Bay.

"There, Alfred, my boy, that's the place where your father and I first made each other's acquaintance," said a deep voice behind the two lads, as they stood devouring the

unknown land with their eyes.

"Was it here that the Abyssinian expedition landed, then?" asked Alfred Huntley, looking eagerly at the tall,

handsome man who had just appeared at his side.

"This was the place," replied Lord Heathermoor, "and I can tell you it was a bustling place then, though it's so quiet and lonely now. Well do I remember how we all stood looking at those mountains, when we first sighted 'em, wondering what was waiting for us behind them; for of course we couldn't tell whether Theodore's whole army might not be ready to pounce upon us the minute we got out of sight of our fleet."

"I wish I had been there!" said his son, with sparkling

eyes.

"The only man among us who seemed quite cool," pursued Heathermoor, "was your father, Alfred; for, although he wasn't Colonel Huntley in those days, but only a junior captain, it took a good deal to fluster him. I can tell you that, young as he was, his men would have followed him anywhere; for, as I heard one of them say once: 'Cap'n Huntley never says Go and fight, but always Come and fight!"

"Bravo!" cried Alfred. "That's just what old Richard Cœur de Lion said in *The Talisman*, you know: 'I never bade man do that which I would not do myself'—and I'll be bound my father never did, either! When I see him I'll get him to tell me all that Abyssinian business over

again. I say, won't it be jolly meeting him again? I haven't seen him now, you know, since they sent him out to Borneo, years and years ago."

"No more have I," said Marmaduke, "and we'll be very glad to see him again too—won't we, father? He's to join

us at Singapore, isn't he?"

"So his last letter said," answered his father; "but it was written nearly a year ago; his plans may have changed since then. Anyhow, we'll go first to Singapore, and see; and if this weather holds, and nothing goes wrong, we oughtn't to be long in getting there."

But something did go wrong, much sooner than any of

them could have expected.

After leaving Annesley Bay the Mermaid stood over to the Arabian coast, and next morning they sighted a mass of white flat-roofed houses and tall tapering minarets huddled together upon the low sandy beach, which Wyvil heard one of the sailors call "Mocha".

"Mocha!" cried he. "Is this the place where the coffee comes from?"

"The place where it doesn't come from, you mean," laughed his father. "First and foremost, nearly all the coffee of these parts is exported through Aden now; and, secondly, no coffee ever grew anywhere near Mocha since the world began. It's all grown on the slopes of the Coffee Mountains, one hundred and twenty miles to the eastward, so that 'Mocha' coffee is as great a mistake as 'Jerusalem' artichokes, which, as I dare say you know, are really girasol (turn to the sun)."

By this time the narrowing sea had brought both coasts in sight at once, and along either shore a long line of craggy heights began to loom out like a wall to the southward, as the brave little yacht glided on toward the smaller of the two passages into which the Strait of Bab-el-Mandeb is divided by Perim Islet, as Goat Island parts Niagara.

(B 533)

"Now, boys," cried Lord Heathermoor, as he passed them in his hasty walk up and down the deck, "keep your eyes open, for in another hour or two you'll be out of the Red Sea into the Indian Ocean."

But it was fated that they were to do nothing of the kind. The famous strait was already in sight when our heroes were startled by a sudden slackening of the *Mermaid's* speed, ending at length in her coming to a complete standstill. Then followed a hoarse shout, a loud jingling of bells, a trample of hasty steps to and fro, and presently two or three deep voices at once announced that there was "some'at wrong with the h'en-gine!"

Happily, the "some'at" was nothing very serious, but the chief engineer reported that the damage would need several hours to repair, and Lord Heathermoor, facing the mishap with the coolness of a veteran seaman, gave orders

to cast anchor forthwith, and set to work at once.

"And lower that boat at the stern," he added, little foreseeing what the consequences of that order were to be; "it'll be a good chance to give her a soak, and keep the sun

from cracking her planking."

And now—Heathermoor being down in the engine-room, and all the rest of the ship's company fully occupied—the two lads were left to their own devices; and just at that moment, as ill-luck would have it, Alfred Huntley's quick eye caught a brilliant streak of white far away on the port quarter, breaking the deep-blue surface with a keen, sudden flash.

"I say, Duke," cried he eagerly, "isn't that a coral reef yonder?"

"It must be!" exclaimed Marmaduke excitedly. "Hurrah! it's just the very thing I've always been wanting to see! I say, wouldn't it be a lark to go out to it and get some coral to take home for a curio? We can take this boat that's towing astern, and be out there in no time."

"But how will your father like it?" objected his cooler

companion. "You know he always sends a couple of the

men with us when we go for a pull."

"Pooh!" cried Wyvil; "what's the good of bothering him in the middle of his work just for that? All the men are wanted on board just now, and we can pull there and back, easy, before they've done working. Besides, my father's always telling me that I must learn to shift for myself, and here's a good chance to do it!"

Alfred yielded, against his better judgment, and in a trice the two young madcaps slid down into the boat, cast her loose, and pulled with all their might toward the distant

reef.

It was a longer pull than they expected—for distances are nowhere more deceptive than in the Eastern seas,—but they reached it at last, and were soon in the full enjoyment of wonders that seemed to have come bodily out of the fairy tales of their childhood.

They appeared to be standing upon a monster nosegay of flowers of every hue—pale gold, glossy green, snowy white, delicate pink, vivid scarlet, and velvety black, without order and without end. Over this enchanted garden long wreaths of rich golden-brown sea-weed trailed like twining creepers, and, far down in the depths below, fresh shoots and tendrils could be seen branching upward through the cool transparent water, so perfectly formed that it seemed impossible they should really be nothing more than cold, hard stone.

Suddenly a shout from Wyvil drew his comrade's attention to a blackish-yellow mass floating past the southern end of the reef. At first sight it might have passed for a drifting bunch of sea-weed, but a second glance showed them the round shining back, flat head, and broad fanshaped "flippers" of a sedate old turtle, which was "paddling its own canoe" toward the Arabian shore, in the leisurely fashion of one to whom time was no object.

"I say, Alf," cried Marmaduke, as he pointed to this

living iron-clad, "we've got to collar that fellow, and no mistake! My father's very fond of turtle-soup, and it'll be a fine present to take him back. Lend me a hand to shove off the boat, and we'll have the beggar in no time—Hollo!"

Well indeed might Wyvil utter that startled "Hollo" as he turned round, and well might poor Alfred stare blankly in the same direction. It was just as Marmaduke was speaking of shoving off the boat that he suddenly discovered that there was no boat to shove off!

Their boat was gone!

Whether the hastily-reeved knot had come undone, or whether the projecting spike of coral to which it had been made fast had broken short off, the boat was gone, leaving them alone upon the reef without any means of escape. It was already fully fifty yards away from them, and drifting farther and farther beyond their reach every moment.

"Can't be helped," said Huntley doggedly, as his cool, self-reliant spirit rallied itself from the first shock of this terrible discovery. "If we've let it go, we've got to get it back again, for we can't be left here like this. It's not very far to swim; that's one comfort. Here goes!"

"Let me go!" cried Wyvil, stopping his friend as the latter was throwing off his jacket for the plunge; "it was

all my fault for not taking better care."

"Fudge!" exclaimed Alfred impatiently; "we've no time

to fight about it now. Stand clear!"

But, just as he was about to plunge in, Wyvil clutched his arm with both hands in a grasp of iron, and dragged him backward, shouting, as he did so:

"Hold hard for your life, old boy! do you see that?"

Huntley had no need to ask what "that" was, for, as his comrade spoke, there came darting up like a spear-point through the clear, smooth water, within a few feet of the spot where they stood, a black, jagged, hideous thing, which even the inexperienced boys knew at once for the back-fin of a shark!

CHAPTER II

THE LONELY FIGURE ON THE CLIFF

National States and the sudden appearance of this horrible creature, the poor lads did not realize even now the frightful peril that hung over them. Of course they and their boat would soon be missed, and the men would come and pick them up. In fact, just at first, both boys were more inclined to congratulate themselves upon having caught sight of the monster in time to avoid him

than to have any thought of alarm.

Huntley was the first to perceive that the tide was fast rising, and already reached their feet where they stood; and, as he looked round for some higher point whither to retreat, he saw with inconceivable horror that the whole reef lay equally low, the coral insects being unable to exist above the water-level. It was but too plain that its whole surface would soon be covered by the sea, and they would then be at the mercy of their ferocious enemy, one stroke from the powerful flukes of whose huge forked tail would suffice to fling them off into deep water, to be drowned or devoured alive.

Thoroughly alarmed at last, the boys shouted for help with all their might. But it soon became fearfully evident that the ceaseless hammering aboard the yacht—the sound of which reached them faintly even there—was more than sufficient to drown their distant call, while their figures, unrelieved by any patch of bright colour, were at that distance so completely blended with the grey outline of the coast as to be only too easily overlooked.

Meanwhile the tide rose steadily, and the shark circled

restlessly around them, as if feeling that its time was at hand. Drawing back as far as they could from the edge of the narrow reef, and clinging tightly to each other to keep their footing against the swirl of the rising water, the forlorn lads silently awaited their doom. It seemed hard to die—and by such a death—with help and friends full in sight! But what could they do?

But all at once Marmaduke Wyvil called out eagerly:

"Look, Alf, our boat's drifting right down towards the yacht, and they must see her! There's a chance for us yet!"

In fact, a few minutes later, they saw that a boat was being lowered from the port side of the *Mermaid*, and already thought themselves safe; but their hearts died within them when they perceived she was heading not for them but for their drifting boat, the men being evidently under the impression that the latter had merely got loose by accident.

"Shout with all your might, Duke!" cried Huntley; "it's our only chance. Now, then—both together!"

Whether this final call had been heard, or whether someone had sighted them through a glass, it was evident that their danger had been perceived at last, for in another moment the second boat (which had just brought the first alongside the *Mermaid*) was seen to turn suddenly, and shoot toward them like an arrow.

But, swiftly as she came, it seemed doubtful even now whether she would arrive in time. The heaving tide was already above the ankles of the two castaways, and it was only by the most violent exertion of their fast-failing strength that they were able to make good their footing against that quiet, steady, overwhelming pressure.

The sailors bent to their oars with desperate energy, for they now saw plainly the imminent peril of those whom they came to save. But the shark, too, was on the alert, and, having thrust himself through a gap in the outer edge of the reef, was all but touching the boys with his shovellike snout.

Dimly, as if in a dream, Wyvil saw the set faces of the approaching rescuers—heard their shouts of encouragement, and the harsh grating of the boat's bow against the coral—and then felt himself clutched by two strong hands, and dragged on board, while Huntley came tumbling down beside him.

Lord Heathermoor was leaning over the side of the yacht when they reached her, but, seeing what a deep and terrible impression had been left upon both lads by this hair-breadth escape from a horrible death, he wisely refrained from weakening its effect by any reproof of his own. The boys themselves, however — true to Marmaduke's favourite maxim that "any fellow who was ashamed to own himself in the wrong was no better than a coward",—lost no time in making their confession.

"It's all my fault, father," cried Wyvil frankly; "it was

I persuaded Alf to go."

"No, it was my fault too, rejoined Huntley, "for I

oughtn't to have given in."

"Well, well, my dear boys," said Heathermoor kindly, "I think you've both had a pretty good lesson to be more careful another time, so we'll say no more about it."

Half an hour later they were off again, heading toward the entrance of that storied ocean which (as Marmaduke had once said in a school theme) "was formerly ploughed by the adventurous barks of those great historical navigators, Sindbad the Sailor, Vasco da Gama, and Robinson Crusoe."

As they neared the straits, Perim Islet gradually developed itself from the huge shadowy likeness of a monster sword-fish into a small, barren ridge of dark-grey rock, three miles long by nearly two broad, and two hundred and nine feet above the sea at its highest point. Lying

close to the Arabian shore, it made a very unequal division of the channel, the western or African passage being fully ten miles in width, while the eastern passage (for which the yacht was making) was barely one.

As they entered it, Lord Heathermoor called out to the two lads: "Now, boys, here are three nations for you at

once-France, Italy, and Old England."

It was indeed as he said. Against the pale-yellow sand of the Arabian shore stood gauntly out a huge, massive, prison-like building of grey stone, garrisoned by a handful of sickly French soldiers. A little way beyond the straits the bare outline of the African coast was broken by the deep, narrow notch of Assab Bay, in the hollow of which, hidden by intervening hills, nestled Italy's infant colony of 1870; and between the two the British Union Jack waved defiantly over Perim Islet itself.

But the jaunty flutter of its crimson folds was the only sign of life that relieved the grim desolation of one of the dreariest spots upon the face of the earth. No living thing was to be seen, no sound of life to be heard, upon the bare, stony ridge, unchequered by a single speck of verdure. Over its dark surface two narrow white foot-paths wound upward, like veins, to the highest point, from which a low grey wall (surmounted by the round white tower of a lighthouse, and flanked on one side by a cluster of tumble-down Arab hovels) looked sullenly down upon the smooth, sunny sea, through the narrow, cunning eyes of countless loopholes.

"What a nice quiet place to spend one's holidays!" cried Wyvil with a school-boy grin. "Who on earth lives here, father?"

"A military Robinson Crusoe from the garrison of Aden," replied his father, "with a Hindoo sergeant for his Man Friday, and thirty sepoys to represent the Caribbee Indians. But I can tell you that, dreary as you think it, there was once a man who begged to be allowed to stay here."

"Did he?" exclaimed Marmaduke. "He must have been a brother to that fellow who broke into prison again after he was let out!"

"Well, the story was this: As I've told you, the officer in charge is sent over from Aden, and relieved every few months; but, as you may suppose, all the young 'subs' hold this post in particular abhorrence, and do their best to avoid being sent to it. So you may think the commandant of Aden was considerably astonished to receive, one day, an application from the young fellow stationed at Perim, not for the shortening of his term of duty, but for the extension of it for three months more!"

"Well, I never!" cried Alfred Huntley; "that's as bad as the yarn of the boy who used to steal castor-oil!"

"The old commandant granted the application at once, inwardly setting down this good young man as either a very zealous officer or a most amazing fool; but it wasn't long before in came a second letter from the same man, asking for another three months at Perim! This struck the old man as rather too improbable, and he began to conceive dark suspicions."

"And well he might, I'm sure!" chuckled Marmaduke Wyvil.

"However," continued Lord Heathermoor, "he hadn't time to look into the matter just then, being himself on the point of going home on leave. But the explanation came sooner than he expected; for, when he got to London, almost the first man he ran against was his zealous subaltern from Perim, who had been enjoying himself in England for several months past, having left behind, with his trusty sergeant on the island, several written applications for an extension of duty, to be sent to Aden one by one, whenever his time was nearly up."

By this time they were well into the narrow channel, and could see the ominous white of the fatal coral reefs streaking the shallow water on either side of them. Just. at the foot of the Perim cliffs, the rusted funnel and broken foremast of a wrecked steamer rose gauntly up from a long, low sand-bank; and as they began to near the other end of the strait, they caught sight of the shattered hull of a second wreck stranded among the rocks of the African shore.

"Doesn't Bab-el-Mandeb mean 'Gate of Weeping'?" said Wyvil. "The old strait seems to deserve its name, with all these wrecks about!"

"Why, bless yer, sir," chimed in old Graves's voice from behind, "if 'twarn't for plunderin' a wreck now and then, what 'ud them poor h'Arabs have to amuse 'em? I've heard folks say that up in the Shetland h'Isles, or some sitch barbarious place, whenever a ship was wrecked upon their coast, they used to give part of the plunder to the church, and pray that Heaven would be merciful, and send 'em more wrecks before long!"

And now, as they swept forth from the perilous straits into the open waters of the Gulf of Aden—a kind of side-pocket of the Indian Ocean,—our heroes suddenly caught sight of something which looked like a broad patch of white foam, a few hundred yards off, upon the starboard bow, strongly outlined against the deep blue of the sea, and undulating ceaselessly with a quick, irregular motion, like a table-cloth vigorously shaken out. The boys snatched at their spy-glasses, and instantly the seeming foam resolved itself into a vast cloud of white sea-birds, in the height of their day's fishing, and to all appearance making a very successful "haul".

As the yacht neared them, the whole tableau became clearly visible; and a very curious sight it was. Far and wide, the smooth sea was alive with flapping wings and pouncing beaks, swooping, diving, seizing, shooting up again, and replunging instantaneously, while the air echoed with their screams and the ceaseless rush of their pinions.

Here and there, along the skirt of the column, broke forth

a burst of shrill cries, and a jostle of conflicting forces worthy of a football match, as some lucky fellow, who had drawn a prize in this marine lottery, was assaulted simultaneously by a dozen or more of his good friends and neighbours, "with intent to rob". To the left of the main body, and about fifty yards away from it, a few old stagers had formed themselves into a joint-stock company, and were fishing very profitably on their own account, while three or four gluttons, who had already crammed down quite as much as they could conveniently hold (and possibly a little more), were flapping heavily away to digest their Lenten supper elsewhere.

"Look, look, Alf!" shouted Wyvil; "there's a fellow just brought up a big fish, and another fellow's whipped it away from him the minute he came up!"

"And see there!" cried Huntley; "there are two of 'em having a fight for a fish in the air, and now they've let it fall, and a third 'un's gone off with it—serve 'em both right for being so greedy!"

"Well, boys," said Lord Heathermoor's voice behind them, "even in this uneventful age there's something to

be seen out here, eh?"

"Yes, that's just it!" rejoined Wyvil in the regretful tone of a good man bemoaning a lost opportunity of usefulness; "there's such a horrid lot to look at that one hasn't even time to read—and I'm in the middle of such a stunning story too!"

"What story's that?" asked his father, smiling at this

characteristic regret.

"Ashley Thurraboy's last — In the Wilds of the New World," replied Marmaduke, the greater part of whose luggage, in fact, consisted of selections from the works of Messrs. Kingston, Ballantyne, Henty, Jules Verne, and Co.

"Aha! you've got hold of Thurraboy—'Thorough Boy', as Punch calls him. Well, he ought to be able to write about strange adventures, for he's had some pretty startling

ones himself, by all accounts. I remember meeting him a few years ago at a country house in Devonshire, just after he came back from that wonderful journey of his through South America, which is what I suppose that book of yours is about."

"And have you really seen him yourself?" cried Wyvil

eagerly.

"Really and truly I have enjoyed that pleasure; and, so far as I can recollect, he had neither horns nor hoofs, nor a fiery halo round his head, but looked very much like an ordinary man."

"I only wish I could come across him somewhere, and have a talk with him about these jolly books of his!" said

Marmaduke enthusiastically.

"You wouldn't get much out of him if you did," answered Heathermoor. "All the time he was with us at Falconhurst he hardly ever spoke a word, though what little he did say was certainly very much to the purpose. One evening, at dinner, a conceited young fool, who was always trying to make himself appear clever by crying down everyone else, said in a cheeky kind of way: 'Stanley may be something of a traveller, but he's no critic; he can't even tell a good book from a bad one!' 'So I thought,' answered Thurraboy quietly, 'for I've heard him praise one of yours.'"

During the night they held a straight course through the open sea, keeping well away from the Arabian coast on the north and the dangerous African shore on the south. But next morning Lord Heathermoor, coming on deck just before daybreak, gave orders (somewhat to the surprise of the officer of the watch) to lay the yacht on a course which would bring her well to the southward, and full in sight of that great cliff-wall which towers in an almost unbroken line from Berberah, along the Somauli coast, right onward to the vast wedge-shaped headland of Cape Guardafui, the easternmost point of Africa.

"The last time I passed this way," said he, "I picked up

a shipwrecked crew somewhere hereabouts; and who knows but we might find someone else in distress here this time?

It's worth trying, anyhow."

All that morning the dainty little vessel skimmed along like a sea-bird beneath that mighty rampart, which rose sheer up out of the sea to a height of more than one thousand feet; and our young travellers made their necks ache by constantly bending them back to stare up at the endless succession of grim, dark-grey precipices overhead, which, with their bare, scorched, crumbling rocks, dusty hollows, frowning crags, and dry torrent-beds—that gaped on every side like thirsty mouths panting for water—bore out fully all that the boys had heard or read of the savage desolation (unmatched even in Africa itself) for which this strange out-of-the-way corner of No-Man's-Land is so unenviably famous.

"Isn't there a text somewhere," said Marmaduke Wyvil in an undertone to his comrade, "which speaks of 'the land where all things are forgotten'? I should think this must

be the very place!"

But just at that moment Lord Heathermoor (who was pacing up and down the deck as usual, underneath the awning) was seen to give a sudden start, glance keenly upward at the mighty precipice above him, and then, bringing his telescope hastily to his eye, look long and fixedly at the highest point of the cliff, above which a dark spot had just risen up against the hot cloudless blue of the tropical sky.

These proceedings were not lost upon the quick-eyed lads, who, interested at once, whipped out their glasses, and turned them in the same direction. Then two sharp exclamations burst forth like one, for the first glance showed them that this slow-moving spot at which they were gazing was the figure of a solitary man in European

dress!

CHAPTER III

OVER THE PRECIPICE

SUCH an apparition, in such a place, was enough to startle the most case-hardened traveller alive; and the boys were excited beyond measure, though somewhat divided in opinion as to who this stranger might be who had made his appearance in such a melodramatic way. Huntley felt convinced that he was an African explorer, who had turned up here at the end of a walk right across the continent; and the more romantic Wyvil was equally positive that he must be a pirate!

But Heathermoor, who had been on this formidable coast three or four times already, was not long in guessing the

truth.

"He must be an Englishman," said he, "escaped from captivity among the Somaulis, and we must lend a hand to help him. Give him a shout, my men, as loud as you can!"

The crew lifted up their voices in a lusty shout, and, whether the forlorn man heard it or not, he had evidently caught sight of the yacht, for he was seen to wave his hand toward her. But just then he glanced quickly over his shoulder as if pursued, and then moved hastily, though with the tottering step of one whose strength was wellnigh exhausted, toward a spot a few hundred yards to his left, where a narrow, winding, break-neck path (upon which, when seen from below, it seemed as if even a mountain-goat could hardly have found footing) zigzagged in a greyish-white thread down the dark face of the cliff.

"They're after him, plain enough," muttered Heathermoor, "and we have no time to lose. Mr. Walters, you

know these seas better than I do; how close can we stand in to the shore without risk of running aground?"

"About a quarter of a mile more, my lord, is as much as

we can do safely."

"Stand in, then. Cast loose the gripes of the starboard quarter-boat, and stand by to lower away when I give the word."

"Ay, ay, my lord!"

But, ere the Mermaid could cover the allotted distance, the fierce excitement of this grim drama was unexpectedly

and formidably heightened.

The fugitive on the cliff—who had kept glancing quickly over his shoulder as he ran—was seen to stop short all at once, to cast one more rapid glance behind him, and then (as if driven to desperation by some imminent danger) to lower himself deliberately over the edge of that tremendous precipice, and begin to scramble down the fearful depth below.

So thunderstruck were even the hardy seamen at this unheard of and seemingly needless rashness that they stood staring blankly at each other without uttering a word. The excited Marmaduke bit his lips till they bled; and even Alfred Huntley, as he watched the small dark figure hanging upon the face of that terrific precipice, like a fly on a wall, clenched his hands till the knuckles grew white.

But they soon had something else to think of, for in another moment there came floating toward them from the shore the sound of a far-off yell, which, faint and distant though it was, was as ominous of evil as the scream of a pouncing vulture. Then there started up against the sunny sky, upon the dark brow of the precipice, three or four wild forms, quickly followed by a dozen more.

Through Heathermoor's powerful telescope, the black, bony frames, and lean, cruel, wolfish faces of these grim pursuers were plainly visible, and he evidently recognized

them at a glance.

"Somaulis!" he muttered savagely. "I see it all now. They're in chase of that poor fellow, and they've come up so as to cut him off from the path, and make him scramble right down the cliff to escape them! But they sha'n't have him, if I die for it."

Then his orders rang out in quick succession, clear and

decisive:

"Heave to! Stand by your boat! Let go the davittackle falls! Lower away!"

The boat was lowered and manned in a trice, and, skilfully steered by the second officer, Mr. Browne, flew toward the shore as swiftly as four stout oarsmen could send her.

But the fortune of this race with death seemed terribly doubtful even now, for all the chances were manifestly against the fugitive. As yet—though aided by the cleft of a dry torrent-bed, down which he was clambering like a sweep down a chimney—he had achieved barely a third of the descent; and, despite the wonderful activity which he displayed, it was mere madness to expect that he could distance in that way men who were advancing along a beaten path.

"Pull, my lads, pull!" shouted Browne to his crew; "it's to save a Christian man from cut-throat savages!"

The brave fellows worked like giants, but, do what they would, it seemed fatally certain that they must come too late; for now they could all see plainly that the path which the savages were following must sooner or later cut right across the line of the course taken by the intended victim in his descent. And, if they reached the point of intersection first, the forlorn man would be at their mercy.

That they would do so there could now be little doubt, for they were advancing at an increasingly rapid pace down the formidable path, evidently quite indifferent to the presence of the yacht, which they probably supposed to be unarmed, as she had made no attempt to fire upon them. Moreover, the English could not feel sure of getting the

best of it, even if they did arrive in time, for the Somaulis numbered ten men, and, though seemingly without firearms, all carried short swords or spears, while Mr. Browne and his crew were only five, at least one of whom would be needed to take care of the boat.

The savages themselves, too, were manifestly aware of their advantage, as was shown by the exulting yell with which they quickened their pace.

But nothing of all this escaped the vigilant eye of Lord Heathermoor, who had been watching the whole scene through his telescope from the deck of the *Mermaid*; and, just at the critical moment, his voice was heard again:

"Mr. Walters, load the signal-gun, and give those fellows a shot. Don't kill any of them if you can help it, but just try and scare them off; and then, if they won't take a hint,

we must go at 'em in earnest with the Gatling."

In a trice the light iron carronade, which, with a Gatlinggun fixed on a pivot amidships, formed the yacht's whole armament, was loaded and run out, and its bang fired a long train of thundering echoes among the crannied cliffs overhead.

The intervention of this new pleader was more successful than even Heathermoor himself could have ventured to hope, for although the old tar who managed the piece had obeyed his captain's humane commands by aiming a little below the advancing Somaulis, in order to avoid needless bloodshed, yet the sharp and stunning report of a cannon from a vessel which they had supposed quite unarmed, the crash of the ball against the cliff, the shower of broken stones which it dashed up on every side, and the howls of their foremost man, who had been hurt by a flying splinter of rock, were more than enough for the startled savages. For an instant they halted in doubt and dismay, and then, as the lusty cheer with which the shot was hailed by the English boat's crew, who were by this time nearing the shore, came rolling to their ears from below, they turned

and scampered up the steep path almost as quickly as they had come down it.

A few moments later the rescuers ran their boat alongside of a narrow platform of rock at the foot of the precipice, just in time to see this strange melodrama take another and very unexpected turn.

The daring climber, prevented by the formation of the cliff from seeing what lay below him, had suddenly come to a standstill at the top of a rock which plunged down to the sea in an all but sheer descent of fully thirty feet. To all appearance he could get neither up nor down, and Browne was just shouting to him an offer to send some of the sailors up to his assistance, when the stranger was seen to slide over the edge of the rock, and shoot like an arrow down its almost perpendicular face.

A muttered exclamation of dismay broke from the seamen, who thought that he had fallen, and that he would certainly be either killed or terribly injured. But this man was one of the best and boldest cragsmen on the face of the earth, and it was not the first time that he had run such a risk unscathed. To their utter amazement, he slid down to the foot in safety; but the rush of his descent was too great to be checked, and, shooting like a skater across the narrow and slippery ledge upon which he alighted, he plunged headlong into the sea. But several strong hands clutched him as he rose to the surface again, and he was instantly dragged into the boat, which was soon alongside of the Mermaid once more.

"Shall we lower the rope-ladder for you?" asked Mr. Browne, seeing the rescued man show signs of exhaustion now that the excitement was over, "or would you like us to hoist you up along with the boat?"

"Neither, thank you," replied the stranger cheerily; "I'm not so far gone but what I can climb a rope yet."

The voice that spoke was a very peculiar one, and not to be easily forgotten; and Heathermoor, starting visibly as

he heard it, shot a keen glance at the rescued man as the latter swung himself up on to the deck. The glory of the tropical sunset fell full upon the stranger's dark, bearded, weather-beaten face, and threw out in strong relief every line of its bold resolute features.

"Ashley Thurraboy, as I'm a living man!" cried the

master of the yacht in amazement.

"The same, at your service," replied the great author with perfect composure; "and this is not the first time that I have had the pleasure of meeting Lord Heathermoor."

CHAPTER IV

MARMADUKE GETS HIS WISH

MARMADUKE WYVIL happened to be within earshot of this astounding revelation, and the sudden discovery that the very man in whose tales he delighted, and whom he had just been wishing to meet, stood before him in all the glory of an escape from real live savages, was enough to make him spring forward as if at an electric shock.

But he was doomed to be grievously disappointed; for, ere he had time to speak a word, his father, seeing that their strange guest was not only wringing wet, but so worn out that he could hardly stand upright, led away Thurraboy below, and insisted upon his going to bed forthwith.

There was little slumber for our impatient Marmaduke that night, and even when he did fall asleep at last he was

haunted by wild and troubled dreams.

He dreamed that the rescued man was not Ashley Thurraboy, but Sindbad the Sailor, who sternly refused to answer any questions about his seven voyages, declaring that his travels were about to appear in the form of a Christmas book, and that he owed it to his publishers not to let any of the facts get abroad before the day of publication. By way of amends, however, the great navigator offered to make the boy a present of one of the jewels which he had picked up in the famous "Valley of Diamonds". But no sooner had he pulled it out than it turned into a shark, and hunted Wyvil up and down the deck, calling out fiercely: "You escaped me on the coral reef, but I'll have you now, or I'm a porpoise!" And here-

upon our hero set up a howl that startled the whole ship, and awoke to find himself sprawling on his back on the floor.

Even the cool Huntley was scarcely less excited, and came on deck at sunrise next morning, whither Wyvil had preceded him by some minutes, in the hope of finding Mr. Thurrabov already there.

But they watched and waited in vain. Strong and seasoned as he was, their chosen hero had evidently reached the limit of his endurance, for he slept fourteen hours at a stretch from sheer exhaustion; and nothing more was seen of him till the *Mermaid* was well on her way toward the Isle of Socotra, and had almost lost sight of that dreary corner of Africa in which, as the Irish engineer truly said, "even a robber could hardly find the means to 'arn an honest living!"

But, in spite of this great disappointment, our young voyagers were in high spirits. This trip of theirs, which had at first been gallingly uneventful and "just like any other voyage, you know", really seemed to be developing a fair amount of romance at last. In the same twenty-four hours they had themselves had a hair-breadth escape from destruction, and had witnessed another even more exciting; and, better still, they had now got on board with them a man who was proverbial for strange experiences of every kind, and would, as they hoped, pour out to them as many startling adventures as Robinson Crusoe himself.

But even this hope was soon to be taken away from them, for, directly after lunch—at which Mr. Thurraboy did not appear—Lord Heathermoor came up to them as they stood looking over the side, and said in his usual kindly way:

"My boys, I know you're wanting to hear all about Mr. Thurraboy's adventures in Somauliland, and it's very natural that you should. But, whatever he may have been doing there, I can see that it has given him a great shock, and the less he's reminded of it the better, till his nerves get

settled a bit; so I want you both to promise me not to ask him any questions until he chooses to tell us all about it himself."

The two bright faces clouded for an instant, but no persuasion was needed to make the brave English lads give up at once any pleasure of their own which could give pain to other people; and Marmaduke, manfully choking down his disappointment, replied in his cheeriest tones:

"All right, Dad! I won't say a word to him about it."

"Nor I either," added Huntley with equal readiness.

"That's right!" cried Heathermoor heartily; "and I see

I've warned you just in time, for here he comes."

Here he came, sure enough, in a well-worn suit of navyblue lent him by Mr. Walters, and as he moved slowly across the deck to join them, the two boys, who had only caught a passing glimpse of their favourite author the night before, took a good look at him.

As Lord Heathermoor had said, there was little about Ashley Thurraboy's appearance to distinguish him at first sight from other men, and any ordinary observer would have been surprised and disappointed to find, in the hero of so many daring deeds and wild adventures, nothing more than a plain, strongly-built man of middle height, with a sunburned face, and a thick, reddish-brown beard. But, to a practised reader of men's faces, the keen, watchful eye, the firm mouth, the fearless bearing, and the bold, self-reliant look would have told their own story, and fully borne out the criticism passed upon him by an observant sailor the evening before:

"He's the right sort, is that chap! If he had a craft of his own, I'll be bound he'd sail her till she went all to bits, and then he'd take a needle and thread and stitch her to-

gether again!"

"Glad to see you on deck again, Mr. Thurraboy; I hope you've had a good rest," said Lord Heathermoor with that

frank geniality that made him a favourite wherever he went. "Allow me to introduce my son, Marmaduke, a devoted admirer of yours, who has read, I think, every book that you have ever written."

"And I'm just in the middle of one of them now!" cried Wyvil, shaking with boyish heartiness the great writer's extended hand; "and I was wishing, only the other night, that I could fall in with you somewhere—and now here you are!"

"Well, I'm glad to find that I've turned up so opportunely," laughed the author of In the Wilds of the New World; "for, as a rule, I seem to come in just when I'm not wanted."

"And this," continued Heathermoor, putting Huntley forward, "is Mr. Alfred Huntley, a great friend of ours, who is going out with us to meet his father, Colonel Randolph Huntley of the —th, of whom, I dare say, you have heard."

"What? 'Rescue Randolph?'" cried Thurraboy. "I should think I have heard of him, and I hope there's no one in all England who has not heard of the man who ventured across a hundred yards of open plain, with dozens of sharpshooters firing at him all the time, to save a wounded native soldier whom everyone else had left to die! I'm very glad to make your acquaintance, Mr. Huntley, and I can tell you you may well be proud of your father."

Alfred looked as if he were quite of the same opinion himself.

"And now that we are all acquainted with each other, Mr. Thurraboy," resumed Heathermoor, "may I ask what your plans are, and what we can do to assist them? If you are only out on a holiday cruise, and not in any special hurry, I need hardly say we shall be glad of your company as long as you are good enough to favour us with it; but if you're bound for any particular place in these seas, you have only to say the word and I'll run you there as fast as steam can carry us."

"You're very kind," answered Thurraboy; "and, to tell you the truth, my idea was to catch a steamer at Aden and go on to Singapore, which was to be my starting-point for

a cruise among the Malay Islands."

"The very thing!" cried his host. "We are bound for Singapore too, to pick up Colonel Huntley and take him home with us, as his term of service is just up now—he's been something in the consul or commissioner line, you know, since he left the army. Well, then, I hope you'll consider yourself my guest until we get there, and my wardrobe is quite at your service for anything that you may require in the way of clothes."

The boys, as may be supposed, were in ecstasies at this arrangement, and when Thurraboy took his place at table that evening, for the first time, their delight rose to the highest pitch, though they were still manfully true to their promise of abstaining from questioning him about

his recent perils.

The weather continued favourable, and, passing under the vast limestone precipices of Socotra Island ("a kind of appendix to the last volume of East Africa", as Mr. Thurraboy professionally remarked), they were soon right out in the Indian Ocean, far from the sight of land.

"How fine it must have been to be here in the old times," cried Marmaduke Wyvil enthusiastically, "when you might bump against a new empire any morning before breakfast, and when pirates, water-spouts, mermaids, seaserpents, spectre ships, and all sorts of jolly things were as common as blackberries! But nowadays, when everything's mapped out and written down, and when you know just where you are, and where you're going, and how long it'll take you to get there, it's no fun at all!"

"Well, I must say I agree with you there, Duke," said his father, smiling, "and that's just why I prefer to go about in this little yacht of mine, which at all events leaves me free to go where I like instead of crawling along a line traced by somebody else, as one has to do in a passenger steamer."

"You're right there," put in Thurraboy; "but, do what one will, travelling nowadays is a sadly unromantic affair, especially on such a well-frequented road as this Red Sea route to India. There was still some excitement possible in the days when Vasco da Gama, as he swept forward into the unknown waste of waters, could say with Coleridge's Ancient Mariner:

'We were the first that ever burst Into that silent sea!'

But 1497 and 1883 are two very different things, and one's only chance of distinction in these prosaic days is to be able to say:

'We were the last that ever passed Out of that hackneyed sea!'"

"True enough," said Heathermoor, laughing. "Sharks, water-spouts, hurricanes, 'fairy coral isles', and 'light periaguas' (whatever they may be) are fairly worn threadbare by this time; and even the invaluable pirate—whose priceless services to literature have almost atoned for his injuries to commerce—is now as completely 'played out' in fiction as in fact."

"Well, then," cried Wyvil, "why not make a yarn out of the old days when there was some romance? Have you ever written a story about Vasco da Gama's voyage round the Cape, Mr. Thurraboy?"

"Never," said the great writer, "and, in fact, there would be no credit in it, for the actual history is so romantic that it needs no addition. All that one would have to do would be to copy it out, and any fool could do that!"

"I wish you would do it for us then, Mr. Thurraboy," said Wyvil with an unconscious sarcasm at which his father looked aghast.

"Ay, do!" chimed in Huntley with equal eagerness.
"You could do it first-rate. Make it a regular romance,

you know, like Mayne Reid or Jules Verne."

"Oh, if you want somothing in the 'thrilling romance' style, that's another matter!" answered the author, taking out his pencil. "Well, what shall we call it? Into the Unknown Ocean: a Tale of Mystery and Terror!"

"That'll do tiptop," cried both boys at once, quite unconscious that they were being made fun of. "Now, then,

how does it begin?"

Thurraboy scribbled for a few moments in his note-book, and then, with a sly smile at his impatient audience, read aloud as follows:—

"CHAPTER I.—A TERRIBLE VISION

"It was midnight. The light breeze barely sufficed to fill the wide sails of the Portuguese caravels, which cast a dark shadow in the ghostly splendour of the tropical moonlight over the smooth, shining waters below. Already had the practised ears of Vasco da Gama's veteran seamen caught the distant booming of the surf upon the unknown shore. High on the poop of his flagship stood the great admiral himself, straining his keen eyes into the blackness behind which lay a new world.

"Suddenly the dauntless leader gave a violent start, and a deathly pallor fell over those calm, stern features which had faced unquailingly all the thousand perils of the unknown sea. What new and unheard-of terror could this

be, then, which had power to dismay even him?

"Right down upon him came, gliding out of the dark bank of cloud into which the moon had just plunged, a vast shadow, wearing the shape of a large vessel of antique fashion and cumbrous Eastern build. But was her mighty hull really a solid fabric wrought by human hands, or only a shadowy mass of gloom? Was the white haze above her. through which the stars twinkled faintly, her outspread canvas or a fleecy cloud hanging between sea and sky? And were those crimson streaks at her mast-heads fluttering

pennons or tongues of lapping flame?

"The night seemed to grow darker as the terrible form came on, and, in the ghostly phosphorescence that played around her bows, shark and sword-fish might be seen darting aside in panic terror, while the sea-birds that hovered on the still night air flitted away with ominous shrieks. Mute and motionless, the Sao Miguel's crew stood gazing upon the ghastly spectacle, every man seeing reflected in his comrade's face the horror that distorted his own.

"On came the fearful stranger, looming out plainer and plainer every moment. Her shadowy decks were crowded with men all arrayed in the gorgeous garb of the Orient, but with the white, rigid faces and rayless eyes of the dead. High above all towered a mighty form in gilded armour and purple robes, whose massive features seemed frozen into a stony look of eternal pain, and deep in whose swarthy forehead was sunk the blood-rusted head of a huge iron nail, the jagged point of which projected through a yawning wound in the back of the skull, which his jewelled turban vainly strove to conceal.

"For one instant the phantom bark stood out awfully distinct amid the gloom, close alongside, and then vanished

as if it had never been.

"A stifled cry burst from the Portuguese admiral's quivering lips:

"'I have seen it at last! It is it must be the Angue-

bona Callaventejo!'

"'And what, in St. Miguel's name, is that?' asked Dom Fernando do Monte, the second in command, looking wonderingly at his leader's convulsed features.

"'What? do you not know?' asked Da Gama in a voice

scarcely human.

"'May I become a Spaniard if I do!'

"'No more do I,' said the great admiral solemnly.

"And with this explanation he was about to vanish into his state-cabin when—something happened."

"Well, how does it go on?" asked both boys at once with breathless eagerness, as the narrator paused.

"To be continued," answered Thurraboy, smiling at their disappointed faces; and then he added more gravely:

"Now that you've seen for yourselves how easily such rubbish can be written, I hope you'll remember that what is very easy to write is often very hard to read; and, whatever you do, don't get a taste for those blood-and-thunder serials which some boys are so fond of, for they're always sheer nonsense, and very often something a great deal worse."

And Marmaduke Wyvil—who, when at school, had devoured a round dozen of those thrillingly impossible Western romances in which one small boy puts to flight, by his prowess, a whole tribe of Red Indians—looked rather foolish, and made no reply.

CHAPTER V

FALLEN AMONG SAVAGES

FOR the next few days the two lads enjoyed to the full all those "marvels of the tropical seas" about which they had heard and read so much, though they had never

actually beheld them till now.

They saw sky and sea meet in a perfect arch, so strangely blended that the keenest eye could not tell where one ended and the other began, and their ship seemed to be hovering in the centre of a transparent bubble. They saw, once and again, the loom of land along the horizon so plain that they were already running to find it on the chart, when it suddenly melted and disappeared, while a hoarse laugh from the sailors told them that it was only "Cape Flyaway". They sighted in the distance, to their unbounded delight, a small water-spout, and were greatly disappointed that it did not come near enough to be broken with a cannon-shot, according to the recipe laid down in all respectable books of sea-travel.

Animate wonders, too, combined with inanimate ones to fill up the measure of their enjoyment. They watched the dolphin leap upward from the clear bright water, and the wide-winged albatross hang poised over their mast-head, like a white cloud upon the deep-blue sky, recalling weird memories of the ancient mariner and that unlucky cross-bow with which he committed his famous "albatrossity". They saw the charming little nautilus (called by sailors "Portuguese man-of-war") glide past them with outspread sail by thousands at a time. Night after night the phos-

phorescent jelly-fish lit up the whole sea with a procession of purple lamps that seemed to have no end; and once the sea itself appeared to have caught fire, and every ripple in

their wake was a quivering jet of flame.

Nor was this all. Our heroes had at length the supreme pleasure of seeing the renowned flying-fish—"real live flying-fish, and no mistake"—shooting like living rainbows from wave to wave, with the many-coloured sheen of the sunlight upon the wet surface of their outspread wings. And by night the deck was all a-glitter with the silvery scales of these poor little wanderers, which—attracted as usual by the vessel's lights—"flew on board for breakfast" (as the steward cruelly said) by scores at a time, though the finest of them were generally snapped up by the ship's cat, on the principle that the early cat catches the fish, as well as the early bird the worm.

"Yes, there's plenty to see here," said Thurraboy, to whom our heroes were pouring out their enthusiasm one afternoon; "but I do wish people could find some new way of describing it all. After reading for the thousandth time, in exactly the same words, about 'balmy skies', 'fairy islets', 'frolicsome porpoises stirring the bright-blue sea into foam with their unwieldy gambols', the 'everrenewed freshness of the boundless ocean', and all the rest of it, one does really begin to tire of the ever-renewed staleness of the boundless ocean, and to wish that it would be a little fresher. And the worst of it is, that every young clerk who has been rowed round Bombay harbour, and every lady who has gone for a half-hour's sail outside of Aden, claim to know as much about the tropical seas as men who have spent their whole lives upon them. People travel fast, as well as live fast, nowadays. I knew a man once who wrote two volumes on India after being a week ashore at Bombay; and I'm daily expecting to see the announcement of a book called Half an Hour at the South Pole, by the author of Twenty-five Minutes in Central Africa!"

"Well done, Mr. Thurraboy!" laughed Marmaduke; "you ought to write reviews—you'd do 'em tiptop!"

"I have done a good many," said the author quietly; "and, in fact, I think I can boast of having written the shortest review in the world: 'The preface is a flat performance, the work a flatter, and the author a flatterer.' But, as I was saying, if these people could even write the same nonsense in different words, it would be always something of an improvement. You can't think how sick I am of perpetually hearing about 'the phosphorescent sparkles which played around the eddies in our wake, crowning the twilight sea with a diadem of lambent flame'. Why on earth, too, is a flame always lambent on such occasions? and what meaning, if any, do its task-masters attach to that most ill-fated of words?"

"If it's Latin," said Huntley, "it ought to mean 'licking'; so perhaps it's a kind of flame that licks every other sort."

"Hear, hear!" cried Wyvil; "that's just like old Charles Lamb saying, when he called that man a naufrageous villain: 'I don't know what it means, but it sounds a good sort of word to throw at a fellow'. Hollo! here comes another gang of flying-fish!"

"And here comes something else after them, or I'm much mistaken," said Thurraboy. "Keep a look-out, now, both of you, for you're going to see a form of hunting which Captain Mayne Reid never saw in his life."

Such a suggestion was more than enough to make both lads stare with all their might at the approaching shoal of flying-fish, which were no longer skimming playfully from billow to billow in mere sportiveness, but leaping and darting with the quick, irregular, terrified movement of fugitives from a deadly and imminent danger.

What that danger was soon became apparent.

Up through the clear bright sea, piercing the surface with a sudden stab, came the black, pointed, dagger-like

back-fin of an enormous shark, in hot pursuit of the poor little runaways.

"Hard lines on 'em!" muttered Wyvil compassionately.

Scarcely had he spoken, when it became evident that the "lines" were even harder than they had seemed, for, just as the fish were in full flight from their terrible pursuer, up shot another pointed fin right in their path, and a second shark, darting in among them, headed them right back into the clutch of his confederate. It was soon manifest, indeed, that the two partners in this firm of Shark Brothers were playing into each other's hands, or rather jaws—the one chasing them forward, while the other made a circuit to cut off their retreat,—so that, between the two, the poor little victims were snapped up by half a dozen at a time.

One of these two "sea-lawyers" kept near the yacht for several hours after, and Marmaduke, having begged a piece of pork from the cook, rigged up a hook and line over the starboard quarter, bent upon avenging the flying-fish by entrapping the destroyer himself in turn. But the shark, whether suspecting a trick, or merely scared by the beat of the screw, fought shy of the tempting bait, and Wyvil, shaking his fist at the unabashed monster, indignantly informed him that he "wasn't half a shark", and that he ought to be ashamed of himself!

That evening, and the next, and the next after that, Wyvil was fully employed in drawing out Mr. Thurraboy; for, as he confided to Huntley, "one don't get hold of a real live author every day"; and Thurraboy, though still rigidly silent about his recent adventures in Somauliland, seemed ready enough to talk on any other subject, and answered the boy's questions very good-naturedly.

"Do you find it very hard work to write one of those books of yours, Mr. Thurraboy?" asked Marmaduke, on the third evening.

"Not particularly; the hardest part of the work is after

it is written, when I have to go all over it again, revising and correcting the proofs. Many and many a time have I had to correct the same misprint twice or thrice over; and of course the proof-readers, in their wisdom, always know what you mean to say better than you do yourself, and put something quite different from what you really wrote, very likely making utter nonsense of some of your most telling passages."

"Well, that is too bad!" cried Huntley sympathizingly.
"But surely, when once you've put it all straight for 'em,

they can't get wrong again!"

"Can't they? My dear boy, you have no notion of what a proof-reader is capable—or a printer either, for that matter. I could tell you some fine tales of that sort from my own experience. Do either of you know the story of the head-master and the runaway dog?"

"No-do tell us," cried Alfred, zealously echoed by his

comrade.

"Well, there was an English county paper which published on the same day the account of a farewell address, given by the head-master of ——, and the description of the antics of a runaway dog; and what should they do but go and mix the two stories, with the following result:—

"'Dr. Grimwig, the esteemed head-master of —— School, delivered his farewell address yesterday morning, before taking his departure for London. He exhorted his pupils, in the most moving terms, to be as obedient and well-disciplined under the rule of his successor as they had been under his own; and, having thanked them for their attention, took a whim to play some frantic freaks. He ran furiously down the High Street, barking violently, till he reached the market-place, at which stage of his proceedings some mischievous boys pounced upon him, tied a tin kettle to his tail, and then let him loose again. A great crowd gathered round, and for a few minutes there was quite a lively scene."

"First rate!" cried Wyvil, as well as he could speak for laughing. "I say, Alf, wouldn't our old 'head' have been wild at a thing like that!"

"Rather!" chuckled Huntley; "I can just fancy I see him reading it, and growling out, 'Most unwarrantable and

disgraceful buffoonery!""

"Oh, that's nothing to some that I could show you!" said Mr. Thurraboy, taking out his pocket-book. "I cut a bit out of an English paper myself, not so long ago, mixing up the presentation of a gold-headed cane to Dr. M——, the scientist, with the chopping-up and cooking of a pig by machinery, which beats the other one hollow. Just listen to this:—

"'A select deputation of Professor M-'s friends waited upon him at his own residence yesterday afternoon, and after a brief conversation, the unsuspicious hog was seized by the hind-legs, and sent sliding along a beam until he reached the hot-water tank. His friends explained the object of their visit, and presented him with a very handsome gold-headed butcher, who caught him by the tail, swung him round, cut his throat from ear to ear, and, in less than a minute, his carcass was in the water. Thereupon he stepped forward, and said that there were times when the feelings overpowered one, and for that reason he would not attempt to do more than thank those whom he saw around him for this kind compliment, for the rapidity with which that huge animal was cut to pieces was simply astonishing. The doctor had no sooner concluded his remarks than the machine seized him, and, in less time than it takes to write it, he was chopped small, and worked into delicious sausages. The occasion will long be remembered by the learned professor's friends as the most delightful of their lives. The best pieces may be had for tenpence a pound; and we are sure that all who have profited by his valuable lectures will rejoice that he has been so handsomely treated."

During the reading of this edifying extract—at which the boys laughed till they were fairly exhausted—Huntley's eye was attracted by the glitter of a small steel plate on the Russia-leather pocket-book in Thurraboy's hand, bearing a half-effaced inscription: "A...y gift, from R...n, Se...oth, 1872". At the same moment he caught sight of a gaping rent in the leather just behind the plate, laying the back completely open.

"I say, Mr. Thurraboy," cried he, "you'd better let us give you a new pocket-book when we get to Singapore, for that one's pretty nearly worn out—and no wonder, if you've

had it ever since '72!"

"But it's not worn out," said Wyvil, looking close at the rent. "That's a cut, and it must have been done by a——"

Here the recollection of his father's warning checked him just as he was about to add "a weapon", which manifestly had been the instrument of this damage; but Thurraboy evidently understood him, and answered with a significant smile.

"I see what you mean," said he, "and you're quite right. That torn pocket-book is a souvenir of my adventures among the Somaulis the other day, about which I know you have been wanting to hear; and it's very good of you to have gone so long without asking me any questions about it."

"My father thought you wouldn't like it," replied Mar-

maduke Wyvil simply.

"And if you prefer to avoid the subject," put in Lord Heathermoor, who came up to the group at that moment, "you may rest assured that we shall never trouble you

with questions about it."

"You are all very kind," said the author heartily; "but I don't think I should mind talking about it now, though I own I would not have cared to be reminded of it when the whole business was still fresh. Besides, it was you who got me out of the scrape, and therefore you have a right to

know all about it; so, if you'll sit down here, I'll tell you the whole story.

"I don't know if any of you have ever been to Zeylah, which is a tiny port on the African coast (pretty nearly due south from the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait) where we've lately established a British consul and one or two other matters of the kind-getting up the scaffolding, so to speak, for the annexing of it by and by. Well, there was a young fellow named Frank Bartlett that I'd chummed with a good deal at Aden, who was told off to make a fresh survey of the coast from Zevlah to Berberah, the only other port in Somauliland; and he offered to take me along with him. It was too good a chance to be lost, for, apart from his being capital company, he had got a very snug little cutter for the trip, and the weather seemed inclined to behave itself properly; so away I went, taking with me just a few things for the voyage, and leaving the rest of my luggage at Aden—which, as matters have turned out, was just as well.

"Our survey succeeded capitally, and all went right till we got to Berberah, which was by way of being our farthest point. If we had turned there it would have been all right; but just then, by ill-luck, poor Bartlett heard some talk among the Arab traders of a dangerous reef that lay close inshore about fifty miles to the eastward, which he did not remember to have seen laid down on his chart. Sure enough, when we came to overhaul the chart, there was no such reef marked at all; and nothing would serve Bartlett but he must go and find it for himself, thinking (as he well might) that it would be a feather in his cap to have been the first man to survey it and mark it down.

"I didn't much like the idea myself, for there seemed to me to be signs of a change in the weather. But Bartlett was so set upon his new idea that he wouldn't hear a word against it; and of course I could not well say much, he being the commander of the expedition, and I only his guest. I wish I had, though, for all that; but it's too late to think about it now.

"Well, we stood eastward to look for this place, and found it just where the Arabs had said; but as the water was too shallow to let the cutter get inshore, we lowered the boat, took two men with us, and went in to make a thorough overhaul of it, leaving our little craft lying hove-to outside.

"A very ugly reef it was, stretching a good way out to sea, just near enough to the surface to be certain destruction for everything but small boats, and just far enough below it to keep it completely hidden unless the water was quite clear and perfectly calm. It stood a bit higher, however, where it joined the narrow strip of sandy beach along the foot of the cliffs. At that point it was only just 'awash'; and when Bartlett (who had evidently made up his mind not to leave a single foot of it unsurveyed) saw that there wasn't even water enough to let our boat go right round it, he beached the boat, left our two men in charge of her, and actually set off to wade along the edge of the reef where it skirted the shore; and I, of course, had to go along with him, till he had seen all that he wanted.

""Well,' says he at last, stopping short, 'I think that will do now, and though it's been a long job, it was worth the trouble to be the first man that has done it. If the fame of a discoverer be worth anything,' he went on, laughing, 'this day's work ought to make me immortal!'

"Poor lad, he little thought how terribly truly he spoke!

"The words were hardly out of his mouth when, far out to seaward, I caught sight of something like a light cloud of steam, sweeping toward us over the water quicker than

an express train.

"We were still staring at it in a stupid kind of way (for somehow neither of us took in at first what it really was) when all at once—just as I was beginning to notice that, wherever this cloud passed, the deep blue of the sea changed

to a sickly white—we heard a terrible outcry from our cutter, and saw three or four men rushing up and down her deck like mad.

"But it was too late. Before we had time to move, or even to speak, there came a hiss like the pelt of a driving shower, and a blast of spray, or rain, or both, came smashing into our faces like a volley of shot, fairly blinding us for a moment or two. And when it had passed, and we looked about for the cutter, she was gone. Whether she had been sunk, or blown out to sea, she was gone, and we never saw her more.

"All this had passed so quickly (for the whole thing was over in less time than I've taken to tell it) that we hardly knew what had happened, and stood staring blankly. But we soon had something else to think about, for just then one of the men whom we had left in charge of our boat jumped up and gave a shout, pointing at the same time to the cliffs overhead. We both ran or rather splashed toward him as fast as we could, and soon saw that he had given the alarm none too soon.

"Just opposite the spot where the boat lay, a deep, narrow ravine or cleft (evidently a dry torrent-bed) sloped steeply downward to the beach between two sheer walls of rock, quite in the style of one of the subways in our railway stations; and at the higher end of this gorge had just appeared a band of Somauli savages—a dozen strong at the very least, and well armed, as we could see by the glitter of steel as they moved—hurrying down the pass straight toward us.

"'Shove off the boat,' shouted Bartlett to the men, 'it is our only chance!'

"And then, seeing them hesitate, as if they didn't relish the notion of turning tail before 'niggers', he called out again:

"'Shove off, I tell you! where there's one dozen of these fellows in sight, there will be three or four dozen more be-

hind, and we can't fight 'em all! The only chance is to get out to sea at once.'

"I had my own thoughts about that, for the squall had whipped up such a sea that our poor little boat seemed to have no more chance in it than an egg-shell; and what we had just seen happen to the cutter wasn't very encouraging, as you may think. However, there was nothing else to be done; so we pushed off, right into the thick of it.

"Then, tossed and beaten and banged about as we were—deafened and blinded and strangled by the foam and spray and whirl—a huge wave hanging over our heads like a tower one moment, and the next moment underneath us, heaving us up to the very sky—we had, luckily for us, no time to think what a forlorn hope it was to coast fifty miles through such a sea in an open boat, without food or water, which was the only prospect that lay before us. But that question was to be settled for us sooner than we expected, for all at once we saw ahead of us a solid wall of water as high as a house, extending to right and left as far as eye could reach, and coming right down upon us like a whirlwind.

"'Steady!' roared Bartlett, as he saw the men waver and look like turning to head for the shore. 'If you put the boat about, we're done for! Go right at it, and pull like mad—we may do it yet!'

"They obeyed with a will—for, indeed, our only chance was to meet the great wave and ride over it before it had time to break,—and, a few seconds later, we found ourselves half-way up a smooth, shining precipice of water, upon which our boat seemed to hang like a fly on a wall!

"For an instant I hoped that we might escape after all; but suddenly I saw the great overhanging crest begin to curl over and break into foam, and then I set my teeth hard, knowing that it must overwhelm us.

"I had hardly time to say 'God help us!' when there came a rush and a roar as if the sky had fallen, and all was

dark, and I felt myself snatched up and flung forward like a stone out of a sling. Then there was a loud crash and a stifled cry—a ripping, cracking, rending noise—a shock as if I had fallen from the top of a house—and then my breath went, and I thought all was over.

"But all at once I was aroused by a clamour of yells that might almost have awakened the dead; and, dashing the salt water from my eyes, I looked up and found myself lying on the sand-beach at the foot of the cliff, among the broken timbers of the boat, which had been smashed all to pieces. A little way off, Bartlett and one of the sailors (the other had disappeared) were lying, in a helpless kind of way which showed that they must be badly hurt, while the savages whom I had seen coming down the gully, having by this time gained the beach, were rushing down upon them spear in hand, evidently meaning to murder them on the spot!

"Faint and dizzy as I was, that sight roused me like an electric shock. I scrambled to my feet, stumbling at every step, and ran towards Bartlett, catching up as I went a heavy piece of broken timber from the wreckage. Three of the Somaulis were a little in advance of the rest, and the foremost of them made a thrust at me with his spear; but I dodged it, and, before he could draw back, felled him with my club. Then I flung the club right in the face of the second man, and, as he dropped, I snatched the short sword from his girdle just in time to tackle number three.

"This third man had a gun, which he levelled full at me; but the piece missed fire, and I cut him down. Just then, however, the others came up in a body and surrounded me; and all at once I felt a stunning blow on the back of my head, and down I went; and after that I

remember no more.

"When I came to myself again, the first thing I saw was poor Bartlett and the sailor lying dead beside me, having been murdered in cold blood by these merciless brutes

because they were too badly hurt to be worth anything as slaves; and I found myself tied hand and foot, and a prisoner in the hands of the Somaulis!

"Of my captivity among them I don't care to say much; indeed I can only wonder, when I think of it, that I ever lived through it at all. You may be sure that it was from no motive of humanity that they spared my life, but simply because they hoped to make their profit out of me by selling me for a slave; and, in fact, you may judge how much any thought of mercy had to do with it, when I tell you that, on the very first night after my capture, I heard them gravely deliberating whether it might not be as well to put out my eyes, in order to ensure my not escaping.

"They lost no time in marching me over the mountains; and then my troubles began in earnest. Before starting, they had plundered me of all that I had worth taking, including even my English shoes of tanned leather, which took the fancy of the chief; and you may think how I fared in clambering barefoot over rocks almost too hot to be touched, and in many places as sharp as a knife. Moreover, I had got several bad scratches when I was flung ashore by the big wave, which were but poorly protected by my torn clothes; and, my hands being tied, of course I could do nothing to help myself. So, what with the sun blistering my skin, and the sharp stones gashing my bare feet, and the dust and sand-flies getting upon the raw places in my flesh, I had such a time of it that I really thought I should have gone mad outright.

"Luckily for me, they went at a very slow pace, the two men whom I had knocked over being so weak from their hurts that they could scarcely crawl. Just at first I fully expected that the others would take vengeance by killing me at once; and, upon my word, I felt so miserable that I hardly cared whether they did or not. But I found out afterwards that the wonderful way in which I had escaped,

first from the sea and then from their weapons, had made these superstitious savages think that I could not be killed; and, when they saw how fast my strength was being used up, they were not long in bethinking themselves that if I got worn out or disabled on the march, there would be an end of the profit which they hoped to make out of me. So they slackened my bands, bandaged my hurts roughly, and gave me an old half-worn pair of native sandals, which were at all events better than nothing.

"Then my love of life began to revive again, and I determined to take the first chance of trying to escape, and I prayed to God to strengthen me for it; and after that I took heart again, and began to save up my strength in

every possible way, to be ready for the attempt.

"And now the circumstances themselves seemed to work in my favour, for we got over the mountain sooner than I expected, and came down into the Wadi Nogal, or Happy Valley, which lies between the mountain ranges that run right across Somauliland, like the Stoura Valley between

the Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon in Syria.

"Here the savages halted and camped, their two wounded men being by this time almost worn out. It was a beautiful place, well watered, and abounding in wild figs and other fruit; so that, after all these weary scramblings up and down those burning, bare rock-ridges, I was really comparatively comfortable for three or four days, in body at least. But in mind I was not comfortable at all; for, do what I would, I could never get a chance of escaping. In the daytime they watched me closely, and every night, besides tying my hands, they fastened a rope round my body, and knotted it to the wrist of their strongest man. So he and I woke each other up almost every time we moved in our sleep, which was not particularly satisfactory to either of us.

"As I've told you, I had picked up a smattering of their language at Aden, and I did my best to persuade them to

carry me to Berberah, where there was an Italian trader, a friend of poor Bartlett's, who would readily have gone surety for my ransom. But I could see that they didn't believe a word of it; and on the third evening I overheard part of a talk between two of them, from which I gathered that they meant to take me away to the south and sell me there as a slave.

"When I heard that, I determined to escape or die for it; for I knew that if they once got me down there, I should have no chance.

"On the fifth day, two of the Somaulis, who had been out hunting, brought in a young antelope—a mighty treat for these savages, who only taste meat once in a way. Then I thought that my time had come, for I knew enough of their ways to be sure that they would stuff till they could hold no more, and then sleep like gorged boa-constrictors.

"I felt confident of getting free from my bands whenever the chance came, having learned from a famous juggler, whom I once knew, a trick of stiffening up my muscles in such a way as to make my arms nearly half as thick again as in their natural state, so that a cord tied round them when they were rigid would be pretty slack when the muscles were relaxed again. The sentinel was my greatest trouble, for I had seen that they always left one man on guard, for fear of being surprised by another gang of thieves like themselves, and I knew that he would not dare to sleep, however drowsy he might be. So I puzzled over it till I hit upon a plan, and only waited for night to carry it out.

"When they tied my hands at nightfall, as usual, I tried the juggler's trick; and, as if on purpose to make it easier for me, the fellows were in such a hurry to get to their food that they bound me hastily, and not half so carefully as usual. Moreover, the big man to whom I was generally fastened—thinking, I suppose, that he might as well be

comfortable for one night at least, and that there was no chance of my being able to get away—made fast the other end of the rope that was round my body to a tree instead of his own wrist.

"'Many thanks to you, my worthy friends,' said I to myself. 'If I don't get away from you now, it's no fault

of yours, anyway!'

"They gave me some of the antelope meat, and I ate every bit of it, not knowing when I might get more food if I did escape. As for them, they gorged till they could eat no more, and then (as I had foreseen) fell fast asleep, all except the sentry, who stood leaning on his spear a few

paces away.

"And now my troubles began in earnest. As I knew that there was no getting off without being seen by the sentinel, I had decided to make sure of him first of all; and of course it was specially important to do so as soon as possible, because he would be relieved in three hours, and then my escape would be discovered. On the other hand, I dared not stir till all the rest were slumbering soundly; and, upon my word, it seemed as if one or two of them would never go to sleep. I got so wild at last, at the thought of missing my only chance, that I was within an ace of jumping up and making a rush for it. But at last all was quiet, and then, having got rid of my bands, my time came.

"After the cold of mountains several thousand feet high, the air of this sheltered valley was quite warm and sultry, and the nights were almost as warm as the days; so (just as I had calculated) more than one of the Somaulis, heated by the strong meat, had thrown off his haik—a sort of long white mantle with a hood, such as one sees among the Arab shepherds of Palestine. One of them lay close to me, and in a trice I had slipped it on; and then, picking my way carefully among the sleepers, I went straight up to the sentinel who took me for one of his own comrades coming

to speak to him. Before he could discover the trick, I felled him with a blow on the temple from a heavy stone that I held ready in my hand, stunning him so completely that he was not likely to tell tales for some time; and then, snatching his short sword, away I went, a free man once more.

"I knew my footprints in the soft sand would betray me, so I stepped into the little stream beside which we had encamped, and waded up it for more than a mile. Then I came out upon a patch of hard ground that would tell no tales, and pushed on faster than ever; and before daylight I was miles away.

"My plan was to get as quick as I could to the mountains (where I should not be so likely to fall in with any natives) and cut across them down to the sand-beach at the foot of the sea-cliff, and then make my way along it to Berberah, which would be only twenty or twenty-five miles off by that time. So on I went, marching all night, lying hid all day, and living on whatever fruit I could pick up.

"I need not dwell upon my further adventures—how I wore out my sandals, and cut my feet all to bits upon the sharp stones—how, when I was just at my very hungriest, I found no fruit on the only tree anywhere in sight—how I rushed into a beautiful clear stream, with my tongue hanging out of my mouth for thirst, and found the water salt. At last I got across the mountains, and was just climbing the last ridge that overhung the sea, when a sound of voices made me dive into a cleft, just in time to escape a straggling band of Somaulis, who were coming down the hill.

"When they had gone past, I came out again; but, as ill-luck would have it, one of the rogues had lagged behind the rest, and I came full butt upon him just as a passing gust of wind threw aside my Arab mantle, and showed the European dress underneath!

"'Kafir!' (an unbeliever) shouted he, and ran at me with

his spear. Luckily the point caught my pocket-book—which the savages had left me as a thing of no value—and made that cut which you've seen, while I seized the spear with one hand, and cut him down with the other. But the rest had turned back at his shout, and were hurrying up from below, yelling and flourishing their weapons; so there was nothing for it but to throw off the long mantle and run for my life. They hunted me right up to the crest of the ridge, and I was just beginning to give myself up for lost, when (thank God!) I caught sight of your yacht in the offing. What happened after that you know as well as I do."



CHAPTER VI

A GRIM WARNING

Is this really Ceylon, then, Graves?"

"Ceylon it is, sir, sure enough; and that's Adam's Peak (as mayhap you've heerd on) loomin' out yonder to the nor'ard; and if you was to look well at it through your glass, p'raps you might make out Adam hisself a-standin'

on the top of it!"

"I dare say we could, Mr. Graves, if we had your eyes," said Huntley meaningly.

"'For he must need have optics keen Who sees what is not to be seen,"

quoted Wyvil with a significant grin.

But the boys had barely time to catch a passing glimpse of one of the finest panoramas in the world, when a thick haze swept provokingly right across it, blotting out every vestige of the beautiful "Queen of the Eastern Seas".

For nearly an hour the cloud remained impenetrable; but, just as the two lads were growing quite desperate at the thought of not seeing the famous island after all, the sun broke through the hovering dimness like a charging conqueror, and the scattering mists revealed a low dark ridge, at one point of which a narrow white line seemed to rear itself upright out of the sea, while behind it a number of white spots chequered the deep shadowy green of the hill-side. This upright line was the lighthouse of Point de Galle, and these white spots were the houses of the town of Galle itself.

"This was the port-of-call for all steamers," said Lord Heathermoor, "before the breakwater was built at Colombo, the present capital, which lies a good way north of this, up the west coast; but since then Colombo has had the best of it, for this harbour of Galle is a very awkward one. Your father and I, Alfred, were here together after the Abyssinian war; and just then a batch of recruits fresh from England had joined his regiment, and very much entertained he and I were with the sayings and doings of these raw lads, who were immensely astonished at everything they saw in 'foreign parts'. When the first native came alongside the transport that brought them, I heard one very green 'Johnny Newcome' say to a comrade of longer standing, in a tone of amazement and awe:

"'I say, Bill, who on earth is that 'ere blackamoor

chap?'

"'What? don't yer know him again?' cried the other man, who happened to be from the same place as himself. 'Why, that's our old chum Tom Barton, as 'listed along with me five year ago; he's been out 'ere h'ever since.'

"'But he's-black!' faltered the poor recruit, looking

utterly bewildered.

"'In course he is; what colour 'ud you have him be, arter five year in this 'ere climate? In these parts, d'ye see, the sun toasts a man bit by bit, same as bread toasted afore a fire; fust you gits yeller, and then you gits black. That chap yonder, you see' (pointing to a passing Chinese boatman), 'is jist about half-baked now; he'll be as black as all the rest afore long!'

"'But you don't mean to tell me as how I'll turn black

too!' gasped the horror-stricken 'Johnny'.

"'Why, o' course you will, Johnny my boy—as black as a boot!' answered the soldier, as cheerily as if he were telling him the best news imaginable.

"And the poor lad actually believed every word of it,

and looked so miserable that I had to go and comfort him by telling him that it was all nonsense."

The mist having cleared away by this time, our two heroes eagerly turned their spy-glasses toward the shore. But just then (as if on purpose to disappoint them) the whole sky blackened to windward, and down upon them came a real tropical squall, lashing the smooth, bright sea into foam, and making the decks echo with the rattle of heavy bullets of rain. A great heap of black, ragged clouds, which seemed to tumble headlong from the sky like falling rocks, blotted out for the second time all trace of the ill-used island; and Wyvil muttered to his chum with bitter emphasis:

"This blessed island seems to be like the tame boa-constrictor in the story, which, whenever it saw anybody looking at it, crept under its blanket and stayed there for a

fortnight!"

But the wrath of the East-Indian sky is like that of its people, "soon hot and soon cold". The storm passed away as suddenly as it came. The great veil of blackness rent asunder and floated away in scattered streamers of cloud; the rain ceased; the sun broke forth in all its splendour, casting a broad sheen of gold over the dripping deck and the tossing sea; and then the whole coast-line started into view at once, arrayed in the same gorgeous tropical colours which gladdened the weary eyes of Alphonso d'Albuquerque's wave-tossed seamen four hundred years ago.

The ranks of an army in battle array could hardly be more closely massed than those magnificent trees, which clothed the hills, almost down to the water's edge, with a sheet of dark, glossy green, contrasting very strikingly with the narrow line of pale-yellow sand that divided it from the deep, rich blue and the sparkling foam of the Indian Ocean. At one point the sea of foliage was broken by a wide patch of lighter green, where the wild grass grew

thick and rank over a broad slope dappled here and there with dark clumps of trees which the axe had spared; and a little farther on a deep blood-red stain, outlined with grim distinctness amid the surrounding verdure, showed where a mass of the overhanging ridge had crashed down into the sea, laying bare, like an open wound, the raw red clay below.

Behind the coast-line surged up, wave beyond wave, endless mountain-ridges, so thickly wooded that the whole country-side looked like one great tree. Far up against the sunny sky the plumy crests of the palms drooped languidly upon the warm, dreamy air, with a gracefully "used-up" aspect worthy of a fashionable beauty. When a sudden gust of wind came frolicking through their outspread fans, like a frisky young nephew in a quiet household of sedate maiden aunts, they gave one impatient rustle of protest against this boisterous intruder, who wouldn't let a respectable tree have its afternoon nap in peace, and then relapsed into stillness once more.

High over all, far away to the northward, the mighty outline of Adam's Peak hovered between earth and sky, dim and faint as a half-forgotten dream. Everywhere the same utter loneliness, the same deep, dreamy silence, the same tropical gorgeousness and more than tropical languor.

But though all was still on land, it was far otherwise by

While yet several miles from the coast, our boys saw quick puffs of white smoke spurting up all along the beach, as if its whole length were being swept by a furious cannonade.

"Look, look!" cried Wyvil eagerly; "see the cannon firing! Don't they make a famous smoke? But, I say, why don't we hear the sound?"

"Because those cannon are not loaded with powder," said Mr. Thurraboy with a quiet smile.

And, in fact, our heroes soon perceived that the seeming

smoke-clouds were really vast sheets of snow-white spray hurled up against the shadowy green of the forest by the great waves which thundered ceaselessly upon the beach below, rendering this whole coast so perilous at times during the summer that many vessels are compelled to run past Galle altogether, without making any attempt to enter the port.

The two lads were naturally not a little elated at meeting so many new sights in one day; but another spectacle, more startling than all, was still in store for them, which not only they, but the whole ship's company, were to have terrible cause to remember.

By four in the afternoon the dark cliff of Dondra Head lay right abeam, and about an hour later they glided round the long, low promontory of Nillewelle Point, with its row of trees ranged along it in line, like soldiers on parade, and came fairly out into the formidable Bay of Bengal, which is to the voyagers of the Indian Ocean what the Bay of Biscay is to those of the North Atlantic.

The sun was sinking when they entered it, and, as the glow faded, huge masses of purple clouds began to rise all along the western horizon, towering like a precipice over the darkening sea. Above this gloomy rampart the dying light looked wan and ghastly, as if growing pale at the

approach of some unseen horror.

Then suddenly a fierce red glare rent the deepening gloom, like lightning breaking from a storm-cloud. In one moment the whole western sky seemed to become red-hot, and from the fiery depths below came surging upward an endless whirl of shadowy monsters, whose shapes appeared to change every instant. Coiling snakes, shaggy lions, pouncing eagles, leaping wolves, whirled up to join this dance of spectres, now black as night, and now all aflame with lurid red; and with these came worse horrors still, limbless, formless, hideous, such as Dante might have seen in the regions of the dead,

Last of all this phantom host rose a mighty shadow, of which nothing could be plainly seen but the vast outline of two expanded wings, and as it ascended it grew larger, darker, more terrible, till it blotted the whole sky.

All at once there arose beside it another giant shape, as grim and colossal as itself, and instantly the two were grappled together as if in mortal combat. Before the terror of that great battle the lesser demons trembled and fled away, melting spectrally into the deepening darkness of night. Suddenly the two terrible shapes seemed to roll into one, and then they faded, ghost-like, into the gathering gloom, and the burning glare behind them died away, and night and utter blackness closed like a shroud over the loneliness of the desolate sea.

"What on earth's all this?" cried Marmaduke Wyvil with a look of very unwonted dismay upon his bold, bright face.

"It's a warning!" said his father's voice from behind, in a very grave tone. "Only once before in all my life have I seen anything like this—and then it came just before the worst storm that I've ever faced yet."

CHAPTER VII

IN THE DEAD OF NIGHT

LORD HEATHERMOOR'S forebodings, however, appeared to be as visionary as the phantom giants that had caused them, for the next morning showed them a clear bright sky, undimmed by any trace of those threatening clouds which had lowered so darkly over it on the previous night.

"I begin to think," cried he, with a look of great relief, "that that hobgoblin business last night was a false alarm, and that we're not going to have any storm after all."

"Well," said Thurraboy, "the same effect might have been caused by some volcanic outbreak in one of the Malay islands, and it would not be the first time if it were so."

"The Malay islands!" echoed Wyvil in amazement. "Why, you don't mean to say that a blow-up out there, all those hundreds of miles away, can make any difference

to the look of the sky in Ceylon?"

"Indeed I do! In 1816, when the island of Sumbawa blew up like a bomb-shell (the greatest eruption that has ever been known in this part of the world), the effect of it was seen quite plainly on the west coast of Ceylon, as I've heard myself from some old people who were there then and saw it."

"Talking of Malay islands," struck in Alfred Huntley, "that reminds me that we were by way of learning some Malay this voyage, and it strikes me it's just about time for us to begin; for I suppose another five or six days will pretty well bring us to Singapore."

"Right you are!" said Marmaduke. "You'll teach us some; won't you, father?"

"And I shall be happy to join the class, if you will allow

me," added Mr. Thurraboy with a grave smile.

"You, Mr. Thurraboy!" cried Wyvil. "Why, I always thought you knew every language under the sun! You bring in enough of 'em in your books, I'm sure!"

"Not quite so many as that, I'm afraid," laughed the author. "People said of Count von Moltke that he could hold his tongue in ten languages, and I think I may say that I can make mistakes in eleven; but Malay does not

happen to be one of them."

"Well," said Heathermoor, "it's like many other Eastern languages—pretty easy if you want just to pick up a smattering of it, but hard enough if you mean to know it well. There's just one past participle (sudah) for the whole language, like the courier of a 'personally-conducted tour'; and so, when you have learned that, it's just as if you had mastered all the past participles in Malay."

"That reminds me," put in Thurraboy, "of how, when I was learning Arabic, the word mafeesh (there is not) seemed to turn up at every corner. It even meant that a man was

dead, just as they say in the Bible: 'he is not'."

"The Malays have a much finer phrase for it than that; they say, when a man dies, Sudah pulang ka rahmat Allah (he has gone home to the mercy of God). Indeed, even their commonest expressions are wonderfully picturesque. They call the sun mata hari (eye of the day). Ice is ayer batu (water stone). An honest man is betool (straight), a rogue poosing (crooked). A spring or stream is called ana ayer (child of the water) and a key ana kunching (son of a lock)."

"And do they call a pistol 'son of a gun'?" asked Marmaduke, who had been listening with great interest.

"Not that I know of," laughed his father; "but they have some other phrases that are quite as queer. They

call gunpowder ubat bedil (medicine for a gun), and to have a pipe or cigar is meenum roko (to drink smoke). Then their names for the different hours are very curious too. The time just before daybreak is bloom terbang lalat (before the flies are astir), which means a good deal, as you'll know to your cost if you ever go up a Malay river. They call sunrise pechah panas (the heat begins); 8 a.m., kring ambun (the dew dries); 9 a.m., tengah naik (half-way up); 11 a.m., toolih tenggala (the plough is idle); noon, buntar membayang (the shadows are round); 1.30 p.m., lekas ba'dah (after prayers); 5 p.m., tooroon kerbau be-rendam (the buffaloes go to the water); 10 p.m., jindera boodak (the children are asleep).

The boys—whose curiosity about this new and strange language was now fully aroused—eagerly accepted Heathermoor's offer of a Malay manual, with which to commence their studies, and the morning passed pleasantly enough.

But toward afternoon the light breeze which had prevailed for the last two days (for they were now in the interval of variable spring weather which comes between the ending of the north-east and the rising of the southwest monsoon) suddenly died away, and a dead calm brooded over the glassy sea as far as the eye could reach.

"H'm, I don't much like that," said Lord Heathermoor

very gravely.

"Nor do I," added Mr. Thurraboy. "It looks to me as if that storm of yours were coming after all."

"So it does to me too; and at all events it's just as well

to be ready for it."

And he at once gave orders to strip the yards, cover and make fast the signal-gun, and "get all snug aloft and alow".

Nor were these precautions needless, for, as evening drew on, presages of evil began to multiply on every side. A close, sultry, lifeless heaviness brooded upon the air; a dead, ominous silence settled down like a pall upon the lonely sea. Though not a breath of wind was stirring, a slow, sullen heaving began to disturb the glassy surface, like the breathing of some mighty monster slumbering in the depths below. The sun went down in a dim, blood-red haze, and, where it had sunk, a long, low band of grey cloud began to creep upward along the darkening sky.

"Are we going to have a storm, Graves?" asked Wyvil of the old steward, feeling vaguely uneasy at these sinister omens, and still more so at the look of unwonted gravity on the bold, handsome features of his iron-nerved father.

"Well, Mr. Marmydook, that depends on what you calls a storm," replied the veteran with calm disdain. "What we had t'other day in the Mediterranean, as you and Mr. h'Alfred thought so wonderful, was just what we calls a good stiff breeze; but if there was to git up sitch a wind that it 'ud blow a turnip flat, mayhap we'd call that a storm!"

At the dinner-table that night Lord Heathermoor was just as pleasant and genial as ever, but almost before the meal was over he went hastily on deck again, and did not return. Mr. Thurraboy speedily followed him, and the two boys were left alone.

Our heroes scarcely missed their companions, however, so completely were they taken up with their new studies in Malay. For a whole hour they continued to ask each other, in the Ollendorf style, for every possible article from a cannon to a cockroach; and Wyvil was delighted to learn that the Malays appropriately called a ghost "haunt us", while Huntley vowed he should never forget that the Malay word for a stick was "tom-cat".

At length, having laid in a good stock of Malay substantives, and feeling rather tired after their exertions, they voted that enough had been done for one evening, and betook themselves to the books of adventure in which they delighted, till the steward summarily cut short their reading by the simple process of putting their lights out.

A little after midnight Marmaduke Wyvil had a strange and troubled dream. He seemed to be in the midst of a great battle, with smoke rolling thickly around him, bullets flying and men falling on every side, and the very earth trembling with the thunder of cannon, the shouts of charging thousands, and the din of drum, fife, and bugle. Then he found himself, without knowing how, leading a charge; but the sword with which he waved his men on suddenly turned into a stick of barley-sugar, and broke short off in his hand, while all the ground in front of him was heaped with Malay dictionaries, over which he tumbled at every step. On he went, however, and was just scrambling up the face of a huge earth-work when a tall, dark-visaged soldier, whose face seemed strangely familiar to him, though he had never seen it before, dealt him a crushing blow on the head with a clubbed musket, and down he fell, head-over-heels, down, down - and awoke.

For a moment or two, however, he could hardly tell whether he really was awake or still dreaming, for he found himself sprawling on his back in utter darkness, with his head aching as if from a heavy blow, and his ears stunned with a deafening clamour of rolling, clanking, crashing, and banging, mingled with the rush of trampling feet and a shrill, bugle-like note that pierced through the din ever and anon, which represented fairly enough the uproar of his visionary battle.

Hardly knowing what he did, or where he was, our hero scrambled confusedly to his feet, but only to be instantly knocked down by a shock like that of an earthquake, while a tremendous crash just over his head, like twenty muskets fired at once, made every nerve in his body tingle.

ed at once, made every herve in his body tingle.

"Alfred!" he roared with the full power of his lungs.

"Hullo!" responded a stifled voice from the berth next door, which sounded as if it came from the bottom of a coal-pit. "I say, what's all this about, d'ye think?" cried Wyvil.

"Have we struck upon a rock?"

"More likely we've been struck by a squall," said Huntley, "for I've just been chucked slap out of bed, and every mortal thing in the room has come tumbling right atop of me."

"Well, I vote we go right up and see what's going on," cried Marmaduke, who could never, when awake, be still for five minutes together. "If the ship's sinking, or any-

thing like that, we oughtn't to miss all the fun!"

"All right! stick on your clothes and come along," answered Huntley's voice, faintly audible through his struggles to free himself from the avalanche of blankets, books, portmanteaus, cushions, boots, and camp-stools

which had so suddenly overwhelmed him.

Wyvil "stuck on his clothes" accordingly with all possible speed. But to dress in the dark under such circumstances—as anyone knows who, like myself, has been wrecked in the middle of the night—is no easy matter, and not until he had thrust his right arm into the left sleeve of his shirt, put on his trousers hind-side in front, like King Dagobert in the song, and forced all his waistcoat buttons into the wrong holes, did our hero at length complete his toilet and join his friend in the saloon.

Wyvil's first proceeding, on arriving there, was to run his head like a battering-ram into the side of a book-case, while Alfred caught his knee such an excruciating knock against the corner of a settee that he roared like a bull.

"Hollo, Duke! where on earth are you?" shouted he,

rubbing his leg.

"I'll be shot if I know!" cried Wyvil bitterly; "I seem to be walking slap into a cupboard. Where the dickens are you?"

"Why, here, to be sure—can't you hear me?" halloed

Huntley.

"I can feel you anyhow," growled Wyvil, as his com-

rade, floundering about with the roll of the vessel, dealt him a kick on the shins worthy of a school match. "Con-

found it, do you think I'm a football?"

"Hurrah! I've got to the table at last!" cried Alfred "It's all right now; just you stick close to me, and keep a tight hold of the table, and we'll get to the door in no time."

And sure enough they did get to it at length, though not without difficulty, for they heard beneath their feet, at every step, the crunching and jingling of the broken glass and crockery with which the floor was strewn, and they were more than once all but torn from their hold of the cabin table by the furious pitching and rolling of the yacht, which kept plunging and leaping like a wild horse.

"Here's the stair!" called out Alfred gleefully;

now, out we go!"

But out they didn't go, for a very sufficient reason; for, when they had stumbled up the companion-way, they found both the doors which opened on to the deck fast shut and locked.

"Well, I do call that a shame," cried Wyvil indignantly;

"keeping it all to themselves like that!"

"After all, though, I dare say we should only be in the way," said the more philosophic Huntley, "for I've heard your father say that in a heavy gale—and this is a pretty tidy one, or I'll eat my hat—the passengers are always sent below till it's over. And besides," he added, as a tremendous sea came thundering over the deck just outside, bursting with a splash and a vicious hiss right against the door behind which they were standing, "I don't know that we should have a very snug berth of it out there."

"No, I suppose not," assented Wyvil reluctantly. "Well, if we can't get out, the best thing we can do is to go below

and get to sleep again."

To anyone but a British school-boy this would have appeared to be easier said than done, for the frantic

plunging of the storm-tossed vessel seemed as if it would loosen the very teeth in their heads, and the noise above and around them might almost have awakened the dead. But an English boy's power of sleep is as astounding as his power of digestion, and our two imperturbable heroes, half an hour later, were sleeping peacefully (with their heels higher than their heads) just as if they had been at home in England.

CHAPTER VIII

SWEPT TO THEIR DOOM

BUT there was no sleep that night for Heathermoor himself, or for any of his hard-pressed crew. As Huntley had guessed, the yacht had been struck and thrown on her beam-ends by a squall; and although the brave little craft recovered herself admirably, her splendid sea-worthiness was tasked to the utmost to make head against such a

storm as only the tropical seas can produce.

Not a glimpse of moon or star relieved the pitchy blackness of that terrible night, which remained unbroken save when a sudden blaze of lightning, which seemed to tear open the whole sky, threw out in ghastly distinctness for one moment the tall tapering masts, the skeleton rigging, the flooded deck, the dark forms and bearded faces of the crew, and the wide waste of leaping waves around, only to vanish again instantly as if they had never been, while earth and sky seemed to tremble at a thunder-clap like the crash of a score of brass cannon all fired at once.

All through the long dark hours of a night that appeared to have no end, the great gulf of blackness around them was haunted by all manner of ghostly sounds. The groaning of the strained timbers was like one in mortal pain. Unearthly voices seemed to mingle with the howling and shrieking of the gale through the bare framework of spars and cordage overhead, and with the deep crashing cannonade of the furious waves against the planking below; and the ghostly hiss and patter of the torrent-rain shaped themselves into the tread of unseen feet and the rustle of viewless wings.

76

Not once during the night did Heathermoor quit the deck for a moment, and his stout blue-jackets, though knowing well that it was more than doubtful whether one man of them would see another sunrise, flinched as little as their captain. But neither he nor they could keep their footing for an instant upon the rocking, reeling, flooded deck without clinging to the "life-lines" which crossed each other from side to side; and even thus they were again and again all but torn from their hold by the terrific pressure of the roaring cataract of rushing, foaming water which came thundering over the deck almost every other minute.

"It's just as the old riddle says," cried the gallant first officer, Mr. Walters, with a cheery laugh; "sometimes you see a ship, and sometimes you ship a sea!"

Hardly had the brave man spoken when he was struck by a mighty wave which tore him from his hold and swept him away like a straw. He felt himself whirled up against the quarter-rail, and carried half over it, and another second would have plunged him headlong into the boiling sea, when an iron grasp clutched him and held him back.

"Thank you, my man," said Walters to his invisible rescuer, sputtering out a huge mouthful of salt water as he spoke; "I shall remember you for this. What's your name?"

But the other made no reply, and vanished as suddenly as he had come.

Mr. Walters was somewhat surprised, but, concluding that the man had not heard his question (which, indeed, might well have been drowned by such an uproar), he made up his mind to enquire into the matter when daylight came, and troubled himself no more about it.

He was not the only man on board, however, who was similarly puzzled, for, during that whole night, the deck was haunted by a phantom in dripping oilskins, who appeared to turn up just whenever help was needed—

now holding up a man who was about to be swept off his feet, now handing a biscuit or a flask to some drenched and benumbed sailor, and now putting forth a strength that seemed more than human to aid the worn-out crew in "hauling taut the weather-brace" or obeying some other order.

At length the first faint gleam of daylight broke through the gloom, and then it was discovered that this mysterious personage was no other than Ashley Thurraboy himself.

"What, Mr. Thurraboy! is this you?" cried one of the men with a broad grin. "Well, if all other trades fail, you can 'arn a decent livin' as a fo'-mast hand, that's sartin!"

"It must have been you, then, who saved me from going overboard," said Mr. Walters, grasping his wet hand; "and I can tell you——"

"I say, Thurraboy, this won't do!" struck in Lord Heathermoor, coming up. "You've no business here, you know—passengers are not allowed on deck in a heavy sea."

"Well, I couldn't stay below like a sneak," urged Thurraboy, "when the rest of you were up here fighting for all our lives; and I am a bit of a sailor, you know, after all."

"It's not that I want to 'come the captain' over you, my dear fellow," replied his host, drawing him aside. "I know you're the last man on earth to shirk your share of any rough work, but you can really be of much more use to us below just now. Those two boys of ours, if there's no one to look after them, will manage to slip on deck somehow, as sure as a gun—which would simply mean certain death to both of them, as things are now; so, if you wouldn't mind going down and amusing them a bit, and keeping 'em employed till the gale blows over, I should be ever so much obliged to you."

"I'm your man," said the author; "but mind you shut

the companion-door sharp after me, or we shall have a wave

walking in too."

"Three cheers for Mr. Thurraboy!" cried a sailor, as the hero of the night darted in through the half-open doorway like a clown springing through a hoop; and the call was answered with an energy that made itself heard above all the roar of the storm.

The two lads below (who were just beginning to wake up from their second nap) were fully aroused by these hurrahs, and sprang up at once—having lain down in their clothes—just in time to be startled by a tremendous rumble-tumble down the companion-way, as if someone were falling downstairs.

"Hollo!" cried out Marmaduke Wyvil, "what's the

matter?"

"'Fragments of an Author', as the advertisers say," answered Thurraboy's voice. You'd better get a basket and a coal-shovel, and pick up what's left of me!"

"Why, have you really come a cropper down the companion-way?" cried Wyvil, hurrying to the spot. "I say, I hope you're not hurt, are you? Hollo! what's this? Here, Alf! fetch some rag and cold water—quick! he's bleeding like one o'clock!"

"Am I?" said Thurraboy, putting his hand to his cheek, and drawing it away all bloody. "Well, do you know, I never felt it a bit. Take my handkerchief, and tie it up

for me, there's a good fellow!"

The hurt was speedily bandaged, and then Mr. Thurraboy, giving the boys no time to question him about the

state of things on deck, said promptly:

"Now, I'll just tell you what we'll do: we'll all three go to work and make some hot coffee for breakfast; for I doubt very much if we shall get any from the cook's galley to-day. They'll never be able to light the fire in such weather as this. You know, don't you, Marmaduke, where your father keeps his spirit-lamp and his store-chest? Well,

then, while I get into some dry clothes, you and Alfred can be rummaging out what things we want; and then I'll come and help you to make the brew. And when our friend, Mr. Graves, comes in with a glum face to tell us we can't have any coffee, we'll just astonish him with a steaming pot of it under his very nose!"

Never was any diversion more timely. The boys, delighted with the suggestion, forgot everything else in their eagerness to carry it out, and had just (under Mr. Thurraboy's skilful direction) completed their task without any mishap—despite the terrific pitching and rolling of the vessel—when old Graves showed his lean, brown visage in the doorway, and announced in a tone of gloomy satisfaction:

"No coffee for you this mornin', gen'l'men—fire can't be lit!"

"No coffee, eh? What do you call that, then, you old croaker?" chuckled Wyvil, swinging the steaming coffeepot, like a censer, round Graves's head.

"Well, I am blowed!" growled the old fellow in amazement. "This is some o' your doin', Muster Thurraboy; them two young whipper-snappers 'ud never ha' had the gumption to do it their own selves!"

"Why not, Mr. Graves?" cried Huntley; "we should need nothing but your temper to make the water hot, and we couldn't have a better thing to stir it with than your long tongue!"

Graves answered only with the hoarse grunt that was his nearest approach to a laugh, and proceeded to make what preparations he could for a breakfast which seemed likely to be a very make-shift affair at best.

But Ashley Thurraboy, after being on deck all night in the rain, was in no mood to be particular. He fell to with a will, and his young companions seconded him most manfully.

The meal was a pretty lively one, as may be supposed.



"NO COFFEE, EH?"



Alfred was fain to drink his boiling coffee at one gulp, lest it should be sent spouting over him like a fountain-jet; and Marmaduke had an exciting race all across the saloon after a piece of cold meat, which was ambling nimbly away to leeward. But this only made it "all the better fun"; and when breakfast was over, the two lads found ample amusement in watching the rage of the sea through the ports, against which a huge billow dashed up ever and anon with a noise as if all the glass-work of a hot-house had been shattered at one blow.

"Well, it's a good deal snugger here than on deck," artfully observed Thurraboy, "and one can get a far better view of the sea down here than up there, where you can't

open your eyes for the rain and the spray."

Finding their chosen hero so well satisfied to remain below, the boys became much more resigned to their own imprisonment; and when they began to tire of watching the waves, Mr. Thurraboy opened the piano and sang them several of his best songs, and then set them to sing likewise. Finally, having entertained them for the best part of the morning, he settled them down quietly to a couple of books, and then went off to get a snatch of sleep, which he very much needed.

Meanwhile the storm was beginning to abate; and, toward lunch-time, down came Lord Heathermoor in turn for a brief nap after sixteen hours on deck, leaving strict orders to call him the moment there was any fresh sign of danger. Mr. Thurraboy, being now completely rested, went on deck again, and the two lads, to their great delight, were permitted to go with him.

"I say, it must have blown pretty stiff while it lasted!" cried Wyvil, staring wonderingly at the swimming decks, the splinters of wood that strewed them, the torn covers of the boats, and the bent iron staunchions of the quarter-rail. "However, it's soon over, at any rate."

"It's not over yet, my boy," said the author gravely.

"I don't want to be always croaking, like your old steward yonder, but I must tell you that in my opinion (and I know something of these seas) the worst of it is still to come!"

It was, as they soon learned to their cost. Toward nightfall the wind rose again as suddenly as it had fallen, and blew harder than ever; and poor Heathermoor (who had barely had time to swallow a few mouthfuls of dinner) was forced to hurry on deck again, having with some difficulty persuaded his guest to remain below in charge of the boys.

The latter had gone to sleep as usual—for neither din nor danger seemed to have any effect upon their slumbers—when a sound was heard which awakened even them, a sound which even the hardiest seaman can seldom hear unmoved. Mingling with the ceaseless thump, thump of the great waves against the trembling hull came the harsh, ripping, rending sound of broken timber, coming apparently from the direction of the forecastle.

"There goes something for'ard!" cried Thurraboy, spring-

ing nimbly out of his berth; "and-"

But, ere he could finish, there came a crash right overhead, like the explosion of a bomb-shell, followed by a noise of shivering glass and splintering wood, and down came a perfect cataract of water into the saloon, the skylight-scuttle of which (despite its strong wooden framework and casing of brass rods) had been smashed in like pie-crust, leaving the cabin below as completely exposed as a house with the roof blown off. At the same instant, the hanging lamp, which had been left lighted at the far end of it, flew in pieces with a crash and a jingle, plunging everything into utter darkness, while the yacht heeled over as if she were going down bodily.

In the depth of the blackness our two young travellers (who were now thoroughly aroused) could see little glimmering spots of light, not unlike glow-worms, glancing hither and thither amid the gloom; and they knew at once that these were the phosphorescent fish, swimming about the saloon, which was now flooded from one end to another.

In a moment more, Wyvil saw these tiny stars come flashing and surging over the sill of his door, while a plash and gurgle of unseen waters told him that his room was "all awash". It was undoubtedly a pretty sight; but our hero felt that had he witnessed it in someone else's room he would have appreciated its beauty a great deal

"My portmanteau!" cried Marmaduke, aghast; "it's right down on the floor!"
"So's mine," answered Alfred, from next door, in tones

of equal dismay, "and all my things in it too!"

"Well, now, wotever's the good o' fussin' about your clothes now?" chimed in old Graves's hoarse voice reprovingly. "You won't need none at the bottom o' the sea, and that's where we're a-going to, every man Jack of us!"

"I don't think so, Mr. Graves," replied Huntley in a tone of profound conviction; "people say one can't be drowned in the company of a man who is born to be hanged, and so we're all right so long as we have you on board. Besides, I fancy you can be careful of your things too, at the last moment; for I've heard that you once let one of your messmates drown while you were saving your tobaccobox."

The old croaker's indignant mutterings were drowned by the ceaseless hammering of the sailors overhead, who were nailing planks over the broken scuttle to keep the sea out. Meanwhile the two lads, splashing to and fro ankle-deep in water, were groping out the various "properties" which were floating about their rooms, and enlivening this new form of blind-man's buff with an impromptu parody of

their favourite sea-song—"I'm Afloat, I'm Afloat—O'er the Billows I Roam":

"I'm afloat, I'm afloat! all my berth's full of foam; My boots are both gone, and I can't find my comb; My clothes are all swimming, as wet as can be— I'm afloat, I'm afloat, flooded up to the knee!"

This done, they joined Graves and Mr. Thurraboy in baling out the water, which the four accomplished at last, though not without a long and weary struggle, which left the boys so tired and stiff that they could hardly move.

When morning came it revealed a spectacle worthy of one of Vereshtchagin's delightful pictures of a bombarded town. The floor was (as Graves poetically phrased it) "reg'larly buttered with broken glass". Splinters of wood, strips of canvas, twisted brass rods, and what not lay strewn on every side. The fall of the scuttle had smashed a mirror and knocked off one entire corner of the piano. The stout cover of the book-case had been torn away like a rag, and the glass beneath it smashed to pieces; and Lord Heathermoor's cherished books—torn, soaked, with their rich covers half off—lay scattered broadcast upon the wet and dirty floor.

"Won't my father be in a way when he sees all this?" cried Marmaduke, as they sat amid this chaos over such a breakfast as could be scraped up for them. "He always says he can't bear to see books hurt, because it seems to him just as if they could feel what's done to 'em."

But poor Heathermoor had something very different to think of at that moment, for just about nine o'clock (the gale being still as furious as ever) there came faintly through the roar of wind and wave an ominous cry from the "look-out" at the bow:

"Land ahead!"

As he heard the ill-boding call, Heathermoor's bold face seemed to harden all at once, like metal suddenly congealed, for he needed no one to tell him what land this might be, or what he and his crew had to expect there.

Picking his way warily along the wet and sloping deck, he planted himself beside the foremast, and, somewhat sheltered from the blinding spray, turned his glass toward the eastern horizon.

There, sure enough, looming darkly far away to the east-ward against the pale grey light of the sunless sky, stood out a huge shadowy headland—the fatal promontory of Acheen Head, which forms the westernmost point of Sumatra. The brave man looked at it long and earnestly, and shook his head meaningly as he gazed, for he well knew how many stout seamen had perished among its deadly rocks and boiling waves, or had escaped them only to die by the yet more pitiless cruelty of the savages who haunted the gloomy mountains overhead.

Most of his men were familiar with these waters, and knew the doom that threatened them as well as he knew it himself; but neither he nor they had any thought of flinching. With death in its worst form gaping to devour them all, the captain gave his orders, and the crew obeyed them, as coolly and steadily as if they were only sailing

a match in the Solent.

Plainly and more plainly, as they flew onward to destruction, loomed the stern outline of the terrible cape, upon which wind and sea were driving them headlong. With good management and the help of her engines, indeed, the staunch little craft might possibly weather the point itself, but from the front of it jutted out into the sea like the snout of a sword-fish, just beneath the water, a long line of jagged black reefs, around which raged unceasingly a foaming ring of white-lipped breakers; and, as things were now, nothing short of a miracle could save the yacht from being dashed full upon them.

The wind now began to fall again, though the sea was higher than ever, and, the engines having "slowed down",

their lessening speed seemed to give them just space enough to count the few remaining minutes which lay between them and destruction. There they stood, those bold, fearless men, brimming over with strength and energy, still in the prime of life, yet doomed to die as surely as if smitten with a mortal disease. And, moment by moment, before their very eyes, Death came creeping nearer, and nearer, and nearer.

Half an hour later they had come so near to the fatal headland that every feature of its grand outline stood clear before them; for, as if to add bitterness to death itself, the sun had suddenly broken through the clouds in all its glory, revealing the full magnificence of one of the noblest panoramas in the whole range of the Eastern seas.

Far to right and left endless ranges of wooded hills surged up, wave beyond wave, against the brightening sky, one mass of clustering foliage from base to summit. But right in front this veil of leaves was rent in twain, and through the gap thrust itself a mighty precipice of darkpurple cliff hundreds of feet in height, gaunt and bare in all the grimness of eternal desolation amid the sea of luxuriant growth around it. A narrow band of greyishvellow beach lay between the cliff and the sea, the great waves of which, as they broke in spouts of flying spray, flashed back the brightening sunlight in a thousand glancing rainbows. Beyond it, brilliantly white against the deep, rich blue of the sea, the snowy foam of the destroying breakers danced and sparkled in the sunshine, and Nature seemed to pour forth all the fulness of her life before the eyes of the men who were about to die.

Beside Heathermoor stood the two lads, with life-buoys securely fastened round them, and on the other side of them was Mr. Thurraboy.

The wind was now falling fast, but the fury of the sea was unabated; and, although the engines had been reversed.

even this availed nothing against the terrific force by which the yacht was whirled onward like a leaf down a torrent. And just then—as if to destroy their last hope of escape, even should they reach the shore alive—several wild figures were seen to break from the thickets and come rushing down to the beach, quickly followed by others, and others still, until the whole shore was black with armed savages, whose shout, or rather scream, of ferocious joy at sight of the doomed vessel sounded in the ears of her forlorn crew like a death-knell.

"Our only chance now," muttered Heathermoor through his set teeth, as he glanced from the seething foam of the rock-tormented breakers to the howling swarm of murderers beyond, "is for her to stick fast among the rocks without breaking up; but there's not much hope of that with such a sea on. God have mercy upon us all!"

Then, turning to the two lads beside him, he added

quietly:

"Now, boys, stick close to me till you hear me sing out 'Jump!' and then overboard you go!"

"All right, Daddy!" answered Wyvil as cheerily as ever.

"Good-bye, Thurraboy!" added the captain, grasping the hand of his guest. "If you live through this business, you know what to do."

"I won't forget," replied the other, returning the grasp with interest. "Good-bye—God bless you!"

Not a word more was spoken. Side by side, in grim silence, they went onward to their doom

CHAPTER IX

THE ISLAND CITY

A LL at once the set, stern face of the captain (who had gone forward as if to see his death ere it came) underwent a startling change. His glass was at his eye in a moment, and as he glanced through it he muttered:

"There is a cross-current that would carry us clear—but how to reach it? There's only one chance, but it's worth

trying. Mr. Walters!"

The few brief, clear orders that followed were obeyed with an alacrity that showed that the mere feeling of doing something (whatever the issue might be) was a reviving cordial to the sturdy Englishmen. In a trice the anchor was ready for letting go, and old Graves (who had come on deck with the rest) grunted to himself:

"He's a-goin' to club-haul her, then, he is! Well, that means that we may be drowned if the anchor holds, and

we must be drowned if it don't."

Meanwhile two fresh men had been sent to the wheel to assist the two already there, whose whole strength barely sufficed to hold it firm against the tremendous pressure of the sea.

"Helm hard down!" came the shout; and the whole four, exerting their full strength, jammed the wheel down and brought the yacht up into the wind.

"Stand by your anchor! Let go!"

The anchor splashed into the water, and all held their breath as they watched the result, knowing well that upon it hung the life of every man on board. Happily it caught and held, but so terrific was the force of the sea that in an instant the cable was as taut as a bow-string.

"Cut away!" roared Heathermoor with the full force of

his voice.

One stroke of an axe severed the cable, and the released yacht bounded forward like a freed stag-hound. But, though the well-handled wheel above and the reversed engines below did their utmost, the result was still doubtful for one terrible moment, during which every heart seemed to stand still.

All at once, however, the yacht was felt to give a quick swing to port, as if suddenly acted upon by some new force. She had caught the cross-current marked by Heathermoor, and, just as the boiling foam of the breakers was so close under her starboard bow that her doom appeared certain, she was borne past the edge of the reef and glided out into the open sea once more, followed by a yell of impotent rage from the baffled savages who crowded the beach.

"Sold again, chickabiddies—no catchee, no habbee!" shouted Wyvil, snapping his fingers at them. "We've

seen the last of you, at any rate."

Our hero was mistaken. He had not seen the last of the Acheenese yet by any means.

For the present, however, their troubles seemed to have ended with this last and most-unhoped-for escape. Three hours later, just as the sun was beginning to sink, they got under the lee of Pulo Brass (Rice Island), where Lord Heathermoor, finding himself sheltered and comparatively safe, wisely decided to anchor for the night.

Then, having seen everything "snug", the brave captain, fairly worn out with the superhuman exertions of the last two days, turned in and slept soundly till dawn. Thurraboy did the same; but the two lads were far too much excited to follow their example, and lay awake half the night, talking to each other through the partition; nor was

it until the morning that they at length fell into a sleep which lasted till breakfast-time.

When they did come on deck at last the sun was already high in a cloudless heaven; the huge, round, shining "swells" that heaved on every side were the only traces of the recent storm; the yacht was going briskly along under a full press of sail, and around them lay outspread in all its splendour a panorama to which no words can do justice, though every man who passes it seems to think himself bound in honour to try.

They were by this time well into the far-famed Strait of Malacca, and, as they advanced, the leafy shores of Malacca on the port side, and the wood-crowned hills of Sumatra to starboard, stood out plainer and plainer every moment, giving to the whole scene the aspect of some mighty park in the fulness of its midsummer glory, enclosing a great lake studded with floating gardens in which all the magnificent luxuriance of tropical vegetation ran riot without a check.

No lake, indeed, could have been calmer, brighter, or more beautiful than this land-locked sea, into the clear, smooth, shining waters of which the wooded mountains and bush-clad islets sloped down on every side. These slopes displayed every gradation of colour—the pale yellow of the sugar-cane, the deep, rich green of the cocoa-palm and banana, the lighter verdure of the upland grass, and the raw, bare red of the exposed clay, laid open by a sudden landslip—all framed in the bright summer blue of the sunlit sea. And through the masses of dark, glossy foliage peeped out every here and there the trim white colonnade of a European country-house, the tall, gaunt outline of a factory chimney, or the tapering mast of an anchored vessel.

The boys were in raptures, for, as the channel grew narrower, every turn of it revealed to them some new and genuinely Eastern wonder.

"Here's a Malay canoe, Alf-ain't it a queer one? For

all the world like Robinson Crusoe's first attempt at a water-

trough!"

"And a couple of bronze statues aboard, life-size, eh? Don't it seem as if one could stick the pair of 'em on a mantel-piece and put matches inside 'em?"

"Hullo! they're talking English!" cried Wyvil. "Do you hear 'em singing out, 'Do it, do it!' But what on earth

do they want us to do?"

"I know!" exclaimed Huntley. "Duit is a penny in Malay, and this'll be the Oriental version of the Thames boy's 'Chuck us a ha'penny to dive for!' Let's chuck 'em one and see 'em fish it up."

But ere they could do so, the canoe was left far astern.

A wide-winged sea-bird swept over their heads, on its way southward to Coney Island (for Singapore has its Coney Island as well as New York), and almost as swiftly came swimming over the shining sea a large Malay prahu (boat) with a bamboo mast, cordage of coir (twisted grass), and one huge sail of brown matting, which (as Huntley truly said) looked just like a monster tobacco-leaf.

"Do you remember, Alf," cried Marmaduke, "that bit in old Marryat (in *The King's Own*, I think) where they board a Malay prahu, and take her; and then the Malays jump down below and set her on fire, and burn themselves

and all? This must be one of the very things!"

"And I should think such an old rattle-trap would burn pretty easily," said Alfred, eyeing the uncouth craft with

a grin. "Hullo! what on earth's that?"

"That" was a strange-looking object standing up out of the shallow water just beyond one of the smaller islets. At first sight it looked exactly like a gigantic **H** (possibly dropped by some passing British tourist), but a nearer view showed it to be merely a large stake-net.

Turning round from looking at it, the boys caught sight of a Siamese man-of-war in the offing, with the famous "White Elephant" conspicuous on her fluttering crimson flag; and, a few moments later, they passed a Chinese fishing-boat, with a two-horned prow suggestive of a monster stag-beetle, and a huge staring eye painted on either side; it being the rooted conviction of the pig-tailed boatmen that "suppose boatee no have eye, no can see go".

But what was this nondescript object starting up from the water's edge on an island upon their starboard bow?

An unfinished pier, or a half-destroyed palisade?

"Now, Duke," cried Heathermoor's voice, "here's a real Malay village for you at last."

"That a village!" said his son, staring; "why, it looks more like a lot of hampers left behind by a big picnic!"

Such as it was, however, this quaint little cluster of tiny grass-thatched hovels of bamboo-which, raised upon long slender piles, looked as if they were wading into the sea on stilts-preserved in the nineteenth century the exact likeness of those strange dwellings in which the Malay of the ninth entrenched himself amid his native swamps and A thousand years ago this unchangeable man used to come down that rude bamboo ladder, just as he does now, to the roughly-hollowed log that served him for Then, as now, he stood on this ledge-like platform above the water to throw out his fishing-lines, or to watch for the coming of his enemies. When they came, the canoe was stowed away and the ladder drawn up, and he defended his little dove-cot-on-stilts with the same heavy cleavershaped parang, and the same short, crooked-bladed, daggerlike kriss, which he handles so artistically to-day.

"That's what all the native villages, and towns too, are like in these parts, my boys," said Heathermoor, smiling at their amazement. "In fact, this style of house-building is so thoroughly traditional with the Malays that their way of telling you that any man has married and settled down is to say: Dia ada rumah-tangga (he has got a house with a

ladder)."

Through these and other wonders they at length made

their way up to the island-city of Singapore, though, from the extreme flatness of its site, the boys could see little or nothing of it till they were quite close to the landing-place of Tanjong Pagar, and almost alongside the wharf itself. Alfred Huntley, in his eagerness to meet his father after so long a separation, wholly forgot that the latter could not possibly tell what day they would arrive, and was quite disappointed at not seeing him amid the crowd assembled on the shore.

But if he did not see him, he saw plenty to look at instead; for the whole landing-place was (as the cautious reporter said of the London riots) "a scene of considerable bustle". On one side a couple of lean, rat-faced Portuguese half-castes were shrieking and jabbering over a disputed fare. On the other, an unlucky Chinaman, who had just had his straw hat knocked into the dirt by the rush of a hurrying sailor, was relieving his feelings with a screaming burst of Chinese adjectives worthy of a scalded parrot. In the foreground a brawny English sea-captain was acting "Hercules among the Pygmies" in the midst of a howling swarm of native cabmen, who seemed bent upon tearing him in pieces and portioning him out among them. A little farther on some Hindoo coolies, who had just succeeded in overturning a truck-load of luggage, stood gravely contemplating the result, as if expecting the upset packages to get up again and walk away of their own accord.

"Now, Heathermoor," said Ashley Thurraboy, when the necessary formalities had been got through, and all was ready for their landing, "I know you'll have plenty to do this evening on your own account; so I think you had better just let me go up to the hotel in a trap with the luggage and these two young men of yours, and then you can come after us when you've got through your

business."

"Well, really, I shall be very much obliged to you; for, as you say, I've plenty to attend to. If you don't find

Colonel Huntley at the hotel, there's safe to be a letter from him addressed to me, and you're quite welcome to open it if you think fit."

"Do you think there's any chance that he won't be there,

then?" asked Alfred Huntley ruefully.

"Well, you see, he couldn't possibly know, within a week, when we should arrive; so very likely he may have gone off on a visit to somebody, or on a run up the coast to Perak or Penang. But you'll find some news of him at the hotel, never fear! Off you go, and I'll follow as soon as I've got

everything ship-shape."

Our heroes had reason to pronounce their transit "as good as a London pantomime", for to them this first drive through an East Indian town was one constant succession of marvels. Not the least of these wonders was the appearance of their native driver himself; and they both laughed not a little at the thought of the impression likely to be produced in a London street by the sudden apparition of a chocolate-coloured cabman in a blazing crimson turban and short blue drawers, with limbs bare below the knee. In this region of palms and sugar-canes, white robes and black faces, it was quite a new sensation for the boys to see an English table of fares and distances pasted up inside their carriage; but they soon perceived that the fares themselves had been so carefully obliterated - either by the prudent cabman himself, or by some obliging friend-that even Sir Henry Rawlinson could have made nothing of them.

Scarcely had they gone twenty yards when they passed through a crowd, assembled, not round a Punch-show or a barrel-organ, but round a real live "sloth bear" from Borneo—a lazy, good-humoured looking beast, with a white muzzle and brownish-black body, very much like a short, ill-made boy in an overcoat three sizes too large for him. Then, in the very next street, they met a tall Hindoo leading along (just as a man at home might lead an Italian greyhound) a black-and-white Java tapir—a kind of pocket-hippo-

potamus, with the size and build of an overgrown pig, and a flexible upper lip, hanging several inches below its mouth,

like a gutta-percha pipe.

And now a sudden turn brought them right into the "Chinese quarter", with its cobweb of narrow dingy lanes; its eddying crowds of doll-faced, narrow-eyed, pig-tailed men in short blue pinafores, and straw hats as big as an umbrella; its yellow-skinned matrons (with two crossed skewers in their clubbed-up black hair) nursing cream-coloured babies, whose solemn little faces never laughed or moved; its flying dragons of red paper or gilt tinsel; its tiny rat-trap-like shops, covered with strange, black, long-legged characters, suggestive of crushed beetles; and its deep, tunnel-like gateways, surmounted by huge cornices of coloured porcelain, several feet in height, adorned with a medley of prancing horses and round-faced men, long-legged birds, cabbageshaped trees, top-heavy towers, and convulsed monsters with gaping jaws and tails as long as the "one word in conclusion" of a political speaker.

Marmaduke eyed this strange jumble with an appreciative grin, and struck up (lustily seconded by Huntley) a very appropriate though far from courteous song, to the tune of

"John Highlandman":

"With their little pig-eyes and their large pig-tails,
And their diet of rats, dogs, worms, and snails,
Which are all fair game in the frying-pan
Of that curious feeder, John Chinaman!
"Sing lie-tea, my cheating John Chinaman!
No fightee, my coward John Chinaman!
Not Cobden himself can take off the ban
By humanity laid on John Chinaman."

A few minutes later they turned into a wider and straighter thoroughfare, where they went along more rapidly; and the two lads, one at each side of the carriage, kept up an incessant shouting to each other to announce some fresh local marvel.

"Hurrah!" cried Wyvil suddenly, "here at last is a real jin-rik-sha (man go-cart). You remember the models of them, don't you, Alf, at the Oriental Exhib.? I've always wanted to see one, and here they are at last!"

There, sure enough, was a queer little Orientalized "hansom", drawn not by a horse but by a Chinaman, while another Chinaman, seated in it, looked down upon him with solemn dignity.

"Bravo! that would be the right sort of trap for the 'Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' people," cried Alfred; "the only kind of cab, I should think, where there never is

any fear of the horse being overworked!"

Just then a temporary "block" in the roadway gave them time to watch the Chinese passenger get out and feel in his pockets for money to pay the fare, but seemingly without finding any. Then followed a brief but very spirited dialogue between him and the human horse that had drawn him, which ended in the "horse" getting into the cab, while the fare took his place between the shafts, and gravely proceeded to work his passage.

"Well," cried Wyvil, chuckling, "that's one way to settle it! I say, Alf, what a job it would be in England if, when a fellow hadn't money enough to pay his fare, the cabby could harness him to the trap and drive him along till he'd worked out the balance! Hollo! if here isn't a

Johnny on a bicycle!"

The next moment, in fact, they passed a young Chinaman trundling leisurely along the road on a "patent safety", with a face so perfectly immovable that he might have been taken for an enlarged edition of one of those clock-work cyclists which are the delight of children. The two English boys were very merry over such unwarrantable presumption on the part of a foreigner.

But they soon had something else to think of. By this time they were rattling through the "European quarter", and a sharp turn suddenly brought them out upon the beautiful esplanade, extending its smooth green belt of level sward between the trim white houses of the fashionable district on one side and the boundless expanse of blue, shining sea on the other. To the left, in the midst of a vast enclosed green wide enough for a parade-ground, St. Andrew's Cathedral flaunted in the glory of the sunset its daring and not wholly unsuccessful parody of the wonderful architecture of Netley Abbey; and, high upon the hill above it—commanding a seemingly endless panorama of red-tiled roofs, and broad-leaved palm-trees, and tall church-spires, and black-hulled steamers lying motionless upon the smooth bright sea—rose the grassy earth-works and low white wall of Fort Canning, the citadel of Singapore.

All this, however, was but slightly noticed by our two young athletes, who were instantly absorbed in the contemplation of another feature of the scene which was far more interesting to them. A little way to the right, two or three well-contested combats of lawn-tennis were being fought out beneath the wondering stares of a throng of natives, who were evidently quite at a loss to understand what could be the object of knocking a ball over the net just to have it instantly knocked back again; and, full in front of them as they drove along the esplanade toward the sea-fronting hotel, a number of sturdy figures in white flannel were playing (glorious spectacle!) real English cricket—a match, as our travellers learned from the shouts of the bystanders—of "Soldiers v. Civilians", i.e. the officers of the garrison against the English officials of the town.

"Well hit!" roared Wyvil, as one of the "Civilian" champions, a tall, good-looking young fellow with light

curly hair, made a splendid "forward drive".

"Well hit! run again!" echoed Huntley with the full

power of his lungs.

"Only seven to make now, and one wicket still to go down," called out a voice from the crowd of spectators. "They'll do it yet, no fear!"

"Do you hear, Alf?" cried Marmaduke eagerly, "only seven to make! Oh, I do hope they'll win!"

A few moments later their carriage drew up at the door of the hotel, and Alfred Huntley was out of it in an instant, looking eagerly for his father's tall upright figure and heavy moustache among the groups on the veranda.

But a grievous disappointment awaited him. Colonel Huntley was nowhere to be seen, and when Thurraboy (having sent off the two lads to see their luggage bestowed in the rooms assigned to them) went to make enquiries at the office, he was startled to learn that the Colonel had not been there at all that season, that he had left neither letter nor message of any kind, and that, in a word, no one knew anything about him!

CHAPTER X

TIDINGS OF EVIL

OP to that moment Mr. Thurraboy had never thought of feeling the slightest anxiety as to the famous colonel's safety. Randolph Huntley's past life was a sufficient warrant of his being proof against every form of hardship or danger; and, moreover, North Borneo (in which, of late, he had been officially stationed) was now a well-ordered British colony, where he could have nothing to fear from the natives. Hence, though not surprised to see nothing of Alfred's father at the landing-place or on the veranda, Thurraboy had fully expected to find either the colonel himself, or some message from him, at the hotel.

But now, for the first time, he began to feel uneasy. Heathermoor had expressly told him that the colonel had been informed, many months before, of their probable arrival about this time to carry him home with them, and that Huntley himself had distinctly named this hotel as the place where he was to be found or heard of; yet, now that they were there, nobody could give them any news of him whatever. It was probable enough, of course, that some of the countless matters that had to be attended to, ere Huntley could turn his back on the East after so long a term of duty there, might have taken him away from Singapore for a time; but was it credible that, in such a case, he should have left no message whatever for his expected friends, and more especially for his own son, whom he had not seen for years?

The more Thurraboy thought of all this, the less he liked it; and he was just renewing his enquiries, in the faint

hope that there might, after all, be some mistake in the matter, when he was interrupted by a deafening burst of cheering outside, and in tramped the victorious cricketers, carrying in triumph, shoulder-high, the tall, fair-haired young man already mentioned.

They happened to set down their hero close to the door of the office, and Mr. Thurraboy, while parleying with the

hotel-clerk, heard a voice saying behind him:

"Excuse me, did you ask for Colonel Huntley?"

"Yes," said Thurraboy, turning, to find himself face to face with the light-haired champion. "Some friends of his have come out here in their yacht to take him home with them, and we expected to meet him or hear of him at this hotel; but we can't find out anything about him."

"I'm afraid not," said the other gravely; "and I wish with all my heart that I could give you any news of him, for, to tell you the truth, I'm beginning to be rather anxious

about him myself."

"Indeed!" cried Thurraboy with a sudden cloud on his firm, manly face. "I'm sorry to hear you say that, for we've got the colonel's son with us, and he is quite expecting to see his father turn up at any moment. If there really should be anything wrong, I had rather the boy didn't know it just at first."

"I understand," replied the cricketer; "and if I can help you in any way, pray consider me quite at your service. I'm the governor's under-secretary, Hubert Pennaline."

"You are very kind," said Thurraboy, holding out his hand cordially. "Will you give us the pleasure of your company at dinner? My name is Ashley Thurraboy."

"What? the author of Alone upon the Ocean?" cried Pennaline, warmly grasping the proffered hand. "This is an unexpected pleasure indeed. There will be quite an excitement among our fellows when they know you're here. I can tell you that your name is a household word among them. As for dining with you, I should like nothing better;

but the fact is, you see, our team are expecting me to dine with them to-night, and so—Come, I'll tell you what; won't you and your friends come and join us? I can promise you an English welcome, even if you don't get a very grand dinner."

There was no resisting the young fellow's hearty tone and manner, and Mr. Thurraboy, not at all sorry to have something to divert his mind from the gloomy apprehensions that were beginning to darken it, readily assented.

An hour later, the great author, seated in the place of honour, was as much at home with the young cricketers as if he had known them all his life, while Marmaduke and Alfred, still ignorant of the prevailing fears for Colonel Huntley's safety, having swallowed with eagerness every detail of the recent match, were joining with a will in the chorus of a comic song sung by Mr. Pennaline himself:

"THE RAIN OF TERROR

"'T is sad to mark affliction's storm
Burst o'er the fenceless head;
'T is sad to see the once-loved form
Lie pale, and cold, and dead;
'T is sad to hear, when no aid is near,
The moan of restless pain;
But saddest of all to pay a call
In a villainous shower of rain!

"We mourn the brave whom battle smote,
Yet soon our grief is o'er;
But who shall wail the mud-splashed coat,
The shrunken vest deplore?
And the faultless tie, which low and high
To equal strive in vain—
Their course is run—all, all undone
By a pitiless shower of rain!

"The vanished hope, the blasted name, May yet return to men; The dead in deathless scrolls of fame Arise and live again; The leech's art may ease the heart,
And cool the fevered brain—
But who shall repair the garments fair
Defiled by a shower of rain?

"Ha! while I speak, upon my chest
The deadly Cold doth lie;
The fierce Sore-Throat, in vapours dressed,
Swoops from the lowering sky;
Rheumatics stand, a ghastly band,
And howl this dire refrain:
'The best thing alive to make us thrive
Is a jolly good shower of rain!'

"Ugh! ugh! my throat! that warning note
Dooms me to draught and pill,
And flannelled feet, and doubled sheet,
And a swingeing doctor's bill.
Ugh! ugh! a-tchew! attend me, you
Who would your health retain—
With strictest care henceforth beware
Of a treacherous shower of rain!"

But, just as the general merriment was at its height, a native servant stepped up to Thurraboy and whispered to him that "Tuan Heathermoor" had arrived, and was asking to see him. Mr. Pennaline followed his guest out of the room, and the three men held a private conference, which, judging from the time that it occupied, must have dealt with very important matters indeed.

When the two boys awoke the next morning, they began to realize for the first time (this being their first day ashore since leaving Egypt) the full significance of being "really in the tropics, you know". Along the table beside them, three or four athletic black ants were having a foot-race worthy of the Oxford and Cambridge Sports. Underneath it a Siamese cat with blue eyes, coloured like a cup of weak cocoa with one blob of cream in it, and wearing a trowel-shaped tail, barely an inch long, was purring con-

tentedly on Wyvil's shirt, which had fallen to the floor, as she probably supposed, for her express convenience. On the ceiling, just above their heads, a "tokey" lizard, so enormous that it might almost have been mistaken for a new-born crocodile, was catching mosquitoes upside down, at a rate suggestive of its having just signed a contract to

extirpate them at sixpence the dozen.

Just outside the window a magnificent "traveller's palm" towered high into the air, exactly like a monster featherfan, with green feathers three fathoms in length, and a handle of forty feet. A little farther on, a gorgeous butterfly, as large as an ordinary sparrow, was just alighting upon a leaf that would make an ample carpet for any dining-room; while the road below them displayed an endless procession of coloured paper lanterns and painted umbrellas, shaven crowns and trailing pig-tails, dusky women with rings through their noses as big as a doorknocker, coffee-coloured babies with nothing on but half a dozen silver anklets, and slim, sharp-featured "Klings" from Madras, almost as lightly clad as the Kaffir chief whose full dress consisted of an eye-glass and a pair of spurs.

Fresh as they were from sober England, our heroes thought this sudden plunge amid the marvels of the torrid zone "the finest fun in the world". But they might have felt somewhat more serious if they had overheard the talk that Lord Heathermoor and Mr. Thurraboy were having next door at that moment, over their chota-hazree (little breakfast) of bread-and-butter, Ceylon tea, and bananas—the regular East Indian preface to the "big breakfast" later on.

"Our boys had better know nothing of all this for the present," said Heathermoor, cautiously lowering his voice in deference to the thinness of the partition. "After all, it's not certain yet that there is anything wrong; and if there is, they'll know it quite soon enough."

"I quite agree with you," replied Thurraboy in the same

tone. "Now, just let me see if I have the story clear. Colonel Huntley came back here from Borneo last October, intending to remain in Singapore till you came to fetch him; and at that time he got your letter telling him to expect you towards the end of April, and he wrote you one in reply, which must have been lost on the way. Is that correct, so far?"

"Right to a T," answered his friend.

"Then, about Christmas-time, the governor asked him as a special favour (he being the only man at hand at that moment with experience enough for the job) to go and 'take over' one of the smaller Malay islands, which had just put itself under British protection. So he went, and remained there till the end of January, when he was relieved by a young fellow sent out from here to take charge of the place. Isn't that so?"

"Quite correct."

"A despatch from the young fellow was received here early in February, reporting his arrival, and the finding of 'everything in perfect order, thanks to Colonel Huntley's excellent arrangements'. But he didn't state whether the colonel had left or was still there; and since that despatch—that is to say, for nearly three months—nothing more has been seen or heard of Huntley. That's how the case stands up to date, eh?"

"Point for point; and whether poor Huntley has left that island, or whether anything has happened to him there, it's plain enough what we have to do. To write and enquire would be hopeless, for a letter would take weeks and weeks to get to an out-of-the-way place like that, and I don't suppose the governor could spare us his despatchboat. We must just go over there ourselves, and find out

what has become of him."

"Just what I think," cried Thurraboy; "and the sooner we do it the better. But, by the bye, didn't you say last night that the yacht was crippled?"

"So she is, worse luck! She's leaking, beyond a doubt—I suppose that storm must have strained her timbers—and then that bit of machinery that we tinkered up in the Red Sea has come to grief again, and must be thoroughly repaired. In fact, I should say it'll be nearer five weeks than four before she's fit for sea again; and you don't suppose I'm going to sit doing nothing all that time, while my best friend may be dying for what I know."

"Then there's nothing for it, I suppose, but just to get

there by one of these coasting traders?"

"That's the only thing we can do; and I'm going down to the docks directly to see if I can find anything outward-

bound through the islands."

"No, I've got a better plan than that. You go down and look after the yacht, and let me send a note to this young Pennaline. He seems to be a good sort of fellow, and he's offered to help us any way he can; and besides, being an official, he's bound to know everything that comes into the port or goes out of it. I'll just tell him what we want, and ask him to let us know if he hears of anything going that way."

Mr. Thurraboy did so; and their two o'clock tiffin (lunch) was hardly over when back came the following reply:—

"Dear Sir.

"I would have come to see you myself, but this is rather a busy day with us, the English mail having just come in. Immediately on receiving your note I sent down my chuprassie (native lackey) to the port, and he has just brought me word that there is a light trading schooner (the Sultana—John Barshot, master) expected to sail in about five days' time for some of the lesser Spice Islands, passing close enough to the place that you wish to reach, to be able to land you there without any difficulty. Captain Barshot will call upon you at the hotel some time

this afternoon. If I can be of any further use to you in any way, pray command me. I enclose a short note of recommendation to the English resident at present in charge of the island.

"Yours sincerely,

"H. PENNALINE."

CHAPTER XI

A NEW WAY OF BEING PRESENTED AT COURT

MEANWHILE the boys were enjoying themselves to the full, happily innocent of all these forebodings. All that they knew about the matter was that, as Colonel Huntley had not been able to meet them here, they were to go and meet him somewhere else (where, neither of them ever thought of asking), and, the yacht being crippled, they would have to go in a trading coaster, which struck them as rather amusing than otherwise.

Heathermoor and Thurraboy being fully taken up with their preparations, the two lads were thrown pretty much upon themselves for the disposal of their time; and they

certainly made good use of it.

They tramped all over the citadel, addressing with boyish heartiness (to the visible horror of the soldiers) a prim and rather stern-looking old gentleman that they encountered on the way, who turned out to be no other than the commandant himself. They raced each other at full speed along the whole front of the Esplanade, to the unbounded astonishment of the grave Asiatics who witnessed the performance. They examined every nook of the town museum, being especially delighted with the skeletons of the Borneo orang-outangs. They took a row in the open roadstead all by themselves, and, when a sudden squall capsized their boat, they coolly got astride the keel, held up their coats for sails, and drifted back into the harbour, with the help of wind and current, before the eyes of an amazed crowd many hundreds strong. marched out to the public garden outside the town, and, 107

being attracted by the sight of a strange-looking bunch-like object perched on the lowest bough of one of the trees, they poked at it with their sticks till the whole concern (which proved to be a nest of particularly ferocious red ants) came plump down upon a passing group of natives, with a result more easily imagined than described.

"I'll tell you what, Alf," said Marmaduke on the second evening of their energetic sight-seeing, "this sort of thing's all very fine, you know, but I don't call this seeing a foreign country properly. We've hardly been outside the town yet, barring that once to the public garden; and we haven't much time left now, for that jolly old ship of ours is by way of sailing the day after to-morrow. Now, I'll just tell you what we'll do: we'll go out the first thing to-morrow morning, and take a kreta (carriage), and carry some lunch with us, and go slap across the island to the other side, and see what there is to be seen there."

"Right you are!" cried Huntley; "and when we get there we'll send the carriage back, and walk home in the cool of the day, after we've seen all we want—it's only

fourteen miles, they say."

The motion was carried nem. con., and by half-past six on the following morning our heroes, having hastily swallowed their early breakfast, and left word at the office whither they had gone, were rolling off through the town

on their new expedition.

Away, away they went, past the wide, smooth green from the midst of which rose the Gothic arches and stately tower of St. Andrew's Church—past the Alexandra Hotel—round the base of the hill from which the guns of Fort Canning look watchfully down over their trim breastwork of green turf upon the sleeping town below—and then out at last into the far-extending vista of leafy Orchard Road, along which the glory of the sunrise was streaming as if through the aisle of some vast cathedral.

"This is something like!" cried Wyvil, drinking in the

fresh, pure air with as keen a relish as if he had just come out of the Black Hole of Calcutta. "After all, the tropics

aren't as bad as some people make 'em out."

"Mr. Thurraboy wouldn't agree with you there," said Huntley. "Do you remember that song he sang us the other day, where some romantic young lady was 'gushing' about the East, and her travelled cousin was chaffing her? Let's see, how did it go?

"SHE

"'How sweet to rove 'mid balmy skies Where Eden's fragrance lingers, Where fairest flowers delight the eyes, And brightest gems the fingers!'

"HE

"'Well, don't be quite so sure of that! You'd find those climes a do, love-The Ganges' banks are awful flat, The plague's at Hang-choo-foo, love; The 'balmy skies' of fair Cashmere Do nought but patter, patter, And 'fingers' are employed, my dear, Mosquito foes to batter!""

"Ah, that's only chaff!" replied Marmaduke with an air of superior authority. "But, talking of Mr. Thurraboy, what do you think I heard him say to my father last night? He said he meant to make a story out of this voyage, and that he was going to put both of us into it. Won't it be stunning?"

"Well, I'm not quite so clear about that, do you know?" said Huntley. "How would you like, for example, to have him tell everybody how we got stuck on that old coral reef in the Red Sea, with a shark mounting guard over the pair

of us?"

"Hang it all, I'd forgot that!" cried Wyvil in dismay. "Well, we must just ask him to leave that bit out, that's all."

And now, as the houses of the town sank away behind them, long green lines of indigo and tapioca began to spring up along either side, alternating with dark masses of foliage, in the midst of which our heroes caught a passing glimpse every now and then of a big white gateway, with a ridge-topped roof inlaid with coloured porcelain, showing where some rich Chinese trader had established

his country-house and "garden of ease".

Little by little the clustering trees fell away on either hand, and wide green uplands, flecked with dark clumps of undergrowth, began to rise on the left. Our heroes passed one or two white-jacketed Englishmen in huge umbrella-like "sun-hats", cantering home to breakfast from their morning ride, and at a sharp turn of the road they narrowly escaped bumping into a queer-looking native omnibus, in which a score of unlucky Chinamen were jammed together like sardines, so tightly that when the door was opened the first man was blown out into the road as if fired from a gun.

The thirteenth milestone was at length left behind—then the fourteenth—and now a sudden glitter through the bushes that overhung the road in front of them told our quick-eyed lads that they had fairly crossed the island, and were close to the strait dividing it from the mainland of Malacca. Sweeping round a sudden bend of the highway, they pulled up in front of a neat little whitewashed police-station close to the water's edge, and, having paid and dismissed their driver, discovered, to their no small satisfaction, that it was not yet nine o'clock, and that they still had the whole day before them.

Their first proceeding, when left to themselves, was to run furiously along the level shore for half a mile or so, and then back to their starting-point, three or four times over, by way of "taking the knots out of their legs", as Wyvil poetically phrased it, after sitting still so long. But this being an amusement which is apt to pall upon one after a while, beneath a tropical sun (for, early as it was, the heat was by this time beginning to make itself felt in earnest), our heroes at length ceased their exercises, and, wiping their streaming faces, sat down in the shade to "cool off" and to look about them.

"Look there, Duke!" cried Huntley, pointing to a large white building of Eastern aspect which showed itself through the trees of the opposite shore, "that must be the place they told us about at the hotel, the Maharajah of Johore's

palace, you know."

"And a grand place it is!" cried Wyvil; "if the inside's as good as the outside, it ought to be worth seeing. I say, wouldn't it be a lark to go across and pay the old swell a morning call? I dare say we could get a boat at the stationhouse vonder. What do you say? Shall we try it?"

"I don't think we could very well do that," objected his "They say he's a very hospitable old cooler comrade. fellow, and I know plenty of people do go to see him, but I believe you've got to arrange it all beforehand, and to let him know just what time you're coming, so that he can have all ready for you; it don't do to pop in upon him happy-go-lucky. Perhaps when we come back here after picking up my father we might go and call upon the Maharajah in a body."

"Well," cried Marmaduke with a grin, "I shall do like that Frenchman in Jules Verne's yarn of From the Earth to the Moon, who, whenever they were puzzled what to do, used always to sing out: 'Let us have breakfast'. I feel

as if I could do some, don't you?"

"Well," chuckled Alfred, "I agree with Mr. Thurraboy that 'an Englishman's meal-time is whenever he can get

anything to eat'."

In fact, their six-o'clock meal had been a pretty light one, and it was now between nine and ten, so they opened their provision-bag and ate as only English schoolboys can.

"I say," cried Wyvil, as the meal ended, "it's getting iolly warm here. I vote we go in and have a swim."

"Hadn't we better hold on a bit? They say it's not good

to bathe directly after a meal."

"Oh, bother! you'd never let a fellow do anything, with

all those objections of yours. I'm going in, anyhow.

Huntley yielded, and in a trice the two lads (who were both excellent swimmers) were cleaving their way through the clear, cool water with an intensity of enjoyment only to be appreciated by those who have made trial for themselves of tropical heat and dust.

"Look here, that channel's not much of a breadth after all," cried Marmaduke suddenly, glancing across the strait, which, with that fatal deceptiveness of distance so common in the Eastern seas, appeared barely half its real breadth of three-quarters of a mile. "I could swim across and back as easy as look at it. Here goes!"

And ere Alfred had time to remonstrate, his adventurous

chum skimmed away like a dolphin.

Huntley was not a little disturbed, for he had a better eye for distances than his reckless comrade, and he saw at once all the peril of the undertaking, even apart from the worse danger of sharks. But it was now too late to interfere, and he had to content himself with keeping well out toward the mid-channel, in order to come at once to his friend's assistance in case of any mishap.

Well was it, indeed, that he did so, for all at once he heard a hoarse cry from Wyvil, and saw the latter stop

swimming and begin to struggle violently.

"Keep up! I'm coming!" hallooed Alfred, darting toward

him like an arrow.

Quick as he was, however, the struggling swimmer's head disappeared under water ere Huntley could reach him, though only to rise again instantly; but he was just sinking a second time when Alfred clutched him by the hair with one hand, while paddling strongly with the other.

Twice Huntley shouted for help with all his might, and then turned toward the shore with his helpless burden, who was luckily too much exhausted to cling to him, or even to struggle.

But all other chances seemed against the brave lad in this unequal match with death. He was several hundred yards from the nearest point of land, burdened with a helpless comrade, and himself sorely spent with the desperate rush that he had made, and now, to his horror, he suddenly perceived that the current was carrying him, not toward the shore, but away from it, right out into the middle channel!

Again he shouted with the full power of his voice, while fighting his way against the fatal eddy with all the strength of desperation. His cries had evidently been heard at the police-station, where two or three men were hurriedly unmooring a boat; but it seemed only too probable that this succour, distant as it was, would come too late to save him.

But just as he felt himself about to sink-though he never for an instant relaxed his hold of his powerless companion-a loud shout from behind made him turn his head. Through the salt water that filled his smarting eyes he saw dimly a huge gilded barge bearing down upon him-a confused vision of dark faces, bare arms, embroidered robes. and painted oars hovered above him for a moment-and then everything seemed to swim before his eyes, a hollow roaring sounded in his ears, the waters closed over his head, and (as tenth-rate novelists say when they wish to be impressive) "all was a blank".

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CHAPTER XII

A MALAY KING AT HOME

THE blank, however, was not so complete but that Alfred had a vague consciousness of being seized and dragged up out of the water by several strong hands; and when he was able to open his eyes, and to collect his scattered senses (which kept swimming some time longer than himself), he found that he was lying, wrapped in a thick shawl, on the deck of a nondescript-looking craft, something between an overgrown gondola and a model of the Venetian doge's state galley. Beside him, similarly shawled, lay Wyvil, still unconscious; and a slim, good-looking young man—in European dress, but with unmistakably Asiatic features—was bending anxiously over them both.

"Well, how do you feel now?" asked the young Malay in excellent English, assisting our hero to sit up. "None the

worse, I hope?"

"No, I think I'm all right, thank you," replied Huntley, looking round him, and seeing to his relief that Wyvil was beginning to stir likewise. "But where on earth are we?"

"On board of his highness's state barge," replied his new

friend.

"And who is his highness, then?" asked Alfred with a puzzled air.

"The Maharajah of Johore," said the other with a slight

smile.

"The Maharajah of Johore!" echoed Huntley in dismay, for indeed he might well be scandalized at the thought of presenting himself before "a real live king" in the costume of the Fighting Gladiator or the Apollo Belvidere. "Con-

found it all, I can't go before him without a rag to my back! What the dickens has become of our clothes?"

"Here they are, all right," answered the Malay, smiling again, as two of the native crew came wading through the shallow water with the missing "properties" in their arms, the barge having run close inshore to enable them to do so.

Alfred resumed his long-lost clothes with marked satisfaction, and then helped to dress Marmaduke, who had by this time come to himself, and was beginning to understand the situation.

Huntley had just had time to explain to him, in a few whispered words, how they had both been saved, when the barge ran alongside the landing-place of Johore Bharu (New Johore), and the crowd of natives assembled there drew back respectfully to make way for the stepping ashore of a portly, digniffed, elderly gentleman—all in white but for the short coloured sarong (skirt) worn by all Malays—whom Alfred rightly guessed to be the Maharajah himself.

The moment Wyvil caught sight of the prince, he went straight up to him, and, holding out his hand with boyish

frankness, said unceremoniously:

"Thank you very much, Mr. Maharajah, for coming to help us; it would have been a bad job for us if you hadn't."

"From what I saw of the affair," answered "Mr. Maharajah" in perfectly good English, grasping the offered hand with a smile of quiet amusement, "you should thank your friend rather than me; for you would have been drowned if he had not held you up."

"But we should both have been drowned if your highness had not kindly come to our assistance," said Huntley, whose natural quickness had already begun to pick up the ways of the East, "and I'm extremely sorry that we should have given you so much trouble."

"No trouble at all," said the Maharajah courteously; "on the contrary, I am very glad that I had the good fortune to come up so opportunely. But now that you have come so close to my house, you really must not go away again without paying me a visit; my secretary will show you the way. Abd'ul Rahman, will you take charge of these gentlemen, and see that they have everything they require. I must ask you to excuse me for the present, gentlemen, as I have some business to attend to; but I shall hope for the pleasure of your company at breakfast later on."

And with a graceful Eastern bow the hospitable prince

turned away.

"Well," said Marmaduke, looking after him with a school-boy grin, "I think the 'uncivilized East' takes the shine out of the civilized West in manners, anyhow! Here we come tumbling, without a rag to our backs, right into the private boat of a man we've never seen before (and a king into the bargain), and all he does is to invite us to breakfast! It strikes me that if we'd played the same game with some of these jolly old kings in Europe, they'd have been much more likely to ask for the pleasure of our company at the nearest prison!"

And then, leaving the Maharajah to confer with a small, slight, keen-eyed man in English dress, who had just landed from a tiny steam-launch—no less a personage, in fact, than a British commissioner, who had come to speak with him on some public business—our heroes moved away toward the palace, escorted by the young Malay who had attended

them on the barge.

"Where did you learn English so well, Mr. Abd'ul-Rahman?" asked Wyvil as they walked along. "I suppose

you've been in India."

"I've been in England," said the Malay quietly; "in fact I was educated there, and that was where I learned to play cricket."

"Oho! you can play cricket, can you?" cried Marmaduke with sparkling eyes. "That's your style! When we come

back this way we must get up a match, and have you in it. I suppose, then, the Maharajah has been in England too?"

"Indeed he has—he has been all over it, and likes it

very well."

"What is the Maharajah's name, by the bye?" asked Huntley.

"Abu-Bekr" (Father of the Virgin), replied Abd'ul-

Rahman.

"Abu-Bekr!" echoed Alfred; "wasn't that the name of your first caliph—the one that came after the Prophet himself, you know?"

"Aha! you know our history, then?" said the Mussulman, visibly pleased to find a "Western unbeliever" so

well posted in the records of the faithful.

"We had to get it up at school, you know," answered Huntley, with whom Washington Irving's Successors of Mahomet had been quite a favourite study. "And, now I think of it, your namesake was a famous man too—the Emir Abd'ul-Rahman (Servant of the Merciful), who invaded France, and got licked by Charles Martel."

"Come, I say, Alf, what on earth's the good of reminding him of that?" whispered Wyvil reprovingly, evidently apprehensive of the young Moslem's feelings being hurt by this allusion to the defeat inflicted on his co-religionists

only eleven hundred years before.

But just then their attention was seasonably diverted to the scene around them, which was certainly well worth

looking at.

Beneath the shade of stately palms, and broad-leaved tropical growths of every kind, they came up to a wide, red-tiled stair, by which they ascended to the spacious terrace that ran along the whole front of the palace. Thence they reached a magnificent archway ("fit for one of the gates of Troy", as Alfred justly remarked) in the ample shade of which, between two huge Chinese vases filled with choice exotics, stood three or four light cane chairs and a

small round table, showing that the possessor of this paradise fully appreciated that charming retreat, which must indeed have been a delightful resting-place in the freshness of some glorious summer morning, with the first rays of sunrise streaming over the green leaves and gorgeous flowers all around, or sparkling on the countless ripples of the blue tropical sea.

As our heroes entered, half a dozen dusky Malay lackeys, in dark blue braided with gold, came forward with a low salaam to take charge of their sun-hats. Passing on into a vast many-pillared hall (which subdued the burning sunshine into a rich purple twilight worthy of the Alhambra itself), they ascended to the upper floor by a splendid marble stair, half-way up which—a strange sight indeed among the portrait-hating followers of Mohammed—was an excellent full-length likeness of Mr. Gladstone.

The bed-room into which they were shown was neatly furnished in the English style, and had a lofty, arched entrance, admitting a free current of air both above and below the swinging half-doors of light lattice-work that closed it. The only unusual feature about it was the presence of two narrow, spiral stairs, which seemed to go right down through the middle of the floor.

"Well, Alf," said Wyvil, as they washed off the remains of the salt water, and did their best to arrange their wet and disordered hair, "how about the Arabian Nights now? Isn't this just like one of those yarns where a fellow loses his way, and turns up in an enchanted palace, and has a high old time there, just as if the whole place belonged to him?"

"Only, if I recollect right, the adventure usually ended with the hero being turned into a frog, or a cockroach, or a costermonger's donkey, for seven years—and I shouldn't quite relish that sort of wind-up. I say, I wonder where these two stairs lead down to?"

"The best way to find out is to go and see," quoth Marmaduke coolly, suiting the action to the word. "What a lark if we were to find a treasure-vault jam-full of diamonds, or a 'loathsome dungeon' containing a select party of skeletons, neatly fitted up with 'blood-rusted fetters'!"

"Or somebody walled up in a niche, like what's-her-name

in Marmion."

"Or a thumping big helmet with a lot of black feathers

on it, like that old thing in The Castle of Otranto."

"Or an old boy in rusty armour, with his own head tucked neatly under his arm like an opera-hat—or anything else in a small way! Whichever you please, my little dears; you pays your money, and you takes your choice!"

But none of these romantic visions were realized; for the mysterious stairs led only to a couple of bath-rooms on the

floor beneath.

"Well," said Marmaduke, "I think the bath we've just had is about enough for one morning; I don't feel like wanting any more just now. After all, though, this job has been worth twice the drowning, if only for the fun of it!"

"I would not have thought so at the time, though," said Alfred gravely; "for, upon my word, I thought once that

it was all up with us both!"

"Well, old fellow," cried Wyvil, clapping him on the shoulder, "you know it's not my style to strike attitudes or make a big fuss, but I sha'n't forget that you saved my life,

and nearly got drowned yourself in doing it!"

"Yes, it was a close shave," admitted Huntley. "It would have been a blue look-out for us if our friend the Maharajah hadn't turned up when he did. But come, let's be going downstairs; it won't do to keep the old swell waiting for breakfast."

"Or to keep ourselves waiting either," chuckled Wyvil.
"I don't know if drowning generally gives one an appetite,

but I feel as if I'd eaten nothing for a week!"

They found breakfast laid in the pillared hall below, the

party consisting of the Maharajah, the English commissioner, Abd'ul-Rahman, and themselves; and now, for the first time, they were able to take a good view of their royal host.

The Maharajah Abu-Bekr was already advanced in years, but his stately figure had hitherto remained unspoiled by that tendency to "flesh" so unfortunately general among Eastern potentates. The appearance of age given to him by his long white moustache, and by the snowy hair that escaped from beneath the round, flat-topped cap which covered his head, was amply belied by the firm lines of his swarthy face, regular and massive as a bronze statue; and, altogether, he looked the very model of a civilized Mohammedan prince of the nineteenth century. Nor was the background unworthy of this splendid central figure, to which the graceful pillars of the great hall, its tessellated pavement of black-and-white marble, and the tall, bluefrocked, crimson-turbaned Malay soldier, who was pacing up and down with shouldered musket at the far end of the room, formed very appropriate accessories.

To the great satisfaction of the boys, the prince talked freely enough about his travels, the extent and variety of which amazed our heroes, who had not themselves seen one

in twenty of the places he described.

"I think of going to America next," said he. "It will be a change after Japan (which was my last tour), and there must be a great deal to see in New York. I liked England very well, only the large towns are so terribly smoky. Do you know what one of my people said the first time he saw Liverpool? He pointed to the masts standing up all along the river, and said they looked like dead trees left standing in a burned jungle; and when we got to Manchester, and he saw the tall factory chimneys, they reminded him of cocoa-palms with the tops cut off."

"He wasn't far wrong either," put in the commissioner

with a chuckle.

"I was very well pleased with London, though, and with Edinburgh too," resumed the Maharajah; "and I was lucky enough to meet Mr. Gladstone and several more of your leading men, who were all very kind to me. Mr. Gladstone told me I ought to go and see Australia, and I hope to do so one of these days after I come back from America."

Breakfast over, the commissioner took his leave, and the Maharajah withdrew, after again amazing our heroes by politely enquiring "at what time it would suit them to have lunch", just as if the palace belonged to them instead of to himself. The indefatigable Abd'ul-Rahman, thus left once more in charge of the pair, at once marched them off

on a tour of inspection through the palace.

First came the great drawing-room, the magnificent size of which was an apt symbol of its owner's hospitality. Its walls were hung with admirable portraits of the present royal family of England, supplemented by the hatchet face and long curled wig of James II, the hooked nose, massive forehead, and keen grey eye of his son-in-law and successor, William III, and the broad, heavy features of that royal glutton whom his enemies justly styled "Gorge the First".

The profusion of ornaments in this marvellous room was as striking as their perfect taste. Tall, slender, convolvulus-shaped glasses of rich purple, as high as a full-grown man, springing up from white marble slabs; dainty little French chairs and tables, that might have served Louis XV; soft Eastern carpets, on which the heaviest tread would sink as noiselessly as a shadow; marble statuettes worthy of the drawing-room in which the Duc de Richelieu received Count Cagliostro; specimens of Satsuma ware, from Japan, such as would make a china-fancier's mouth water; and a Collard piano, which, though somewhat marred by long disuse, was still able to fill the whole room with its tones.

The farther side of the room was shut off by a row of closed doors from the apartments of "her highness the

Maharanee", the prince having (unlike most Oriental sovereigns) only one wife. But though this part of the palace was forbidden ground, there was nothing to prevent the boys exploring the opposite wing; and thither they went accordingly, encountering fresh marvels at every step.

In one room they came upon a beautiful ebony cabinet, inlaid with small squares of superb porcelain, each of which represented a different kind of ware. Beside it stood an excellent photograph of the Maharajah himself, in a neat wooden frame; and a little farther on they found a souvenir of his highness's recent visit to Japan, in a row of enormous porcelain vases, so like the monster oil-jars in which the captain of the "Forty Thieves" concealed his murderous gang that it was easy to imagine a grim, black-bearded visage peering cautiously out of the nearest vase, and whispering: "Is it time?"

Then their untiring guide led them forth into the palace garden, which seemed to hang upon the side of a steep ridge just above the house itself. On the left stood a smaller building with a line of pillars, formerly used by the Maharajah as an audience-hall. On the right a broad carriage-drive curved downward to the little town of Johore, and behind them glittered in the sun the great staircase of the palace, with its polished balustrades and marble steps surmounted by the monogram M.J. (Maharajah of Johore) wrought in coloured stones.

The garden itself, with its splendid tropical plants and flowers, its picturesque ascents and descents, its trim little band-stand on the summit of the ridge, and the magnificent height and breadth of its trees, formed as perfect a picture as could well be imagined; and Abd'ul-Rahman did not fail to point out to them, just beyond, a small but extremely well-kept plantation, in which had been grown (so he told them) the very tea that had regaled them at breakfast.

But just then up came a richly-dressed native lackey to

call them to lunch, which they found laid in a spacious front room on the ground-floor, the two vast open windows of which, looking down upon the garden and the sea below it, disclosed a panorama of gorgeous flowers and dazzling sunshine worthy of a fairy tale.

The Maharajah listened very good-naturedly to their eager account of what they had seen, and answered their praises of his china by telling them that he had a far finer collection in his brother's palace at Tyersall, on the Singapore side, which he had just connected with his own house by a telephone!

"What! have you got a telephone too? Why, you seem to have everything!" cried Wyvil, letting his admiration

somewhat outrun his politeness.

The prince smiled pleasantly, and offered them some wine—for although, as an orthodox Mussulman, he never touched it himself, he always had it on the table for his European guests,—and when the boys declined (for both were staunch water-drinkers, as all healthy boys should be) he said, with a good-humoured laugh, that they seemed to be in some points quite as good Moslems as himself.

"When I was in Scotland," said he, "a waiter at one of the hotels looked so unhappy on hearing that I never touched any kind of liquor, that I had to comfort him by telling him to charge it upon something else. By the bye, there's one thing that I had almost forgotten. If you should go across to Sumatra while you are here, I can give you a letter to a friend of mine there, the Rajah of Medan, who will, I am sure, make you very welcome if you like to visit him. And now let me ask how you intend to go home this evening?"

"Walk," replied Wyvil, as coolly as if a tramp of over fourteen miles along a dusty road, beneath the scorching sun of the Equator were hardly worth mentioning.

"You English are always full of energy," said his highness, smiling. "But that will take you three hours at

least, and perhaps more; so I think it will save you some time if you will allow me to send you home by water in that little steam-launch of mine, which is lying down yonder at the landing.

"While she is getting her steam up, I shall have time to get ready that letter which I promised you; and if you care to have a drive round the town in the meantime, Abd'ul-Rahman will go with you and show you all there is to see."

In a trice a handsome carriage was standing ready for them at the foot of the slope—for in this wonderful place everything seemed to be done as quickly as if the hospitable Maharajah had possessed Aladdin's lamp—and away they went down the one long straggling street of Johore, which, like every other town in those parts, appeared to be literally swarming with Chinese.

Here, too, the boys found plenty to look at, for, apart from the picturesque medley of Malays, Chinamen, Hindoos, Burmans, and Siamese, the curious mingling of East and West in the aspect of the town itself was sufficiently striking. A pretty little mosque stood side by side with a low, whitewashed, red-tiled building which the buzz of voices through its open windows proclaimed to be the village school. A graceful cluster of tall palm-trees overshadowed a smart red-brick "medical dispensary" of genuinely English appearance, and from the midst of a group of Malay hovels, thatched with dried grass, peeped forth a trim little white cottage, bearing on its low front, in neatly-painted black letters, the magic words "POST-OFFICE".

"Did the Maharajah really do all this himself?" asked Marmaduke.

"Indeed he did," replied Abd'ul-Rahman; "and every bit of it at his own expense."

"Well, he must be a brick!" cried Wyvil; and Huntley cordially assented.

Then Abd'ul-Rahman proceeded to tell them about the visits of General Grant, and the Duke of Edinburgh, to

Johore, after the latter of whom the landing-place itself was named; and, just as the story ended, they came down to the landing, and found all ready for their departure.

Taking a cordial leave of their friendly guide, and charging him with their best thanks to the Maharajah, the two boys went aboard the steam-launch, over which his highness's private ensign fluttered jauntily. Away flew the brisk little craft like a sea-bird, and, less than an hour later, our heroes were safely landed in the "European quarter" at Singapore, very well satisfied with their day's work.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DEADLY CALM

AH, this is something like! What a treat it is to feel a regular sea-breeze again, after that sweltering atmosphere on shore! People may say what they like about 'the glories of cloudless tropical skies', but they forget the miseries of airless tropical nights. I agree with the Yankee captain: 'I guess, if all them tropics are like the two that I've seen, I don't want any more of 'em!'"

So spoke Lord Heathermoor, expanding his broad chest in a long breath of enjoyment, as he stood upon the Sultana's deck at sunrise on the morning after their departure from Singapore, having left his yacht behind for repairs, under

the charge of her trusty first officer, Mr. Walters.

"Why, what's set you against the tropics so, Daddy?" cried Wyvil. "They're a jolly place enough, so far as we've seen them!"

"Ah, my dear fellow, you haven't half seen them yet!" struck in Mr. Thurraboy. "You'll know more about them when you wake up from your night's rest (!) with an arm like raw beef from 'prickly heat', and a face so disfigured with mosquito-bites that your own shadow wouldn't know you, to shake a scorpion out of one boot and a poisonous snake out of the other, unearth half a dozen cockroaches as big as young lobsters from among your clothes, and then find a bandicoot-rat breakfasting upon your two-dollar photographs, and a swarm of white-ants making copious extracts from your last batch of new books!"

"True enough; and I'm much mistaken, boys, if this very trip don't give you such a taste of the tropics as you

haven't bargained for," said Heathermoor, little thinking how terribly prophetic those words were to be.

For a time, however, the much-abused tropics seemed determined to give no cause for fault-finding. The fair wind that had followed them from Singapore kept with them all that day and all the next; and, having crossed the Equator (on which occasion Mr. Thurraboy revived the good old joke of stretching a hair across the telescope, and showing Wyvil the Line), they ran gallantly down the coast of Sumatra, and stood into the Sunda Strait just as the sun was beginning to sink on the third evening.

"Hollo! there's Mount Cockatoo lightin' another cigar!" cried Captain Barshot, as a light breath of bluish-white smoke was seen to hover above the gloomy crest of Krakatoa, the huge dark pyramid of which now rose gauntly up from the smooth, sunlit sea right ahead of them. "He's

been a-playin' that game pretty often of late."

"Has he indeed?" exclaimed Mr. Thurraboy quickly. "What's the reason of that?"

"Oh, I don't know—it's no consarn o' mine!" replied Captain Barshot, who was a worthy representative of that large class of people who never take the trouble to understand or enquire into anything lying one inch beyond their own regular beat. "Every time I've come this way of late, he's been a-puffin' away like that—that's all I know about it!" And the worthy captain uttered the last words in a tone which suggested that what he did not know about it could not be worth knowing at all.

"Heathermoor," whispered the author, with ominous significance, "do you remember that grim sunset that we

saw off the coast of Ceylon?"

"What?" cried Lord Heathermoor with a slight start, "do you think——"

"I think," rejoined the author emphatically, "that the sooner we're away from here the better!"

Meanwhile the two lads-who had heard nothing of this

ominous by-play—were enjoying the beautiful panorama of the famous strait, and admiring the pretty little Dutch towns, which, bathed in all the splendour of a tropical sunset, sentinelled the passage on either hand—Teluk Betong on the Sumatra side, and Anjer upon the Java shore.

"Aren't they pretty?" cried Wyvil; "I should like nothing better than to have a day or two here. If we come back this way, we must try and get the captain to

let us go ashore."

Poor lads! no foreboding came to warn them that they would never see that fair scene again, and that, less than four months later, old seamen who knew that strait by heart would grope their way through it in bewilderment, without seeing one familiar feature amid the league-broad chaos of ruin left by the awful catastrophe which had blotted from the earth those doomed towns and their ill-fated inhabitants.

It was almost dark when they glided past the base of Mount Krakatoa, planted like a fort in the midst of the narrowing channel, and the keen-eyed Thurraboy, as he looked up at that vast black pyramid, fancied (was it only fancy?) that he could see a pale, ghostly glow playing around its shadowy summit. But the light, if it really was there, was so faint that he could hardly be sure whether he actually saw it or not.

By sunrise next morning they were well out of the strait into the open sea, and the sinister omens that had haunted

their passage through it were almost forgotten.

But, prosperous as this new voyage had been hitherto, our travellers found it anything but a pleasant one. Even for the seasoned Heathermoor and his equally hardened guest their present quarters were a woeful change from the clean and well-kept little yacht. The Sultana, like most of her class, was dirty to a degree, and literally creeping with cockroaches, which came out in such swarms after dark

that, as Wyvil truly said, "you couldn't walk across the cabin at night without hearing 'em go scrunch at every step, just as if you were treading on eggs."

The berths were scrupulously uncomfortable, and the stifling closeness of the atmosphere was splendidly heightened by the fact that a large part of the cargo consisted of ghee, a peculiarly atrocious kind of "cooking-butter", which, though seemingly a priceless essential in every native kitchen from Borneo to Bombay, would suffice to knock down any ordinary European with the mere smell of it. On first making its acquaintance, Wyvil parodied the carter's cry by calling out "Ghee—woe!" And Huntley kept him in coun tenance by remarking that he quite understood now why the Hindoostanee word for "take care" was "butter-'em".

The Sultana's bill of fare was such that our heroes ceased to wonder why a sailor's worst term of insult should be "son of a sea-cook"; and Captain Barshot, who had been recommended to them as a "rough diamond", proved to be such a very rough one that the hot-blooded Heathermoor required all his self-command to keep him from an open quarrel. In fact, the master of the Sultana seemed to pride himself on thinking solely of his own personal interest, or, as he phrased it, "going in for what pays", and on being as insensible as a hog to everything beyond that limit.

"What on earth's the use," he would growl, with a deeper flush on his broad, heavy face, which combined the hues of a tropical sunrise with those of a raw beef-steak -"what on earth's the use, I say, of bothering one's head about what people used to do three or four thousand years ago? It's what people are doing now that one wants to know. I don't eat my dinner a bit better after somebody's told me that this stone was stuck up by Pharaoh, or Julius Cæsar, and that that 'un was knocked down by Nebuchadnezzar. I'd a deal sooner have you tell me if I'll get any cargo at Singapore or Bombay. Talking of Nebuchadnezzar, why ever do folks go making all this fuss about Nineveh (B 533)

and Babylon? I wouldn't give a rotten rope-yarn to see the pair of 'em this minute! Why, when all's said and done, I'll be bound Babylon wasn't anything like as big as London, and hadn't as many people in it neither!"

"But in point of architecture, perhaps-" Thurraboy was beginning, when the unceremonious captain indignantly

cut him short.

"Architecture indeed! architecture be blowed! anybody want to stick up such buildings as them nowadays? Why, o' course not! Well, then, what the dickens is the good of goin' and starin' at them for nothing? I'll tell you what; I'm just sick and tired of the row that people make about foreign places-that's what I am! They go and read a pack o' nonsense that's been written about them parts by other fools like themselves, and then go out there and work themselves up to believe it all, and come home and go on about it till they drive everybody stark mad. The only description I ever read of those rubbishing old places that was worth twopence was that book of Mark Twain's, The Innocents Abroad."

"Yes, I can easily believe that that sort of description would just suit you, Captain," said Lord Heathermoor with a sarcasm so delicate that it was wholly lost upon the bull-hided captain, though the two boys fully appreciated

it, and inwardly chuckled.

"There's Jerusalem now," pursued this self-appointed lecturer, with a more uncompromising emphasis than ever; "the row that people keep on making over that place, calling it 'a sacred spot', 'a home of the past', and all that sort o' rubbish-why, it's downright disgusting, that's what it is! I'll tell you just what I call it—a dirty hole!"

And here the honest skipper, warmed by his own eloquence, paused to nod his huge shaggy head in approval of this concluding definition, which he evidently considered to have summed up the matter very neatly indeed.

"Well done, Captain! I had really no idea that you

possessed such a talent for description," said Mr. Thurraboy with perfect gravity. "Upon my word, you ought to write a book yourself, and save us poor travellers the trouble of going abroad at all, by proving to us conclusively that there is nothing worth seeing upon the face of the earth except warehouses, shipping-offices, and cargo-boats, and that anyone who may be fool enough to waste his time upon such trash as art, science, or history is unworthy to call himself an Englishman!"

Heathermoor gallantly choked down a laugh, and the worthy captain, whose narrow intellect could never take in the possibility of anyone presuming to chaff him, looked

somewhat puzzled, and relapsed into silence.

Well would it have been had this been the worst, but Captain Barshot's obstinate and arrogant self-confidence was fated to work far deeper harm in another way.

Ere he had been twenty-four hours aboard the Sultana, Lord Heathermoor had discovered, to his no small dismay (for he had taken for granted that any vessel would be well-armed and equipped when bound on a cruise through an endless maze of islands swarming with fierce and treacherous savages), that there was not a single cannon or musket

in the whole ship.

"This is what comes of taking things on trust," said he bitterly to Thurraboy. "If I had only had the sense to find this out before we sailed, I could have brought my three rifles and my revolver along with me; it would have been always better than nothing. But who could have thought that any man could be such a suicidal fool? and in the Malay Archipelago too, where, as everyone knows, you may make twenty-nine voyages without a sign of danger, and then be robbed and murdered on the thirtieth!"

His friend was quite as much disturbed by this discovery as himself, and they lost no time in broaching the subject to the captain, who received their remonstrances with his

usual politeness.

"Guns be hanged! what should we want with them? I've sailed these seas in this here craft these ten years and more, and I've never had no bother that a belaying-pin or a capstan-bar couldn't settle d'rectly. We used to carry three or four carronades at first, but we never needed 'em, and all they did was just to lumber up the deck when I wanted more storage-room for cargo; so I just got rid of the lot. I ain't afraid of these niggers—I don't know if you are!"

Lord Heathermoor's eyes shot fire, and he made one stride forward, with a look so ominous that Thurraboy clutched him hastily by the arm, and whispered:

"Leave him to me; whatever's the use of quarrelling with a fellow like that?"

Then, turning to Barshot, the author said as courteously as ever: "We never thought of supposing that you were afraid, Captain, I assure you; but still, there's no harm in being on the safe side, and if I were in your place, I think I should lay in a few muskets at the first Dutch port we touch at—just in case of need, you know."

An angry glow deepened the skipper's raw-beef complexion, and, facing sharp round upon them, he said, in a voice that might have matched the growl of a bear over-

looked by its keeper at feeding-time:

"Look ye here, gentlemen both; I'm the master of this here craft, and I don't need nobody to teach me my business. You've took your passage aboard o' me for Pulo Bintang, and I'm a-goin' to carry you there; but as for h'offering me advice what to do on the way—why, thank ye kindly, but when I want it, I can ask for it!" And away strutted the offended autocrat, ruffling up like an enraged turkey-cock.

"Nothing to be done there," said Thurraboy, shrugging his shoulders. "As my late friends the Somaulis used to be always saying, 'it's our destiny, and who can avert it?"

From that time forth, however, a nameless foreboding of evil weighed down the two brave men like a nightmare, and lay doubly heavy upon Heathermoor, to whose anxiety about the fate of his old friend, Colonel Huntley, was now superadded a far more pressing apprehension for the lives of himself and his whole party. Strive as they might to hide their secret fears, both men grew more silent and thoughtful day by day, till even the careless and lighthearted boys noticed and wondered at the change.

It was the eighth day of the voyage, and on the morrow, if all went well, they might hope to sight Pulo Bintang (Star Island), where they expected to find either Colonel Huntley himself or some news of him. This was no small satisfaction to all four of the passengers, for, to crown their other discomforts, the weather was now becoming oppressively sultry, and the heat, cockroaches, and rancid-butter perfume of the cabin had fairly driven them to sleep on deck, and, in fact, to remain there altogether, never going below except to meals.

That day happened to be more than usually hot, and a little after noon the whole four, sitting on deck in the shade,

fairly dozed off to sleep.

But even in their slumber they were vaguely conscious of a sudden ceasing of the motion that had lulled them to sleep, and a marked increase in the heavy closeness of the air. One and all began to be restless, and at length Heathermoor, whose adventurous life had made him a habitually light sleeper, awoke with a start.

The vessel was lying perfectly motionless on the

water!

Could she have run aground, or was she becalmed—which was almost as bad in those perilous waters! He sprang to his feet and looked keenly around him. One glance told him the whole story. Far as the eye could reach, not a ripple stirred the lifeless surface of the glassy sea, upon which the Sultana lay—

"As idle as a painted ship Upon a painted ocean". The favouring breeze, which had been falling ever since sunrise, had now died away altogether, and all was dead calm. This of itself would have been bad enough; but this was not the worst. They were barely half a mile from the shore of a small, low, thickly-wooded islet, on either side of which two smaller ones lay at short distances from each other, the whole five forming a large crescent which seemed to extend itself on either side of the doomed vessel, as if to enclose and cut her off.

Heathermoor's face changed visibly as he swept with his spy-glass the far-extending chain of islands. It was plain that he knew them—and that, too, in no pleasant way. In fact, any veteran of these seas would have recognized them at a glance as one of those wild spots still unappropriated by Holland or Britain, where the lawlessness of the fierce island pirates was still unrestrained, and where, if report spoke truly, more than one ill-fated crew had escaped the fury of wind and wave only to be destroyed by the more merciless ferocity of man.

Just then Captain Barshot, who had also been roused from a mid-day nap, came tramping along the deck and halted beside him. For some days past not a word had been exchanged between the skipper and his passengers beyond what was absolutely necessary; and this uncomfortable state of things secretly galled our honest captain, who, with all his roughness, was by no means so black as many people painted him. Dimly conscious that he might perhaps have been, as he would have phrased it, "a trifle too sharp with 'em", and sincerely anxious, in his own clumsy way, to re-establish friendly relations with his two famous guests, he now thought he saw an opening to do so.

"Are you expecting letters from the shore, that you keep a-lookin' at it so hard?" he called out to Lord Heather-

moor, with a would-be knowing laugh.

"No," said Heathermoor, turning upon him and looking him full in the face, "I am expecting murderers from it!"

CHAPTER XIV

A BEWITCHED VESSEL

STUBBORN and unimpressionable as he was, Barshot was visibly startled, not so much by the ominous words themselves, as the tone and look with which they were spoken.

"Murderers! what d'ye mean?" cried he, with a very

unsuccessful assumption of his wonted confidence.

"I mean just what I say, as you'll see before long," replied Heathermoor in a tone of bitterness very unusual with him. "You would have your own way, and you've had it; and now that you've destroyed us all, and yourself too, I hope you're satisfied!"

And, turning abruptly away, he began to speak in a low

voice to Mr. Thurraboy, who had just come up.

At any other time these hard words would have been more than enough to make the gruff seaman furiously angry, but now his rising rage was chilled by a secret and terrible foreboding, growing stronger every moment, that

this prophet of evil was right.

For now came crowding upon his memory, with unwelcome distinctness, all the many tales he had heard of becalmed crews, which, entangled in this fatal labyrinth of islets, had been attacked, plundered, and then slaughtered to the last man; and these stories—at which he had so often laughed scornfully when safe ashore—did not seem half so improbable now.

True, no living thing had yet shown itself upon the shore of the nearest island, which lay as voiceless and lifeless as if utterly deserted; but who could tell what might be lurking behind that impenetrable mass of green leaves, which hid everything right down to the border of the narrow streak of firm white sand that fringed the water's edge? And if the Malays did fall upon them in earnest—what then?

Barshot's whole ship's company, including himself and his officers, numbered only sixteen men—eighteen with the two elder passengers,—and these eighteen were to face, with no weapons save knives, hatchets, capstan-bars, and belaying-pins, scores, or perhaps even hundreds, of ferocious savages, a good many of whom would certainly have firearms, while every man of the rest would be armed with the long spear and deadly dagger which he had handled from his childhood.

To scale the Sultana's low sides upon each other's shoulders would be child's play for men as supple and agile as the monkeys of their native forests; and though the first who tried it would be met in true English style, yet when the odds were eight or ten to one, it was not hard to guess how the struggle must end. Into what a dilemma had he brought himself by his own headstrong self-confidence!

"Well, perhaps they mayn't come after all," he muttered in a tone of dejection that plainly showed how little faith he himself had in this would-be encouraging suggestion.

Hardly had he spoken, when, looking toward the shore again, he beheld a light native boat, with half a dozen men in her, coming creeping out from behind a low, thickly-wooded point which broke the curve of the bay not far from its western extremity, evidently flanking the mouth of an inlet or small river.

At that very moment—as if to increase the horror of the situation, which certainly needed no heightening—the gay voice of Marmaduke Wyvil (who had been gazing admiringly at the fatal island) was heard to say with a gleeful laugh:

"That's the sort of place to go for the Midsummer holidays—eh, Alf? If I had been Robinson Crusoe, that's just the island I'd have chosen to be chucked ashore on!"

"And when he was there," added Huntley, who, having just awoke from his nap, had not yet noticed the gloomy looks of his companions, "he'd have had plenty of society, for here are a whole lot of aboriginal Sambos coming off in a boat!"

"So they are!" cried Wyvil, "and coming to trade, of course—hurrah! I say, Alf, let's offer 'em our pocket-knives for some native curios; I've heard they're awfully fond of anything in the way of iron or steel!"

And, springing to the bulwarks, he waved his hand to the distant boat, and shouted, in English modified after the unimpeachable standard of Robinson Crusoe:

unimpeachable standard of Robinson Crusoe:

"Hollo, Johnny! you makee boatee come dis way—me habbee someting for show you!"

"Mari do-sini, orang—lekass!" (Come here, man—quick!) hallooed Alfred, in such Malay as he could muster.

But neither the English salutation nor the Malay one seemed to have any effect upon the unsociable islanders, who, after hovering about in the offing for some time in a purposeless kind of way (probably in order to watch the English ship, and see what she was going to do), turned and darted away across the slumbering sea toward the nearest of the smaller islets.

"Don't like that!" growled the captain with a meaning shake of his head.

And a few moments later he saw something else that he liked still less.

Through his telescope (which was an unusually powerful one) Barshot had made out that, close to the wooded point from behind which the Malay boat had issued, the great veil of clustering leaves that seemed to hide the whole island was somewhat thinner than elsewhere; and he now remarked that there flickered over this spot ever and anon,

through the tangled boughs, a keen, bright glitter—unmistakably the glitter of steel. The destroyers were gathering to the slaughter, and the brave man's heart sank as he gazed.

Then suddenly he faced round as if with a violent effort, and, going hurriedly up to Mr. Thurraboy, held out his

hand, and said hastily:

"Look here, sir; you was right, and I was wrong. I've been a precious fool, and that's all about it; but if we're all a-goin' to git our throats cut, that's surely enough without havin' hard words among ourselves into the bargain!"

"I quite agree with you, Captain," replied Thurraboy, grasping the proffered hand heartily. "Let bygones be bygones, and let us try to think how we can escape now!"

"Hullo!" laughed Wyvil at that instant, "the niggers have all cut and run! I suppose it was your bad grammar,

Alf, that frightened 'em away!"

"This is no laughing matter, Duke," said his father gravely. "I don't want to scare you, but you may as well know now as later on. We're going to be attacked, my boy."

"Attacked!" echoed Wyvil with a somewhat startled look; "why, we haven't done anything to them! But surely they'd never have the cheek to try and board us? or, if they did, a few bullets would soon send them flying."

"We haven't a single gun on board," said Heathermoor in his ear. "But, weapons or no weapons, we must just fight it out to the bitter end; for if these fellows get the

best of it, they'll murder every man of us!"

In the midst of the gloomy silence that followed this cheering announcement the cabin-boy's shrill voice was suddenly heard:

"Dinner's ready, please sir!"

The effect of this prosaic summons, addressed to the doomed men in the crisis of that black tragedy, with their lives swaying in the balance and the shadow of death deepening over them all, was so unspeakably absurd that Heathermoor and his comrade laughed in spite of them-

selves. But the captain only looked doubly stern, and answered grimly:

"I don't leave this deck till this job's over, one way or another. Bring us up something here, Tom, and look

sharp!"

The meal, however, was a miserable pretence on the part of everyone but Thurraboy, who seemed to play as good a knife and fork as ever, and again and again one or other of the doomed band stood up to strain his weary eyes over the smooth, bright, merciless sea, in the faint hope of espying some token of the welcome breeze whose coming was apparently the only thing that could save them now. But there was no wind, nor any sign of it.

Turning impatiently from the untasted food, Barshot

cried to the first mate:

"Mr. Reed, call the men aft!"

The men came—a scanty band, rough, ragged, and almost slovenly in appearance, but with a look of stubborn English hardihood on their weather-beaten faces which showed that they could be depended on to the very last.

"My lads," said the captain, pointing to three large boats filled with Malays, which were seen just then coming off from the smaller islands, "those fellows yonder mean to attack us, and I expect their game will be to hang about till they see whether we carry guns, or have many hands on board, and then make a dash at us all of a sudden; so you had better scatter yourselves about the deck, and make as big a show as you can, to look as if there were more of you than there are. When they do come on, we must fight it out to the last, for they'll show us no mercy!"

He spoke very quietly, but, at the last words, Huntley and Wyvil, who stood near him, saw his face harden suddenly, and his hands clench themselves till the muscles stood out like cords; and they now began to realize, for

the first time, the full magnitude of the peril.

It is always difficult for any man to tell beforehand what

his feelings are likely to be on his first encounter with imminent danger and death. The uppermost sensation in the minds of our two heroes, as they watched the approaching savages, was a feeling of absolute rage—a kind of angry disgust at the thought that these wretched scarecrows should dare to molest Englishmen at all. The Malays were now near enough to be plainly visible, and their gaunt, ill-shaped figures, their lean, dark faces and grinning teeth, their uncouth gestures, and their discordant cries were all inexpressibly revolting.

But, as the captain had foretold, the savages made no attempt to come alongside, and contented themselves with circling round the *Sultana* at a respectful distance, making a pretence of fishing, which, however, wholly failed to

impose upon the wary Englishmen.

"Fishing!" growled the veteran first mate, eyeing them grimly; "fine fishing, indeed! That's all very nice and innocent, but I know enough o' them niggers to be sartain that they don't come out twelve or fifteen in a boat just to fish. And then, too, Mr. Thurraboy, d'ye see that every man-Jack of 'em has got a bit o' mattin' round his neck? If there ain't a dagger under every one of them mats, I'll eat my head!"

Meanwhile the crew had followed out Barshot's orders by showing themselves at different points of the deck in such a way as to make their number appear much greater than it really was, and by skilfully rigging several "dummies", which conveyed to the watching savages an impression of other men standing behind deck-houses or leaning against the masts. Altogether, what with these figures, and what with the eighteen men and three boys who were actually on board, the Malays felt convinced that they had upward of thirty Europeans to deal with; and this being at least twice as much as they had expected (for most of the local merchantmen were lightly manned), they seemed inclined to defer their attack till night, espe-

cially as they could not be quite sure that the vessel might not have one or two guns on board, though none were to be seen along her sides.

"It's my belief," said the captain, who was watching them keenly, "that they won't try it now till after dark."

"It's mine too," said Lord Heathermoor, forcing a laugh, "and as it's only half-past three yet, and it won't be quite dark till half-past seven, we have just four hours to live."

This respite, however, so far from bringing any relief to the forlorn band, only intensified the horror of their impending doom. Now that there was nothing to do but to sit idly awaiting their inevitable fate, the horrible suspense of this weary watching for death was so fearful a strain upon their already overtasked nerves that the coming of death itself would have been mercy to it. Many a time during the slow, weary, endless hours of that terrible afternoon, as they sat looking up at the clear bright sky that seemed to mock their misery, and watching in vain for any sign of the long-prayed-for breeze which was their only hope of life, did Heathermoor bitterly realize the tremendous truth of those few graphic words in which an English soldier had once described to him the last assault at Sebastopol:—

"The worst part o' the whole job, to my mind, was the last five minutes afore it begun; and I tell you, sir, when I heard the word given to go for'ard, 'twas just as if somebody had rolled a big stone right off my heart!"

And all this while the sun was shining gloriously in a cloudless sky, and the tiny ripples along the beach danced and sparkled in the golden light, and the green leaves seemed to hover dreamily on the warm, slumbrous air, and beyond them the infinite sea lay sleeping as if no storm had ever ruffled it, and all was calm and beautiful and bright. But in the very midst of all this peace and stillness and beauty the carnival of murder was just about to

begin, and from behind the wooded point that lay abeam (evidently masking some large native village) came a ceaseless din of hoarse shouts and barbaric music, showing that the murderers were on the alert and eager for the slaughter.

More boats had come over from the adjacent islets, and vanished one by one behind the trees of the fatal promontory; but two of them were still hovering about in the offing, as if to watch the movements of the English.

"Is there nothing that we can do to help ourselves?" cried Heathermoor vehemently. "It won't do for English-

men to let themselves be butchered like sheep!"

"We won't do that!" growled the captain with grim significance; "but as for helping ourselves, what can we do? Our only way would be to tow her out of this with boats, and we haven't half enough hands for that—let alone that afore we'd gone a mile the niggers 'ud catch us up and kill the lot of us. If the wind don't get up afore nightfall, we're dished, and that's all about it!"

"But even if we could just hold the deck against them for only half an hour it might make all the difference," cried Heathermoor; "for what we want is to gain time for a breeze to spring up and carry us away. Now, if we could only rig up something in the way of boarding-nets along the

bulwarks."

"No good! we haven't a yard of netting on board," grunted the captain, who seemed to be as despondent now

as he had been presumptuously confident before.

"Well, I'll tell you what we might do," resumed Heathermoor suddenly, "and in fact a friend of mine did do it not so long ago, when he was attacked by the Papuans, eastward a bit from where we are now. He smashed all the empty bottles and jugs in the ship, and strewed the whole deck with the pieces; and then, when the niggers boarded, they cut their bare feet all to bits, while the crew, who were all right in their sea-boots, knocked 'em over like nine-pins." The captain lifted his head quickly, as if somewhat taken with this new idea, but the next moment he let it fall again

despondingly.

"That would be a tiptop dodge if we could try it," said he; "but, bless you, there ain't bottles enough aboard to cover the main-hatch, let alone the whole deck. No, no; if the wind don't get up, the only thing for us to do is to sell our lives as dear as we can."

And here the talk ended, for Heathermoor made no reply, and Thurraboy—who seemed to be deep in thought—had taken no part in the dialogue from first to last. In gloomy silence, the desperate men sat sternly awaiting their doom.

Afternoon waned into evening—evening was fading into night—and still they were there. The western sky was all aflame—the sun sank lower and lower—but still that deadly calm endured unchangingly; and, as the doomed band lifted their haggard eyes to watch the last sunset they were ever to see, it seemed to them as if the light of their own life were going down along with it into darkness.

As the red sun sank toward the sea, the uproar of savage rejoicing from the black shadow of the woods grew louder and fiercer. Plainly the last moment was drawing nigh, and the beleaguered English clenched their hands and set their teeth as they listened.

"I should not mind so much if it were only myself,"

muttered Heathermoor, "but-"

And a glance at the two boys, which said more than any words, completed the unfinished sentence.

Just then there broke from Ashley Thurraboy's lips a short, sharp laugh, which sounded so hideously incongruous in that moment of utter gloom and despair that it startled his companions like a sudden shriek.

"I have it!" cried he, meeting their wondering glances with a look so bright and hopeful that they were doubly

amazed. "When you told that broken-glass story just now, Heathermoor, I felt as if it reminded me of something, only I couldn't think what; but now I have it pat. Come, there's a chance for us after all!"

"And what is your idea, then?" asked the captain and

Heathermoor eagerly, both at once.

The idea was told in a few words; but, brief as they were, they seemed to astonish his hearers beyond measure.

"Well," cried Captain Barshot at length, "that is a dodge, and no mistake! I shouldn't wonder if it got us out of the scrape after all; and, anyhow, it's worth while

to try. You say it has been done before, then?"

"Yes; old De Ruyter, the great Dutch admiral, when he was out in these seas as a merchant-captain, tried it once against some savages who attacked him, and saved himself and his vessel. Besides, you can see for yourself what an advantage it will give us, not only because we should have them at our mercy in a fight, but because there would most likely be no fight at all; the Malays would fancy the ship bewitched, and run away in a panic without striking a blow. That, in fact, was just what did happen in De Ruyter's case."

"Come along," cried the captain, springing to his feet, "we'll set about it this very minute!"

"And I'll make good the loss, you know, Captain," put in Lord Heathermoor.

"That be blowed!" retorted Barshot indignantly. "Why, you don't suppose I'm agoin' to make you pay for helping to save all our lives? I got you into this mess by being too pig-headed to listen to reason, and so it's me that ought to pay—and I will, too! Now, then, let's all git to work."

The two lads, who were seated at a little distance, had only caught a few fragments of this talk, and what they did catch puzzled them not a little. But they were more puzzled still when they saw the hatches of the main-hold



"HE JUST TOOK HOLD OF MY HAND AND PRESSED IT TO HIS FOREHEAD"



taken off, and several casks of the detested ghee hoisted

up and broken open.

"What on earth are they bringing out that horrid rancid butter for?" cried Wyvil. "Do they mean to leave it about for the niggers to eat, and then knock 'em on the head while they're at it?"

"More likely they mean to poison 'em with the smell of it," said Alfred, "and it's quite strong enough to do it, I'm

sure."

But when they saw lump after lump of this greasy compound scooped out and smeared over the deck, till not only the planking itself, but also the edge of the bulwarks all along either side, was as slippery as a skating-rink, our heroes began to understand, and their delight knew no bounds.

"First rate!" shouted Wyvil; "they're making slides all over the deck, to send the niggers sprawling on their noses the minute they set foot on it. Hurrah! Come on, Alf;

let's go and help."

Heathermoor, Thurraboy, and the captain were equally active, and ere long the whole deck was so slippery that even the crew (though wearing their sea-boots, with the soles well sanded) could hardly keep their feet. As for our two lads and the cabin-boy, they all three made themselves in such a mess with the vile stuff that they might have been scented a hundred yards away.

"And now, Captain," said Thurraboy, "if I may venture to advise you, the men had better lie down and keep out of sight, though all ready to jump up, of course, if these fellows succeed in gaining the deck; for it will frighten the Malays far more, and make them more certain that there's witchcraft in the business, if they see no living soul to oppose them."

The order was given, and in a trice the Sultana lay voiceless and lifeless as a ship of the dead upon the darkening waters. Night came down over sea and sky, and the wolfish

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yells of the unseen murderers on shore suddenly ceased, giving place to a silence more terrible still.

"They're coming!" whispered a voice in Captain Barshot's ear.

"Where away?" asked the captain in the same cautious tone, as he strained his eyes in vain through the gloom; for, the ship's lanterns not being lighted, and the moon having not yet risen, nothing could be seen amid that utter darkness.

"Right astern," replied Heathermoor. "Listen! Don't you hear 'em?"

Both men held their breath, and bent forward to listen. There was no noise of oar or paddle—the savages had been too cunning for that,—but the slight sound made by the heavy boats in forcing their way through the still water, almost imperceptible though it was, could not escape the quick ears of the two practised seamen.

Both were as utterly fearless as any man alive, but all their courage could not wholly repress the thrill that quivered through their strong nerves as they heard that faint and far-off sound which, feeble as it was, heralded the approach of death in its worst form.

Suddenly it ceased, and there was a terrible pause, through which came a whisper from the dark waters below, sharp and sinister as the hiss of a snake:

"Orang-orang puti tidor" (the white men are asleep).

"Ada bai" (it is well), said a second voice, somewhat farther off.

And then the same voice added, in a tone of command:

"Ismail, ka-kanum! Ishak, ka-keri!" (Ishmael, to starboard! Isaac, to port!)

The men to whom the order was addressed promptly obeyed it, and their boats came up, one on each side of the English vessel, almost at the same moment, while half a dozen nimble savages, clambering over the shoulders of

their comrades, made a clutch at the edge of the starboard bulwarks.

Instantly the solid wood seemed to melt away in their grasp, and down they fell with a wild cry, which was hoarsely echoed by their companions, and certainly not without reason; for not merely did the falling men knock four or five of their comrades overboard, but the shock of their fall capsized the boat herself, and in a moment her whole crew were struggling in the water.

At the same instant a terrible hubbub from the port side told that there, too, the assailants had fared no better. In

fact, they had, if anything, fared rather worse.

Three of them had actually succeeded in gaining the deck; but they did so to their cost. The first who leaped down upon the slippery planks shot forward like a skater, and fell head-over-heels down into the main hold, which the wary captain had craftily left open for that very purpose. The second, unable to stop himself, tumbled after him with a howl of terror; while the third flew, head-foremost, from the top to the bottom of the cabin stair, and was apparently either killed or stunned by the fall, the crash of his descent being followed by a dead silence.

All this while no living thing was to be seen upon the Sultana's deck, as if this vessel were herself hurling back her presumptuous foes without any human aid; and this (as Thurraboy had foreseen) intensified a hundred-fold the panic of these superstitious savages, who were already sufficiently terrified by the seeming miracle of their unaccountable defeat, as well as by the mysterious fate of their three missing comrades, whose wild cries, with the utter silence which had succeeded, showed that no good had befallen them.

"Ada koppal hantus/" (it is a ghost-ship) screamed Ismail's followers in chorus.

"Ada koppal Shaitaun!" (it is the ship of the Evil One) howled Ishak's men from the other side.

"Ilmu! ilmu!" (witchcraft, witchcraft) yelled a score of voices at once out of the darkness, in tones tremulous with horror.

Even the crews of the hindmost boats—which had not yet been engaged at all—seemed to have caught the infection of this universal terror. As if by tacit consent, the Malay barks, one and all, drew off from the fatal vessel, while the discomfited pirates busied themselves with picking up such of their comrades as were still floundering in the sea; but they did so in such a flurried and nervous manner that it was abundantly evident that it needed only one boat to set the example of flight for all the rest to follow as fast as their oars could carry them.

Meanwhile the dreaded vessel lay dark and silent as a burial-vault; but it was only by a violent effort of selfcontrol that that silence could be maintained, for the captain and his two elder passengers were literally choking with suppressed laughter, while Huntley and Wyvil felt as

if they must burst on the spot.

"It's the turn of a hair now," whispered Barshot with a stifled chuckle. "Let just one of these niggers start to run away, and you'll see the whole kit of 'em go after him like so many frightened sheep. It's been a tight fit, and no mistake, but I think we've got out of the mess at last!"

The worthy captain was exulting too soon. They were

not out of it yet, by any means.

Scarcely were the words uttered when, as he cautiously raised his head above the bulwarks, the first pale gleam of the rising moon showed him, to the eastward, three more boats flitting ghost-like athwart the long, narrow, wavering streak of light cast by it across the dark waters. Evidently these were the warriors of the two remoter islets, who, not having arrived in time to witness the prodigy that had appalled their fellows, were coming on like hungry wolves to join in the fight which, from these distant shouts and yells, they supposed to be at its hottest.

"It was the turn of a hair, and the hair's turned the wrong way!" growled Barshot under his breath. "These niggers follow each other like sheep, and when they see this new lot come up, and go at us without being afraid, they'll pluck up heart too, and we shall be just as badly off as ever. Blow them hignorant savages! They haven't even the sense to run away when they ought to!"

And the captain, as he spoke, took a tighter grasp of the iron belaying-pin that he clutched in his brawny hand, while Heathermoor, who was crouching beside him, loosened

his long dirk in its sheath with a business-like air.

But just then Thurraboy (who, hidden by the companionhatch, had risen to his feet to watch the advance of these new enemies) started, held up his hand, and turned his face slightly to one side. Then he drew a long, deep breath of overwhelming relief, and two words came forth as if heaved up from the very depths of his chest:

"Thank God!"

"What is it?" asked Barshot in an eager whisper.

"Breeze!" replied the other with an emphasis which told how much was contained in that one word.

Sure enough, a few seconds later, one of the sails that hung drooping overhead gave a long, lazy heave, flapped back against the mast, heaved again, and then began slowly to fill out.

A yell of fury came rolling across the silent sea from the new band of assailants, who had already noted and understood the signs of the coming breeze, and on they flew with redoubled speed. But it was all in vain. Sail after sail filled out, and the spell-bound hull lived again, and moved onward, the beleaguering canoes scattering before her like shadows. One last howl of baffled rage from the second group of boats, a few dropping shots, fired harmlessly and at random, and then the rescued ship left death and danger behind her, and swept forth into the open sea once more.

CHAPTER XV

THE TIGER OF THE GOLDEN MOUNTAIN

WELL, I never want to see so close a shave as that again!" said Captain Barshot, drawing a long breath as he looked back in the moonlight at the islands which had so nearly become their grave. "Mr. Thurraboy, you've been best man of us all this bout, and I heartily beg your pardon for roughing you up the way I did t'other day."

"Don't say another word about it, Captain," rejoined the author in his most genial tone. "I'm sure we ought rather to be thanking God for our deliverance than be casting up every hasty word that we may have said to each

other."

But it seemed that the excitements of this eventful night were not over yet; for all at once Alfred Huntley (who had suddenly missed his friend Wyvil, and was looking about in search of him) heard a voice call, wildly and urgently, his own name. Its tones were shrill and strained, like those of one in mortal pain or peril; and the voice was that of Marmaduke.

"Where are you, old boy?" shouted Alfred, springing like a wild cat toward the cabin hatchway, out of which the cry seemed to issue.

"Here—quick—this fellow's trying to knife me!" replied

a half-stifled voice from below.

Huntley leaped rather than ran down the steep, ladderlike, pitch-dark stair, and, alighting headlong upon a writhing heap of intertwined arms and limbs at the foot of it, clutched instinctively, amid the gloom, at the first thing that came to hand, viz. a bare, sinewy arm, which struggled and twisted in his grasp like a serpent.

150

Just then the cabin-boy appeared with a light, revealing

a very startling tableau.

Amid a chaos of overturned boxes, sacks, and canisters, Wyvil, lying all his length upon his back, was struggling in a mortal grapple with a half-seen something, of which the only part clearly visible was the glitter of two fiery eyes, which appeared to gleam through the darkness like those of a snake or panther. But when the light was held nearer, this phantom took the form of a slender Malay boy no older than Wyvil himself, who was fighting fiercely to wrench from Marmaduke's clutch the hand that grasped his short curved dagger.

"Don't hurt him!" panted the English boy; "just take

the knife from him."

This, however, was no easy matter; for, young and slight as this boy-savage was, so amazing was his strength, and so fierce the energy of his struggles, that, though he had but one hand to fight with—for his right arm seemed to be disabled,—the combined efforts of all three were fully tasked to disarm and secure him.

This done, Alfred helped up his friend, and, starting as he caught a full view of him for the first time, called out anxiously:

"I say, old fellow, did he manage to stick you after all?

you're all over blood!"

"Am I?" said Wyvil, stretching and shaking himself experimentally. "It must be my nose bleeding, then, for I don't feel as if I'd got a cut anywhere, though I'm jolly stiff and sore all over."

Just then Heathermoor and Mr. Thurraboy appeared on the scene.

The former hastily drew his son into the cabin, and examined the boy's hurt, finding, to his great relief, that, though much bruised and scratched, Wyvil had no actual wound anywhere.

"You've had a very narrow escape, my boy," said he

gravely; "that fellow's kriss (dagger) was very likely poisoned, as most of them are, and if you had got a stab from it, you wouldn't have had much chance. Where is the kriss, by the bye? It had better be thrown overboard at once."

"I'll do that!" cried Tom Bates, the cabin-boy, darting off.

But he didn't, for the very sufficient reason that he could not find it, having let it fall among the sacks and boxes while helping to bind the Malay.

"Never mind," said Thurraboy, "we'll hunt it up in the morning. Now, then, let's have a look at our prisoner."

The young savage (who had been laid on the cabin-table) had ceased his useless struggles, and lay as motionless as a statue; but when they gathered round him, he shot a fiery glance at them from his fierce black eyes, and muttered a few emphatic words in his own tongue.

"He is telling us to kill him at once, for he would rather

die than be kept prisoner," explained Heathermoor.

"Well, if he chooses to amuse himself by sticking knives into people, what can we do but keep him prisoner?" urged Wyvil with some show of reason. "He's a plucky fellow, though, for all that. Just fancy! he's got a broken arm, and an awful cut on his head as well—just see how it's bleeding,—and yet he flew at me the minute I came near him, and then fought us all three with one hand! He must be a brick, and no mistake!"

"It was he, then, who tumbled down the hatchway during the scrimmage?" said Thurraboy. "Well, if so, he may thank his stars to have got off so cheap!"

(In fact, as it afterwards appeared, the young islander had been fortunate as compared with his two fellow-savages, who had fallen down into the main-hold; for one of them had been killed on the spot, and the other so badly hurt that he died a few hours later.)

At that instant Huntley, who had slipped out unper-

ceived, came back with a handful of rags, and a jug of warm water from the cook's galley (that worthy man having kept a huge kettle boiling during the affray, with the humane purpose of "scaldin' them blackamoors' hides for 'em'"), and coolly proceeded to bathe the wounded head of the prisoner, who, after a momentary show of reluctance, submitted passively, while the sudden change in his face showed plainly how intense the relief must have been.

Meanwhile, Heathermoor and Thurraboy—whose experience of hurts and bruises was of a large and varied range—were examining the lad's injured arm, and soon satisfied themselves that it was not broken, but only severely bruised and strained. Having applied to it such remedies as he could command, Heathermoor said a few words to the sufferer in his own language; to which the latter, after eyeing him wonderingly for a moment, replied by muttering faintly:

"Ayer! ayer!" (water! water!).

Marmaduke promptly gave him some, which the captive drank greedily, casting at our hero a look of gratitude more

expressive than any words.

"He'll do now," said Heathermoor, "and I think we'll just stow him for the night in that store-hutch outside the cabin door, and lock him in; for if he takes it into his head that we're going to torture him or make a slave of him (as he very likely may, poor wretch!) he'll think nothing of jumping overboard and drowning himself. And after that—as it's getting late, and I dare say we're all pretty tired—I think we had better have a mouthful of supper, and turn in."

Next morning Lord Heathermoor was up betimes, and his first move was to go straight to the foot of the cabin stair, hoping to find and throw away the poisoned kriss; but, early as he was, his son was there before him. "Have you seen anything of that fellow's dagger, Duke ?" cried his father.

"Oh, that's all square!" said Wyvil cheerily; "he's got it again, all right and jolly!"

"Who's got it—the Malay?" cried Mr. Thurraboy, who

had just come up.

"Of course; it's his, you know," said the boy, with perfect composure. "He seemed to want it, so I gave it him."

"Then you've been to see him already?" asked Heathermoor, laughing in spite of himself at the coolness with which his hopeful son spoke of having put a poisoned dagger into the hands of a ferocious savage because he "seemed to want it".

"To be sure we have—Alf's in there now, having a yarn with him; he's quicker than me at the fellow's lingo, you know. I'll just tell you how it was. When we went in just now to see how he was, we found him pretty brisk for a fellow with a broken head and a scrunched arm; but he kept looking about him as if he'd lost something, and he kept on singing out: 'Kriss! kriss!' just as if he were crying water-cresses. Luckily Alf made out what he wanted, and told me, and I went and hunted up his pig-sticker, and brought it in and gave it him, and he was as pleased as Punch!"

"And didn't he offer to stab you, then?" enquired his father, who, during this edifying recital, had exchanged with Mr. Thurraboy more than one glance of comic despair.

"No, not he! He just took hold of my hand and pressed it to his forehead, and then to his chest (I suppose that's how they shake hands here), saying something that sounded like 'Trim my glass eye!' whatever he meant by that." 1

"Oh, he did, did he?" said Heathermoor, looking greatly relieved. "That's all right, then, for by doing that he

¹ Probably Trima kasi (literally, "I receive a favour"), the Malay form of "I thank you".

meant that you're his friend, and now he'll neither hurt

you himself nor let anyone else do it."

"Well, I call that very civil of him!" cried Marmaduke; "and I'll be bound he and I will be no end good friends when we come to know a bit more of each other. Now, then, I'll just go in again and see how he's getting on, and what he'd like for breakfast!"

And away ran our impetuous hero to take another look at his new pirate chum, while his father, with a meaning shrug of his broad shoulders, followed Mr. Thurraboy on deck.

Half an hour later Thurraboy was leaning over the stern to watch the eddying ripples in the vessel's wake, and calculating that they must be running full ten knots an hour, when the two boys came racing up to him, and began to speak eagerly and excitedly, both at once.

"What do you think, Mr. Thurraboy! this Malay chap's the son of a chief—a Sumatran chief—quite a sort of prince

in a small way!"

"And he says his name's Harimau of Bukit-Mas (that's 'The Tiger of the Golden Mountain', you know), and we're

going to call him 'Harry' for short."

"Ay, isn't it a fine name, The Tiger of the Golden Mountain? just the right sort of title for a book! I'll tell you what, Mr. Thurraboy; if you do make a story out of this cruise of ours, do call it that—it'll be first rate!"

"And we're going to teach him English, and get him to teach us Malay—isn't it stunning? just as if he'd come aboard on purpose to help us with it."

"Won't it seem funny to call a black fellow 'Harry'?

just like acting a play, you know."

"And we're going to ask my father to let us take Harry

along with us, and have him for our Man Friday."

"For your Boy Friday, you mean," said Thurraboy, breaking in at length upon this queer duet, "for he's hardly old enough for a man yet."

"Well, what of that?" cried Wyvil. "As old Billy Pitt said: 'The crime of being young mends itself day by day'. He's old enough to fight like a man anyhow—no mistake about that!"

"Ay, that he is!" chimed in Huntley; "and, for that matter, if there's not enough of him to make a whole

Friday, we can call him 'Friday Evening'."

"So we can!" shouted Marmaduke; "just like Thursday October Christian in *The Mutiny of the Bounty*, because he was born on a Thursday in October. Just the very thing!"

"And now I think of it," said Alfred, "yesterday was Friday; so it was on a Friday evening that we got him,

sure enough."

"That's settled, then!" cried Marmaduke with the air of one who had got a great weight off his mind. "There's his name, all square—Harry Friday Evening! Come along, Alf, let's go and tell him all about Robinson Crusoe and his Man Friday. What's Friday in Malay? Juma'at, isn't it?"

And away ran our boys, leaving Thurraboy to chuckle over the cool way in which they disposed of their new acquaintance without consulting the latter at all. But neither the author nor his boy-comrades had the slightest forewarning of the strange manner in which this young barbarian was yet to influence the fortunes of their whole party.

CHAPTER XVI

CAST UP BY THE SEA

"Marmaduke Wyvil, Padang, Sumatra, "To George Stone, Charterhouse, England.

TEAR GEORDIE,

"By this you'll have seen all about our scrimmage with the Malay pirates, and how we buttered the deck and sent 'em sprawling on their noses, and carried off a real live black prince by way of a trophy. That's to say, you'll have seen it if by any miracle you got my last letter from Tanjong Biru (Blue Point), for which consult your atlas, old fellow, unless you've traded it away for jam-tarts since I left. It's long odds if you did get it, though; for in these parts the posts are (as old Dryasdust said of my cousin, Dick Doveton) 'only consistent in inconsistency, and only regular in irregularity'.

"I've got such a lot to tell you this time that I hardly know where to start, so perhaps I'd better just begin at the beginning. It'll be a change anyhow, for you used always to say I began my stories in the middle, and then went on to the beginning, and never gave you the end at all.

"First and foremost, then, about Harry—that's our black prince, you know, short for Harimau (Tiger). When he first turned up, the captain was rather puzzled what to do with him; so my father (who always seems to do just the right thing) said that, as Harry was something of a sailor, the best way would be to ship him as one of the crew. Well, Harry agreed to it at once, and he's a regular pet with the whole crew already, and out-and-out the smartest of the lot, now that he's got to know the ropes; and he did

that in less than no time, for there never was such a fellow to pick things up quick. 'Pon my word, I believe he could learn any mortal thing on earth—even *Euclid*—if he gave his mind to it.

"As for English, he really seemed to learn it all at one go. He called me and Alf by our names, as pat as could be, the very first day; and in less than a week he could ask for whatever he wanted, just as easy as I can. It's a good job for me that he wasn't at the old Charterhouse in our time, or I'd never have got the modern language prize, that's certain.

"But before I say any more about him I must tell you about our voyage, and how we came to get here; for, as you'll see by the map, we're clean on the wrong side of

Sumatra for getting back to Singapore.

"On the morning after our set-to with the savages, the wind, after helping us along famously all night, chopped round suddenly, and blew slap in our teeth; and after that it was nothing but head-winds all the time, so that, instead of getting to Pulo Bintang (the place where we were to enquire for Alf's father, you know) in two days, it took us very nearly five. And, even when we did get there at last, we found that we'd come all the way for nothing, for the young fellow who was in charge of the island—a very good sort of chap, who was as civil as if he had known us all his life—could tell us no more than that Colonel Huntley had left for Singapore in a trading schooner more than two months before, and he'd heard nothing of him since then.

"I saw poor Alf begin to look queer (as well he might), and though my father and Mr. Thurraboy didn't say anything, I could see by their faces what they thought, although they did their best to look as if there was

nothing the matter.

"But just then the old captain must go and shove in his oar. 'Do you happen to remember, Mr. Watson,' says he, 'what that there schooner's name was?'

"'Yes,' says Mr. Watson, 'I remember the name well, because it was such a queer one; she was the Go-along, of

Liverpool.'

"'The Go-along?' sings out the captain; 'what! that rotten old tub of Bob Shaw's? The Go-along, indeed! The 'Go-to-the-bottom' I'd call her! If the colonel's took his passage in that old coffin, I wouldn't give much for his chance!'

"Can you imagine such a blundering fool? and right before poor old Alf, too! My father looked as if he were going to hit him, and no wonder; and even Mr. Watson seemed rather put out.

"Alf stepped forward, and said, in a voice as if someone

were choking him:

"'Lost? not a bit of it!' sings out Mr. Thurraboy, cutting in before the captain, who, beginning to see that he had let out more than he ought, was looking rather foolish. 'The schooner may be lost—very likely she is—but you may take my word for it that he's not. Why, just see how many escapes we've had ourselves in this one voyage, and yet here we are, all right! I knew a man once myself, who was cast away in these very seas, and he came home again all right and jolly after everyone had given him up for dead. We'll enquire for your father at every port we touch on our way back, and no fear but we'll light upon him, somewhere or other, not a pin the worse!'

"Old Alf began to brighten up again at once, for there's no one like Mr. Thurraboy for that sort of thing; he has such a jolly way with him, he'd make you feel as if you enjoyed a toothache, almost. If he'd been with Napoleon at Waterloo, I'll be bound he'd have made him think that losing the battle was rather a good thing for him than not.

"Then Mr. Watson said to us, very politely:

"'I'm extremely sorry not to be able to give you any better news of your friend; but I quite agree with you

that Colonel Huntley is not the sort of man to be so easily lost, and I've not the least doubt that, sooner or later, you'll find he's all right, especially as he knows the ways of these Malay fellows by heart, and could get on with them where no other man would have a chance.'

"And then he invited us to dine with him, captain and all; and when he found out who Mr. Thurraboy was, there was nothing in the whole place half good enough for him, for he'd read a whole lot of his books, and liked 'em no end. And so, altogether, we had a very jolly time of it.

"Finding that the Sultana was going farther on, Mr. Watson actually wanted us to stay with him till she came back; wasn't it jolly of him? But the captain said he couldn't be sure of calling at the island on his return voyage, because he might have to go another way; and he advised us to stick to the ship. So we thanked Mr. Watson, and said good-bye to him, and then went aboard

again, and stood out to sea that very same night.

"We touched at two or three more islands after that, and saw a whole heap of queer outlandish sights, but I mustn't begin telling you about 'em now, or else I'd never be done. At one place that we got to, just before dark, there was a torchlight procession going on that beat any pantomime I ever saw yet. What with the black faces, and glittering eyes, and white dresses, and gleaming swords and daggers, coming and going like so many ghosts in the glare of the torches, and what with the tall palm-trunks in the background, blood-red in the firelight, and then the sea lying dim and vast beyond it all, and the shouting and singing, and playing of wild music—well, I tell you, Geordie, my boy, all the books of travel in the world wouldn't give you a notion of it, not even Mr. Thurraboy's, if you hadn't seen it your own self!

"Well, by and by we got to the last of the ports that the old craft had to touch at, and then it was 'bout ship for Singapore'; and I can tell you we were all very glad of it, for, as you may be sure, we wanted to get as quick as we could to some place where we might have a chance of getting some news of Alf's father and the ship he'd gone in.

"As it turned out, it was a very good job that we hadn't stopped off at Pulo Bintang, for the captain didn't go anywhere near it on the way back, having to call at another island a goodish bit farther to the south; and there he got some cargo for Padang, which, as you'll see by the map, is one of the two big ports on the south-west side of Sumatra (the side away from Singapore, you know), Bencoolen being the other.

"'We'll have to go right round Sumatra this time, then, to get back to Singapore,' says Alf; 'but that's all the better, for the more places we call at, the likelier we'll be

to pick up some news of my father.'

"And sure enough we did pick up some news of him, before long. At the first two ports where we called no one knew anything of Colonel Huntley, or of the Go-along either; but when we came to the next place, the Dutch shipping agents told us that the Go-along had touched there about seven weeks before (and with an English gentleman on board, too), bound for Bencoolen and Padang.

"'Padang!' cries the captain; 'why, that's just as pat as if we'd planned it; for here we're bound for Padang ourselves, and we're safe to git some news of the colonel there.'

"'To be sure we are!' says Mr. Thurraboy in his cheery way; 'in fact, I should not be surprised if we were to find him there himself; and if we do, we'll give him a famous welcome—won't we, Alfred?'

"By this time Malay Harry had got to be quite at home on board, and the men were very good to him, and never tried to force him to drink grog or anything, for my father had told 'em that's the biggest insult you can offer to a Mussulman. Even the captain was getting to like him better, for he was quite a useful hand now, and had picked up enough English to make out nearly all the captain's

orders. And every time Alf and I had a talk with him (which was whenever he was off duty) he always got us to speak English, to see how much he could make out; and

he did make out a pretty good lot, I can tell you.

"My father, too, seemed to be very fond of having a talk with Harry; but he spoke to him in his own lingo, and he was always asking Harry who he was, and where he came from, and who was his father, and what sort of fellows his people were, and how he came to be so far away from home, and all the rest of it, just as if he were going to write a life of him. Bit by bit Harry told him the whole story, and a queer one it was-beat the Arabian Nights all hollow!

"It seems that these people of Bukit-Mas (Golden Mountain), to whom Harry belongs, are one of the hill-tribes of Acheen—the tipmost end of Sumatra, you know—whom the Dutchmen haven't conquered yet, because they keep right away up among the mountains, where nobody can get at 'em. Harry's the only son of the chief (penghulu, they call him here), and when Master Harry got to be old enough to go out to war along with his father-which is a Malay's way of 'coming of age', I suppose—the old penghulu got an old pow-wow-man, who was the cock magician of the tribe, to tell his son's fortune, or cast his horrid-scope, as they call it.

"And very horrid it turned out to be, sure enough; for what should the old nigger go and say but that a great and terrible calamity was hanging, not only over the tribe, but over all Sumatra, and that it would certainly fall unless poor Harry-'the unlucky one', as he had the cheek to call him-were removed from among the children of the

Golden Mountain.

"Now, it's my belief that this precious prophet was put up to his little game by Harry's own uncle, who must be a regular bad lot. This uncle, it seems, would have come to be penghulu after his brother, the old chief, if Harry

hadn't existed; and so, of course, he was just about as fond of his dear nephew as King John was of Arthur, or as the uncle of the Babes in the Wood was of them. Anyhow, up got Mr. Uncle and made a great row, and voted for having Harry 'removed' at once, and drew to his side a whole lot of the big swells of the tribe; and one or two rather extreme members on that side of the House went so far as to hint that the simplest way of removing him would be to kill him outright!

"Luckily for poor old Harry, the majority thought this rather too strong, and considered it quite enough to banish him. But banished they insisted that he must be; and his father, whether he liked or not, was forced to agree that he should be sent away till the fatal day was past, which was rather vague at the best, for the magician hadn't been fool enough to fix any particular day, and all they knew was

that it would be some day next August.

"Well, then, the next thing to settle was where to banish him to; and his father bethought himself that, a good many years ago, a lot of men from their tribe had emigrated to that island where Harry and his piratical chums attacked us. So they sent him off there; and as it might have seemed suspicious for the only son of a chief to be packed off like that, the old penghulu kept dark who he really was, and made as if he'd been only some common

boy going out to seek his fortune.

"'After that, talk of there being no romance nowadays!' says I to Alf, when my father told us the story. 'Why, it's just that yarn in the Arabian Nights over again, about that old king who bottled up his son in an underground cellar on a desert island, for fear Prince What's-his-name should come and kill him on a certain day; and Prince What's-his-name got shipwrecked at that very place on that very day, and came and did for him, right enough. Well, it's an ill wind that blows no one good; if Harry can't go home, he'll be all the more likely to stay with us.'

"You may be sure that after all this we made a bigger fuss of Harry than ever; and he seemed quite curious to know all about the English and their ways, and was no end astonished at what we told him. But what seemed to puzzle him more than all was our not having killed or tortured him when we first took him prisoner.

"'I was thine enemy then, I had done my best to slay thee, and so I looked for nothing but to be slain in like manner,' said he to me one day, in his own lingo; for, as we wanted to learn it, we made him talk to us in Malay, and answered him in English, and very funny it sounded. 'Can it be true, then, that you Christians love not to destroy your enemies?'

""We never do unless we're forced to it,' says I; 'for, to begin with, it's not the way of us English to hit a man when he's down; and then it says in the Bible (that's our Koran, you know) that we must forgive our enemies, what-

ever they've done to us!'

"'Forgive your enemies!' sings out Harry, staring with all his might; 'forgive your enemies! why, we always kill ours!'

"'More shame for you, then,' strikes in Alf, 'for that wasn't how your own prophet Mohammed did. He forgave his enemies—ay, even the very worst of them!'

"'What?' cries Harry, more amazed than ever, 'dost thou, an unbeliever, know anything about the acts of our

holy Prophet?'

"'I know as much about 'em as you do yourself, Harry

my boy,' answered Alf, as bold as brass.

("And so he did, I'll be bound, for he's got Washington Irving's Life of Mahomet pretty well by heart. Stunning book it is, too. Do you remember, Geordie, how you and I used to read it under our desk in school, and how old Dryasdust caught us at it, and gave us a hundred lines apiece? I didn't think then that I'd be quoting it before long to a real live Mohammedan savage, thousands of miles away from England!)

"Well, Alf set to, and reeled off all about Mohammed and his adventures as glib as a historical lecturer; and Harry listened with his eyes starting out of his head—partly, no doubt, in astonishment to find a 'Western unbeliever' so well up in the Prophet's doings, and partly at the thought of anybody forgiving his enemies, which was evidently quite a new idea to Master Harry.

"'Allah ackbar'' (God is most great) says he, when Alf had done. 'In truth, Tuan (master), I have heard from thee many things of the Prophet (may his name be exalted!) which I had not heard even from those who believe in him. But tell me, I pray, how it was that he

forgave his worst enemy.'

"'Ah, to be sure!' cried Alf; 'I forgot that part of the story. Well, you see, after the Prophet ran away from Mecca to Medina—what you call the *Hejirah* (flight), you know—he had two or three fights with the fellows who drove him out; and in one of these fights his favourite uncle, Hamza, was killed before his face. And when Mohammed saw his best friend lying dead, then—let him try as hard as he might to think that the brave man had gone straight to heaven, and would be happier there than he could ever be on earth—yet, at the thought that this man who had loved him and been so good to him was gone, and that he would never see him or speak to him again as long as he lived, he fairly broke down and cried.'

"I could see tears in Harry's eyes while Alf was speaking;

and no wonder, for it was a heart-breaking story.

"'Well, it happened,' Alf went on, 'that in another battle, a little later, this man that had killed Hamza was taken prisoner, and he was a black slave, whose master had promised to set him free if he killed either Mohammed himself or his uncle. So then the Prophet's men—who had been on the look-out for him ever since the day of Hamza's death—shouted for joy, and dragged him away to be tortured to death in Mohammed's presence. And when Mo-

hammed heard who he was, he came and looked upon the man that had killed his old friend, and then laid his hand gently on the prisoner's shoulder, and said:

""The all-merciful God will remember those who show mercy, and thou hast done only what seemed to be thy

duty. Go in peace!'

"'Then the grim soldier's face changed, and he threw himself at Mohammed's feet, sobbing like a child, and said to him: 'Truly thou art the Apostle of God, O Mohammed! for none else could forgive his worst enemy.'

"'And from that day forth that man was the best soldier and the truest servant that the Prophet had; and I think

that was better than killing him-eh, Harry?'

"And now, Geordie, I've got something to tell you which, I dare say, will set you screwing up your eyebrows and thinking of Baron Munchausen. But I can tell you, old fellow, there are plenty of things out here which go a long way ahead of any yarn that the old baron ever spun in his life; and, as the Irish pilot said when the ship struck just as he was saying he knew every rock in the Channel, this is one of them.

"Do you recollect how we used to read about the 'phosphorescent sea' in those old English voyages, and to say that the old boys had a mind to tell a good 'un when they got up that story? Well, now I've seen it for myself at last; and I tell you that all they said about it was just

nothing to what it really is!

"I'd been sleeping on deck as usual—for down below you breathe more cockroaches than air,—when, all of a sudden, I was awakened by a blaze of light in my eyes that made me think the ship must be on fire. But when I looked about me, it was not the ship but the whole sea that seemed to be on fire at once. Flames were leaping up all round us—every ripple in our wake was a flash of lightning, every jet of spray a shower of flying sparks, and each wave, as it broke, spouted up like a fiery fountain

against the black sky; for, as if on purpose to heighten the horror of it, the whole sky was black as pitch—not a glimmer of moon or star to be seen anywhere. There we were, a coal-black ship on a flaming sea underneath an

inky sky!

"You can't think what a grim sight it was; and really, though I'm not by way of being a coward, yet—waking up suddenly and coming upon all this at once—I did feel rather queer, I don't deny it. The men, as they came and went in the glare, looked as white and ghastly as a pack of ghosts; every bit of iron or brass work aboard kept gleaming and glittering like thousands of fiery eyes all staring at you at once; and even the very rigging itself seemed like some great black skeleton towering up overhead. Altogether, it looked so hideous and unearthly that the Flying Dutchman itself would have been a joke to it.

"Well, this went on all night long, till at last things really began to look rather serious. The officer of the watch had got his eyes so dazzled with the glare that he was almost as blind as a bat. Most of the crew were not a bit better off, and we were just wondering what on earth was to be done, when, all at once, we heard the look-out at the bow sing out as loud as he could roar: 'Rocks ahead!'

"Instantly there was a trampling and shouting, and bracing round of the yards, and jamming down of the helm to make the old craft pay off, and such a kick-up as never was. As for me, I ran for ard to see if I could make anything out; and there, sure enough, right ahead of us, there was something like a great black wall standing sheer up out of the sea—such a thing as I never saw before!—and we seemed to be driving right upon it!

"But at that moment the second mate—who had only just come on deck to relieve the first, and so hadn't had time to get his eyes dazzled like the rest of us—hallooed out: 'All right! It's not a rock at all—it's just the dark-

ness where the glare ends!'

"And sure enough that was it, though I could never have believed such a thing if I hadn't seen it myself. You see, the flare of the fiery sea was so tremendous, and the night behind so black, that when the light came to an end suddenly, and there was nothing but darkness beyond, it really looked as if there were something regularly solid there, and I'm sure any man alive would have taken it for a rock just as we did. For my own part, I shall always, after this, be of the same opinion as dear old Charley Kingsley in the Water Babies: 'You must never say positively that a thing does not exist until you have actually seen it not existing'.

"When we had got right past it, and all was over, we all had a good laugh at the way in which we had been taken in; but it was no joke while it lasted, I promise you!

"Isn't it too bad, old chap? I've got to shut up my letter and send it ashore at once, and I haven't told you a word about Padang yet—and it's well worth describing, too! However, it can't be helped; I must just give you all that in my next letter, which I suppose will be posted at Singapore, as we don't touch anywhere between. Remember me to old Dick and all the rest of them, and believe me,

"Yours truly,

"M. WYVIL."

Marmaduke's correspondent, however, lost much more, had he known it, than the mere passing description of the picturesque Dutch seaport from which our hero's letter was dated; for that letter, if kept in hand only two days more, would have added to its list of exciting adventures some fresh incidents quite as startling as any of those which it had chronicled.

"Thurraboy," said Lord Heathermoor in a low voice, as he and his companion paced the after-deck together that evening, looking back every now and then at the fast-

fading outline of Padang, "I don't like this last piece of news at all!"

"Nor I either," answered his friend, casting a troubled glance toward the forecastle, upon which the two unsuspecting lads stood side by side, devouring with their eyes the splendid panorama of the Sumatran coast, which lay so close on their starboard beam that every point of the shore was distinctly visible. "Ever since our captain said what he did, about the unseaworthy state of that vessel, I've been fearing some disaster; and now there can be no more doubt about it."

"None indeed, worse luck! for if (as those fellows told us to-day) the *Go-along*, with poor Huntley on board, touched here five weeks ago on her way to Singapore, and if nothing has ever been heard of her since then, it's pretty plain what

must have happened to her."

"One of two things has happened to her; either she has been blown out to sea, and foundered there (they told us at Padang, you know, that there had been a heavy gale on this coast just after she left, which would not give much chance to a crazy vessel like her), or else she's been driven ashore somewhere in trying to get round Acheen; which, in my opinion, would be much the worse job of the two."

"Well, I'm not so sure about that, do you know," cried Heathermoor, "I dare say the Go-along may have come to grief, for you could hardly expect such a craft to get safe round the north of Sumatra in a gale, but I'd venture any money upon Huntley himself being all right. If ever any man had a charmed life, he has; and besides, he's been out here so long, and learned the ways of the East so thoroughly, that he's more than half a Malay himself, and can get along with these savages just as if he were one of them. No, no, if he hasn't been drowned, I've no fear of any harm happening to him from the natives. Besides, if it comes to that, who would have given a penny for your life when you

were chucked ashore among those Somaulis the other day?

And yet here you are!"

"Such luck as that only comes once in a way," said the other gloomily. "I wish I could feel as confident as you that all's well; but I can tell you I shiver every time that poor lad comes near me, for fear he should ask when we're likely to have more news of his father."

Not the slightest trace of these fears, however, showed itself in Mr. Thurraboy's cheery look and tone at the dinner-table an hour later, where he was the brightest and

merriest of all.

"See, Tuan, that my country; there Golden Mountain!" said Harimau, the Malay, with unconscious pathos, as he looked up, at sunrise, on the second morning after leaving Padang, toward the familiar mountains which, close to him though they were, were made as unattainable to him by the gloomy superstition of his people as if they had been a thousand miles away.

Looking where the young savage pointed, the two lads beheld a picture surpassing all that they had yet seen in

the Eastern seas.

In the glory of the sunrise the highest peaks of the Acheen mountains were just kindling from dim shadowy blue into living fire. All along the great purple ridges of the lower hills the white morning mist lay like a sheet of new-fallen snow, flecked here and there by the brightening sunshine with a passing gleam of gold, while in the dark, narrow glens below, where the jungle grew black and high, lurked shadows which no sunlight could penetrate.

Most of the hills were thickly wooded; but ever and anon the boundless expanse of forest was broken by a vast black precipice of bare cliff towering up over the blue, shining sea, in all its untamed savageness, around the base of which huge dark fragments of fallen rocks, torn away by

some mighty convulsion ages before, stood gauntly up out

of the clear, bright water.

All at once Mr. Thurraboy-who had also come up to admire this wonderful panorama, and was leaning over the starboard bulwark to enjoy a full view of it-was seen to give a slight start, and to snatch up the spy-glass that lay beside him, through which he looked long and earnestly at a particular point of the shore a little way ahead.

"Heathermoor," said he in a low voice, with a quick glance at the boys, as if fearing lest they should overhear him, "your eyes are better than mine-see what you make

of that thing yonder, between those two rocks."

"It looks to me like a wreck," answered Lord Heathermoor in the same tone, after carefully examining the distant object through the glass handed to him by his friend.

It was a wreck, or at least the fragment of one—a part of the stern of a small vessel, which appeared to have been dashed up by the sea with such violence against these two projecting rocks that it had forced itself right in between them, and remained immovable.

The two men exchanged looks of gloomy significance, though neither spoke. But, a few seconds later, both the hardy, weather-beaten faces were clouded at once with the same look of sudden dismay; for there, upon the only uninjured part of the shattered wood-work, were plainly visible -too terribly distinct to leave any room for doubt-the words: "Go-along, Liverpool".

CHAPTER XVII

OVER INTO SUMATRA

WELL, Mr. Van Dunck, how have you enjoyed your holiday in Singapore?"

"Ach, mine vrient, it vas grand! Fourteen days here,

and not von night I vas sober!"

"Well, that is a nice notion of a holiday, and no mistake!" said Marmaduke Wyvil with a look of disgust, as he and his father entered the shipping-office just in time to hear this edifying remark from a big, florid, jolly-looking Dutch planter from Sumatra. "If I were fool enough to

make a beast of myself, I wouldn't brag of it."

Nine days had passed since our hero and his friends sighted the shattered fragments of the Go-along among the rocks of Acheen, and many things had happened in the interval. The Sultana had landed the whole party safely at Singapore, where Mr. Thurraboy found all the things that he had left behind at Aden, including two splendid rifles and an excellent navy revolver, awaiting his arrival. Harimau, the young Malay, had professed his perfect willingness to remain with the "young white chiefs", at least till the expiration of the term during which his return home was forbidden by the fatal prophecy, declaring emphatically that "if all Christians were like them, he was sorry that he had killed so many!"

Even the reckless Marmaduke was somewhat startled to hear a boy no older than himself talk so coolly of having taken the lives of many men. But, with all his untamed fierceness, the young savage was too valuable an ally to be let slip, and Lord Heathermoor, foreseeing how useful he was likely to be to them, at once assented to the proposed arrangement.

One great disappointment, however, met them on their arrival. The yacht, which they had fully expected to find already fit for sea, was still under repair, the thorough overhauling to which she had been subjected having brought to light several very serious injuries which had till then been quite unsuspected.

This was doubly unfortunate at that particular time, their one wish being to go over to Sumatra as quickly as possible, in order to pursue their enquiries about the fate of Colonel Huntley. Though his ship had been lost, there was as yet no proof whatever, direct or indirect, of his having perished along with her, and Harimau, when questioned on the subject, had asserted positively, once and again, that none of the Acheen mountaineers, whether belonging to his own tribe or to any other, would ever be so foolish as to kill any captive for whom they might expect to obtain a high ransom, and that if the colonel had escaped the sea, be was in all probability still alive among the mountains.

Such an authority was not to be gainsaid, and Harimau's assurances gave no small encouragement to the anxious Englishmen. But as it was now of the last importance to lose no more time, Lord Heathermoor, as soon as he had satisfied himself that his yacht was really unfit for service started off with his son to find out when there would be another steamer for the north coast of Sumatra.

By good fortune there happened to be an English steamer sailing for Deli that very afternoon, and, more luckily still, the boat, small as she was, could find room for them all, the only other cabin passenger being the convivial Mynheer van Dunck.

This last discovery did not wholly please Heathermoor, who anticipated no great pleasure from the society of such a hard drinker. But, to his great relief, the planter turned out to be a very pleasant and well-behaved man, who showed

no traces of the excesses that he had so frankly owned, and gave them some valuable hints as to the best way of pro-

ceeding when they landed.

"And if you zall vant to know how dey do grow de tabak (tobacco), he ended, "I vill tell you vat you zall do. Myself I know not ze tabak, for it is coffee zat I do plant; also mine house it is far away, else would I gladly make zat you should komm to me. But ven you do komm in Medan, you zall ask vere is Mynheer van der Haagen, vat live in Willemsdal. Every man know him dere, and he know everysing; he tell you all you yant."

During the voyage, short as it was, our young heroes had plenty to entertain them. The motley crew of Malays and Malabar Hindoos would alone have sufficed to engross their attention, but the deck passengers were a stranger sight still. On the upper deck, a little abaft the funnel, squatted a spare, keen-eyed, half-clad fellow, whose beercoloured skin and peculiar fashion of dressing his wiry black hair showed that he came from some remote district of Northern Burmah, far up toward the head-waters of the Irrawaddy, where even the restless pioneers of British commerce have not yet penetrated. A few paces beyond him, rapidly emptying a bowl of rice with successive whisks of the two long knitting-needles that he called chop-sticks, sat a greasy, flat-faced, omelette-coloured Mongol from the border of the Gobi Desert, speaking a queer dialect of his own, which was quite as unintelligible to the Nankin Chinamen in the steerage as to our English boys themselves.

To the left of this worthy, Alfred's quick eye noted a short, stumpy, heavy-looking Siamese, who at first attracted the boy's attention by the display of a wonderful pair of trousers, apparently made of the finest blue gauze; but a nearer view showed our astounded hero that the man's lower limbs were in reality quite bare, and that the seeming gauze was merely an illusion produced by the wonderfully fine tracery of the skilful tattooing which covered the

exposed skin. Not far beyond him a Malay Mohammedan, with his lean, dark, high-cheeked face turned in the direction where he supposed Mecca to lie, was muttering the ancient Arabic formula which has worked its way into every language of Southern Asia: "La Allah illah Allah, Mahmoudah rasul Allah" (God is God, and Mohammed is the apostle of God).

The boys were still in the height of their enjoyment of this museum of strange figures when their attention was suddenly diverted by a burst of laughter from Mr. Thurraboy, who, seated just outside the queer little deck-cabin that served them as a dining-room, was examining a batch of letters just forwarded to him from England, which in his hurry he had brought on board unopened.

The letter that he had just read seemed to amuse vastly both him and Heathermoor, who sat beside him, and as the two lads came up, the author called out in a voice tremulous

with laughter:

"Now, boys, here's something for you! You asked me if I often got letters begging for my portrait or my autograph, and you'll see that I'm continually besieged with much queerer requests than that. Just listen here:

"'999 WEST PRY STREET,
"'NEW YORK, March 1.

"'Dear Sir,

"'I have written to the juvenile authors of the day, asking the following questions, with the expectation of having them published:—Are the characters of your stories real? If so, how and where did you make their acquaintance? Of what type were they? Do you at times draw upon your own personal experience and history? If you will kindly answer these queries, so as to make my article more interesting and complete, I shall ever remain,

"'Yours very truly,

"'EVERMORE A. MEDLAR.'

"By juvenile authors I suppose he means authors for juveniles," commented Thurraboy, "but it is rather a queer way to express it. As for the characters of my stories, considering that the last two were Charles the Twelfth and Peter the Great, there is not much doubt of their being real; but how and where I made their acquaintance I should be rather puzzled to say; probably the first time I opened a school history of Europe."

"Pretty tidy cheek, and no mistake!" cried Wyvil.
"The fellow must think your time's not very valuable if

he expects you to answer all that nonsense."

"Oh, that's nothing, bless you!" said the author with a rueful smile. "Why, only last year a fellow wrote to me from Chicago, asking me to answer a string of questions as long as an examination paper. Among other things, he was anxious to know whether I composed my works in a dressing-gown or in full morning-dress, if I used a writing-desk, if I employed a secretary, what kind of pen I used, and whether I drank beer, while I was at work, or only coffee and tea!"

"You don't mean that he really put all that?" exclaimed

Wyvil with a grin of half-incredulous amusement.

"Indeed I do; I have the letter still, somewhere or other, along with a lot more trash of the same kind, and I can assure you that when I'm at home I get such things, and worse too, almost every week. So the next time you feel inclined to envy me my reputation, just remember what consequences it brings with it."

That night the boys "turned in" early, so as to be astir betimes for a good look at Sumatra; but Thurraboy and Heathermoor sat up talking on deck till midnight.

"It's really very kind of you to have come with us, my dear fellow," said the latter. "It is just what I would have begged you to do if you had not proposed it yourself, for, in such a job as we have in hand now, one man like yourself, who is used to difficulties and dangers

and outlandish ways of every kind, is worth a dozen raw hands."

"You're welcome to all I can do for you," said the author heartily. "To begin with, I owe you my life, and, however little it may be worth, I should be sorry to lose it. But it strikes me that your new retainer, Harimau, will be far more useful than I can be, and it's very lucky you managed to persuade him that that prophecy didn't forbid his going back to Sumatra, but only his returning to his own particular district."

"Well, I'll tell you what we had better do to start with: try and get hold of that Mr. Van der Haagen, of whom our friend, Van Dunck, was talking to-day; for if he lives so near the Acheen border he must be the likeliest man to

know what's going on there."

"You couldn't do better. Good-night!"

The boys were on deck by daylight, but they were poorly rewarded, for the morning was wet and gloomy, with frequent squalls of heavy rain, and not till long after sunrise did the bold blue ridges of the Sumatran mountains begin to loom shadow-like through rolling clouds of mist against a background of dark, slaty sky.

Little by little the ghostly mist-clouds melted away, revealing an endless line of matted leaves of a dull and sombre green, so thickly massed together that not the slightest break was to be seen, and our travellers could not even guess at the whereabouts of the river which they

were about to enter.

In fact it was still an open question whether they could enter it at all, for, like all rivers in those parts, its mouth was impeded by a bar, and the hour of flood-tide was already past. But the trim little steamer held her own bravely, and glided fearlessly in through hovering mist and pelting rain, beneath which the dark wall of matted boughs and coiling leaves on either side looked more grim and gloomy than ever.

(B 533)

Sliding past half a dozen light native boats with sails of matting and cordage of rattan, the sole visible tokens of man's presence in this great fortress of untamed nature, the steamer made a sudden turn to starboard, and glided into a broad, smooth estuary, the woody banks of which looked like one gigantic tree, so thick and rank did the dark, leathery mangroves swarm over their low, flat, swampy surface. Stream and shore were alike voiceless and lifeless, as if foot of man had never trodden there since the world began. The dark woods, the foul, beer-coloured river, the leaden sky, the falling rain, the grey, sullen mist in the background, heightened the gloom of the scene till its dreariness became absolutely overwhelming.

"Doesn't this remind you of West Africa, Heathermoor?" asked Thurraboy, instinctively lowering his voice to a sepul-

chral whisper.

"I should rather think it did!" replied his friend in the same tone. "I need only shut my eyes and open them again to imagine myself at once back in the mouth of the Cameroons or the Calabar. These Malay fellows may well call it Sungei Mattee (Dead River, or River of Death), and here comes a very appropriate craft to navigate it."

The "appropriate craft" in question was a dead bullock, which came drifting slowly down the thick, slimy stream, with four or five carrion-birds hovering around it, and making sudden pounces at it ever and anon. Bloated to an enormous size, and almost white from its long immersion, this floating corpse was so unutterably hideous as to send a thrill of horror through the iron nerves of Heathermoor himself.

Strangely enough, amid all this gloom and desolation, the briskest and gayest of our travellers was the very one who might have been expected to be the most depressed of all, viz., Alfred Huntley. From first to last the brave English boy had never for one moment believed his father to be really dead, and his bold blood was fired by the

thought of helping to rescue him from a galling captivity among brutal savages. His spirits seemed to rise with every mile nearer to the distant mountains amid which the captive was supposed to be; and Harimau, guessing the boy's thoughts from his glowing face, said with unconscious pathos:

"Tuan Huntley, if it please Allah (God), you will soon see your father again; but they will not let me see mine."

CHAPTER XVIII

IN THE SLOUGH OF DESPOND

A LL at once a sharp bend of this charming river (which, like the Me-Nam, seemed modelled after the favourite weapon of East-Indian planters—a cork-screw) revealed to our voyagers a dozen tiny bamboo huts thatched with dried palm-leaves, clinging like frightened children to the skirts

of their great forest mother.

"Those," said the captain, "are the huts of the native labourers who are at work on the new railway up the river; and that clearing," pointing to a small open space just ahead, which had produced as much effect on the boundless jungle around it as the withdrawal of a single currant from a Christmas pudding, "represents the railway itself, so far as it has yet gone."

"What! a railway here!" cried Wyvil. "Why, I should as soon have thought of running across the Slough

of Despond on a bicycle!"

"Or going down the Styx in an excursion steamer,"

added Huntley.

"Well, perhaps it's not exactly the best place in the world to make one," admitted the captain with a grin. "The first sod (or, rather, mud) of this precious railway was turned last October; but, considering that they've had to sink forty feet down before they could strike anything solid enough to make a road-bed for the line, it's no wonder that it doesn't get on very fast. However, I suppose they'll manage to get it done some time or other, if they choose to spend money enough."

"Yaw, dat is joost it—to shpend money!" growled Mynheer Van Dunck, who had come up just in time to

catch the captain's last sentence. "De Government shpend ze money, but who pay it? Vy, ve, ve, ze planters—ve do pay it all! De Government leaf us to make dem roads for ourselfs, and den dey taxes us for dat ve rides and drives on dem. See you! efery year dey gets out of dis contree of Sumatra von goot half-million guilders, dat is forty tousand pounds English; boot how moch shpends dey to improve it? Not von stiver, as I am honest man! Vere goes it? It goes to ze war, to kill dem black skellum (rogue) in Acheen! Ooch!"

Here the orator broke down into Dutch, and relieved his over-wrought feelings with a burst of emphatic native

interjections too vigorous and pointed for quotation.

Just then another sharp turn brought our heroes in sight of their anchorage (for the Deli River, like most of its relations, is only navigable near its mouth for vessels of any draught), alongside of a big, roofed-in hulk—such as one sees at every turn on the west coast of Africa—lying in a deep bend of the river, and looking quite gigantic amid the tiny sampans (Chinese boats) that hovered round it like flies.

"But where on earth is the town?" cried Wyvil, looking round in bewilderment at the bristling masses of pathless jungle that hemmed him in on every side. "I suppose it's down at the bottom of the river, and only comes up now and then to breathe."

"Shouldn't wonder," chuckled Alfred, "for they say there's a lot of floating capital in the country, as well there may in a Dutch colony."

"Oh, the town ain't anywhere here, bless you!" said the first officer, coming up; "it's a good three miles farther up the river."

"Three miles farther!" echoed Wyvil in dismay. "How on earth are we going to get there, then?" Are we supposed to swim, or paddle our own canoe, or is this old Noah's Ark here to float us up with the tide?"

"She'll be rotten before she ever gets there if she can't go a trifle faster than that fellow," cried Huntley, pointing to a Chinese boatman, who, having rashly taken on board sixteen of the native steerage passengers at once, was struggling frantically to propel his overloaded boat against the current, while, from the extreme slowness of his progress, and the peculiar way in which he held his oars, it was hard to tell whether he was going up stream or down.

"Don't let that trouble you," laughed the captain; "here's our steam-launch coming, and she'll run you up

to Deli in no time."

In fact, the brisk little craft soon left far behind her the creeping swarm of sampans, with their motley freight of Chinamen, Boyans, Javanese, and Sumatran Malays; and, a few minutes later, came snorting and steaming up to a kind of cross-road in this watery highway, where another channel, straighter and wider by far than that up which they had come, forked off to the sea.

This passage, as the native pilot of the steam-launch informed our heroes, had formerly been the one habitually in use, but it was now so completely choked up with sandbanks as to be utterly useless, whence its poetical name of "Dead River", incorrectly, but very appropriately, extended by its English visitors to the whole estuary of the Deli. Indeed, the justice of this ominous title was made manifest before the very eyes of our travellers by a startling and unexpected proof. Just at the point where the two channels met, a couple of Malay boatmen were suddenly seen to jump overboard in the very middle of the river, deliberately shove their boat along for several yards, and then coolly get in again and begin paddling as before.

"Hollo!" cried Wyvil; "that's one way to get a boat along, and no mistake! Do you remember, Alf, the Irishman who said that in his country all land travelling was done by water? If he had lived out here, he'd have been

just about right."

"Oh, that's nothing in these parts!" laughed his father. "I dare say you would hardly believe that, less than ten years ago, Dutch men-of-war were sailing over the very spot where you saw those fellows wading just now; but it's true for all that."

The boys looked startled, as well they might; for they could not guess that, behind those high blank walls of dark foliage that shut them in on either side, a numberless host of masons—inanimate, indeed, but as busy and untiring as the genii who built the palace of Allah-ed-deen between sunset and sunrise—were at work day and night.

In fact, here as elsewhere, the countless mangrove-roots, crossing each other in all directions, and constantly shooting down fresh suckers into the beds of thick black mud that line the water's edge, catch as in a net the vast deposits of soft soil brought down by the muddy river, and are thus incessantly forming new shoals, while raising the level of the old ones inch by inch. So rapidly does this strange work proceed that I have heard some veteran Sumatra planters declare that the land has gained on the water nearly two miles in the last ten years; and thus, while the roads are more than half liquid, the rivers are fast becoming solid.

A few more twists and turns, and then the port of Deli burst upon them in all the grandeur of its four houses, its stately quay, full twenty feet long, and its crowds of two or three people assembled along the spongy shore, ankledeep in the graceful dirt which spreads itself so lovingly

over everything alike.

The first duty of an Englishman in any new place abroad is, as is well known, to "see what the beggars have got fit to eat", and then, of course, to denounce it as "a beastly foreign mess, not fit for a dog". In the case of our travellers, there was no great difficulty as to the choice of a hotel, there being only one in the whole place. It was of the genuine Malay type, raised several feet above the ground

upon stout wooden piles, with a large kampong (court-yard) around it, a broad veranda before and behind, and a huge top-heavy thatch pulled down over its front windows like

an ill-fitting hat.

On the front veranda, a Scotchman, a German, two Malay half-castes, a Portuguese, a Dutchman, and an Englishman were all sitting together over a late lunch, amid a cloud of tobacco smoke; and what with its motley inhabitants and semi-nautical build, and the pools of water left around it by the recent rain, the whole structure was eminently suggestive of Noah's Ark just after its final settlement on what the old dame called "Mount Arrowroot".

Having snatched a hasty meal, Heathermoor and his party decided to start at once for Medan, the town of which Deli is the port; a plan which, like the scheme of Hannibal's brother for taking Rome, had only one defect,

viz., that it was impossible.

First and foremost, there were not carriages enough for the whole party, for, thanks to the peculiar size and build of these objectionable vehicles, two would be required for the passengers themselves, and a third for their luggage, while two more were needed to carry the German and the Portuguese, who were bound in the same direction. Then it appeared that the custodian of the warehouse in which the baggage had been deposited had coolly locked up the place and gone away to his dinner and afternoon nap. Next, it was found that one of the carriages had been sent to the wrong place, and must be hunted up; and, by the time this was done, one of the native drivers had mysteriously vanished in his turn.

"Well," cried Mr. Thurraboy, shrugging his shoulders, "Mynheer Van Dunck was not far wrong in saying that the national motto of Sumatra is Nanti dahulu (wait a bit).

"It strikes me we've waited quite long enough already," rejoined Lord Heathermoor, "so I shall just go and find that worthy driver myself."

And away he went, leaving Thurraboy and the two lads to mount guard over the carriages, lest they should dis-

appear too.

Just at first the boys had been more amused than annoyed by these successive mishaps; but, as minute after minute went by without any sign of the lost driver, they gradually worked themselves into a perfect fever of impatience, which was in no way allayed by the placidly contemptuous stare and derisive comments of a group of native bystanders, who were looking on with that philosophic composure wherewith men are wont to support the misfortunes of other people.

At length, however, Heathermoor came back with the missing man; and Wyvil, skipping into the foremost

carriage at his father's heels, shouted gleefully:

"Off we go! All right at last!"

Poor Marmaduke! He was soon to learn, to his cost, how rashly he had exulted; for, this being his first experience of carriage-travel in Sumatra, he had not yet discovered it to be, what it undoubtedly is, the most un-

comfortable mode of travelling in the world.

To form a proper idea of a Sumatran kreta (carriage), imagine a very dirty packing-case on two rickety wheels, with the front knocked out, and a venetian blind stuck in at an angle of forty-five instead of a back. In fact, but for its wheels, this admirable conveyance might serve as a model of Louis XI's famous "cage of little ease", in which a prisoner could neither stand up nor lie at full length. If you lean forward, the first lurch throws you face-fore-most on your native driver's bare and perspiring shoulders. If you lean back, off goes your hat at once into the mud through one or other of the open sides; and if you try to sit erect, you speedily find yourself trying to knock a hole in the roof with the top of your head.

Nor is this the worst. The interior of this overgrown rat-trap being barely large enough to hold two Englishmen,

or one Dutchman, all your baggage must be corded on to a kind of wooden step at the back, where, should it be so lucky as to keep its place, it will be as thoroughly bespattered with dirt as a public man who has dared to surpass his neighbours.

On such a hopeful drive as this the five carriages set forth at last, strung out in single file; for the narrow, muddy ditch that its inhabitants facetiously called a street, would not admit of their going two abreast. In the first car were Heathermoor and his son; in the next, Thurraboy, with Alfred and Harimau. The third was freighted with the luggage of the party, while the Portuguese and the German, with their belongings, brought up the rear in the fourth and fifth.

Even before they got clear of the town, the heavy jolts, that seemed to make the very teeth rattle in their heads, and the ceaseless "squish" with which the carriages plunged into quagmire after quagmire, gave our heroes a dismal foretaste of what was to come; but when they came out upon the so-called high-road (which, sloppy enough at best, had been doubly liquefied by that morning's drenching rain) their troubles began in earnest.

"I say, Daddy," cried Marmaduke, as their car plunged into its fortieth mud-pool with the rush of a diver, "this just reverses old John Bunyan—it's all Slough of Despond

and no Progress."

"It reminds me," chuckled his father, "of the story of a man crossing an Irish bog, when he spied a hat lying on the ground, and, picking it up, saw under it the head of a sturdy Irishman, just visible above the mud. 'Will I help ye out?' said he. 'No, thank ye, my boy,' cried Pat, 'sure, I have a good horse under me, and he'll get me through if anyone can.'"

Meanwhile Thurraboy and Huntley, in the next car, were

faring no better.

"I think I know now," said the boy, wiping a huge

splash of black mud from his cheek, "how a man must have felt when they put him in the pillory. This is just the same thing to a hair—being pinned up so that you can't move an inch, and pelted with dirt!"

"Happily we authors are used to being pelted with dirt," said Thurraboy with a grave smile; "and so we always

shall be, while reviews and newspapers exist."

"Well, I'm going to get out and walk," cried Heathermoor from the first carriage, suiting the action to the word.

"Get out and wade, you mean, Daddy," laughed his son,

following him.

Thurraboy and Huntley no sooner saw this movement than they hastened to imitate it; but the young Malay, to whom the dignity of riding in a carriage like a Rajah was still quite a novelty, stayed where he was.

Just as the four got out, a Chinese funeral came struggling past through the mire; and the boys saw with amazement that two men, who walked just before the bier, clad in white (the deepest mourning in China), held large sheets of gold and silver paper, from which they kept tearing small pieces, and scattering them on the ground as they went.

One of these strips fell close to Wyvil's feet, and he was about to pick it up as a relic, when his father caught his

arm.

"Don't touch it, whatever you do. Those fellows think that these scraps of tinsel will serve the deceased as actual money in the other world; and if you take so much as one of them, the whole gang will fall upon you for robbing the dead!"

"But why on earth do they wear white at a funeral?"

"Well, you know, everything in China is topsy-turvy according to our ideas. You go into mourning by wearing white, and keep your hat on in another man's house out of politeness. When you row a boat, you push the oars instead of pulling them, and your compass points south instead of north. Children study philosophy, while their

innocent grandfathers are flying kites. In addressing a letter, you put the town first, and the man's name last. When you are puzzled, you scratch your hip in place of your head. The ladies wear trousers, while the gentlemen

go about in petticoats."

Here the talk ended, the attention of both speakers being fully occupied with keeping their footing upon the narrow, tortuous, and often all but invisible strips of "good road" (i.e. not more than two or three inches deep in mud), on either side of which yawned fathomless depths of liquid mire that might make even an eel turn pale. In truth, this amphibious highway (what with its half-fluid surface and the dense masses of rank tropical vegetation that walled it in) looked far more like the channel of a half-dried river than the main thoroughfare of a "civilized" region.

"Well, if the Government taxes a road like this," laughed Heathermoor, "its motto should be: 'Holland expects every

man to pay his duty'."

Just then they were confronted by a vast quagmire, occupying the whole breadth of the road, seemingly modelled on a pair of spectacles, for it consisted of two huge round pools, with a hyphen of nominally solid ground between them a few inches wide.

They were footing it in single file over this bridge, as gingerly as if on a tight-rope, when a carriage came dashing through the mud-pond on the right, while another, coming from the opposite quarter, splashed into the sister pool on the left, and in a moment the white clothes of the unlucky pedestrians assumed the aspect of a well-worn blotting-pad or a collier's table-cloth.

"Well, now I may consider myself a landed proprietor," cried Thurraboy, shaking off a dozen huge mud-clots from his coat; "I'm sure I've enough real estate on my clothes to set up a plantation."

"And I may safely call myself a son of the soil," added Wyvil, as he wiped his mud-plastered face, which was so

covered with long black stripes as to give him quite the look of a zebra.

"A soiled son, you mean," laughed his father, combing with his smeared fingers a handful of wet mire out of his

dripping beard.

But their wrongs were speedily and amply avenged; for, just as the carriage that had done the lion's share of the mischief was vanishing round a sharp bend a few hundred yards ahead, it was seen to give a violent lurch, and then to fall right over, with an ominous crash.

"Hollo!" cried Heathermoor, "there's someone come to grief. Let's go and lend him a hand. He may be hurt."

Their help was certainly needed; for the capsized carriage had lost its left wheel, the Malay driver was floundering like a hippopotamus in a deep black puddle, and the passenger, a tall, good-looking young fellow, dressed like a planter, was leaning against the overturned car, with one foot drawn up under him as if badly hurt.

"Can we help you?" asked Heathermoor. "You seem to be going our way, and we could give you a lift in one of

our carriages."

"You are very kind," said the stranger in good English, though with a foreign accent, "and I will gladly accept your offer, for I've given my foot such a wrench that it's no use trying to walk."

"In with you, then," cried Thurraboy, helping him into the foremost carriage, "and your trunk can be put along

with ours."

"Thank you very much," said the young planter with a polite bow. "I suppose you are going to Medan; and if you care to be burdened with me so far, I dare say I can

find something there to carry me to Willemsdal."

"Willemsdal?" echoed Heathermoor, suddenly recalling Van Dunck's mention of this name. "I presume, then, I have the pleasure of speaking to Mynheer Van der Haagen."

CHAPTER XIX

A MALAY TOWN

THE young Dutchman eyed the speaker with a look of surprise.

"That is my name, at your service," said he; "but how

do you happen to know it?"

"We have heard a good deal about you," replied Heathermoor, "from a fellow-passenger of ours, Mynheer Van Dunck."

"Ah, old Cornelis! did you come over with him?" cried Van der Haagen, smiling. "Yes, he's an old friend of mine, and a very good fellow, in spite of his queer ways."

Here their talk was cut short by the starting again of the carriage, which, plunging, splashing, bumping, and rolling from side to side like a storm-tossed vessel, came so near capsizing outright, at every turn, that even Heathermoor, who had wedged himself in along with the hurt man, in the hope of protecting him to some extent against this unbearable jolting, was hard put to it to escape being flung out head-foremost.

Meanwhile Thurraboy and the two lads were fully employed in watching the movements of a native coolie, who was plodding along the road in front of them, and warned them of the depth of the puddles that awaited them by the high-water mark of the mud upon his bare limbs, which kept rising and rising as steadily as a thermometer, till he was clad from toes to knee-cap in a pair of close-fitting black stockings worthy of a bishop.

"Happy thought!" cried Wyvil; "let us tip that fellow

to keep just ahead of us and show us where the road's fordable!"

"It would be just the thing for a verse in the 'Book of Nonsense' style," suggested Alfred, "with one of Walter Crane's illustrations:

> "'There was a wet high-road of Deli, Just as solid as red-currant jelly; We were not half-way, When our driver did say, 'You must jump out and swim here, I tell ye!""

Just at that moment Thurraboy, looking back to see how Heathermoor's carriage was getting on, saw it plunge down with a tremendous shock, amid a perfect spray of mud; then it rebounded, plunged forward again, and stuck

This mishap occurred just opposite one of those tiny groups of Chinese thatched huts which broke, at long intervals, the sameness of the flanking walls of matted boughs; and their vellow-skinned, straw-hatted tenants, seated at their ease in the shade of a huge tree, surveyed the disaster without a sign of offering help, evidently thinking the whole matter a capital joke, as was shown by the twinkle of quiet amusement that flickered for an instant over the sad serenity of their flat, doll-like faces.

Not so Thurraboy. Springing to the rescue, he splashed recklessly through the mire to the stranded vehicle, and found both wheels fairly embedded in a mud-hole, while the horse, which had plainly given up the case as hopeless, stood quite still, taking all his driver's whipping and screaming with philosophic indifference.

The energetic Englishman "put his shoulder to the wheel" in a literal sense, and heaved with all his might, while Heathermoor and the driver tugged stoutly in front. Instantly down went Thurraboy's right foot to a fathomless depth; and, as he tugged wildly to free it, the other foot sank deeper still, and he suddenly felt a gush of cold, clammy, treacly mire insinuating itself between boot and foot to the very toes.

"Hollo, Heathermoor," shouted he, "come and pull me out before I take root, and blossom into steel pens and

sheets of foolscap, as an author should!"

"That will be turning over a new leaf, anyhow," said Heathermoor, who, exerting his full strength, literally drew him like a cork out of the clinging mud, with no small risk of needing to be extracted in the same way himself.

But the valiant author had not sacrificed his clean stockings in vain. His powerful heave, given just at the right moment, had done its work, and the sunken carriage rose

to the surface once more.

All these mishaps, however, had taken up so much time that the sun was already sinking, and our travellers began to fear that night would overtake them ere they could reach their journey's end. But happily the worst part of the twelve miles between Deli and Medan was over by this time; and as the swampy flats of the shore were gradually left behind, and the road mounted towards the uplands, the soil grew firmer, the mud-pits less and less frequent, and both cars and pedestrians advanced much more briskly than before.

Signs of life, too, now began to multiply on every side. The grass-thatched hovels of the natives, hitherto few and far between, presented themselves at every turn. Small patches of cleared ground broke the dark outline of the jungle every here and there; and our heroes met more than one gang of Chinamen or Malays plodding along the highroad, or issuing from the surrounding thickets.

Finding their work easier, and visibly refreshed by the coolness of the approaching night, the wearied horses, seeming to feel instinctively that they were nearing the end of their toilsome journey, mended their pace, and got over the ground pretty rapidly. Presently the red-tiled roof of

a large country-house was seen rising above the trees, and the long brown thatches of several "drying-sheds", cropping up through the rich green foliage, told them that they had reached the tobacco-planting region at last. A sudden vision of trim white villas, half-buried in many-coloured vegetation—a sprinkling of sallow little soldiers in dark-blue—a small-pox of native huts breaking out all at once along either side of the road—a sharp turn to the left, and then, just as the sun sank behind the distant mountains of Acheen, our travellers found themselves safe under the hospitable though not wholly weather-tight roof of the Medan Hotel.

Here they parted from their new friend, Mynheer Van der Haagen, who, turning a deaf ear to Lord Heathermoor's hospitable entreaties to stay and dine with them, declared that he must go on at once, and started again for his plantation at Willemsdal (which lay a few miles farther up the road) as soon as a carriage could be got ready to convey him. But, before taking his leave of them, he once more thanked them heartily for their assistance, and made them promise, twice over, to come and stay with him as soon as he should be able to get his house in order for their reception.

Dinner was ready at the hotel a few minutes after the arrival of our heroes, and the two boys were immensely amused at the peculiar style of their first Sumatran dinner. A huge soup-plate was set before each guest, and filled to the brim with hot boiled rice. On this foundation was built up a perfect pyramid of curried prawns, dried fish, sweet omelette, chillie peppers, hashed mutton, French beans, rissoles, minced beef, preserved ginger, and sliced sausage—all this, be it remembered, on one plate!

"This is what you may call an 'all-nations dish'," grinned Wyvil; "something to suit everyone, from the Chinaman to the Yankee. It's as big a jumble as that Greek pie in Aristophanes, which was by way of being

the longest word in the world. How did it go, Alf? You used to reel it off pat enough at the old Charterhouse."

"I'll try," said Alfred. "Lepado-temacho-selacho-galeokranio - leipsano - drim - hupotrimmato - silphio - praso - melitokatakechumeno - kichl - epi - kossupho - phatto - perister-alektruon - opt - enkephalo - peleio - lagoö - siraio - baphé - traganopterugon!"

"Better drink some water after that," laughed Heather-"What a chance that word would give to a schoolmaster to play a trick on a boy by letting him off easy with only one word to write out for an imposition, and give him that!"

"And wouldn't it be an awkward dish for some shortwinded old Greek gentleman to order for dinner," added Thurraboy; "especially if the waiter didn't happen to hear him the first time!"

The beds of this strange hostelry were as queer as its meals; the one allotted to Wyvil and his chum being almost as big as a cottage garden, and mapped out with bolsters and cushions into so many small "allotments" as to suggest that its original occupant must have sub-let his extra space to three or four different families.

The rooms themselves, however, were large, high, and well aired, thanks to a door (or rather doorway) at each end, so protected by canvas screens as to leave a guest tolerably private, even when sitting outside his door. But, except in the early morning, there was little sitting out of any kind. Directly after the one o'clock tiffin (lunch), all the lodgers vanished like rabbits running to earth; doors and shutters were closed, and the whole place lay voiceless and lifeless as a tomb for more than three hours. Not till half-past four did this new version of the Sleeping Beauty's Palace wake up, aroused by the shouts of the guests to their respective "boys", as they call native servants older than themselves.

"Funny kind of place, isn't it?" said Marmaduke, as they peeped from behind their screen at sunrise at their new surroundings, which they had hardly seen amid the

gathering darknesss of the previous night.

He might well say so. The hotel looked as if originally issued in serial parts, the dining-room, bed-rooms, kitchen, and stables being all separated from each other, and scattered all over the courtyard. Along the front of the dining-room (prudently raised several feet above the damp ground) ran a vast roofed-in veranda, nearly half as large as the hotel itself, serving the triple purpose of billiard-room, parlour, and smoking-room, in which, whenever it rained (which, in the wet season, was every day and all day long), the Dutch traders sat over their pipes and tankards, chatting, driving bargains, or turning over the stained and tattered copies of the Rotterdamske Humoristik Album that lay on the small round tables.

"I say," cried Huntley, peering out in turn, "here's a fellow cleaning our boots with a big red flower!" (the

Hibiscus).

"The flower of a boot-tree, I suppose," chuckled Wyvil.
"Fancy hearing a boot-black sing out: 'Redden yer boots, sir?' But here comes breakfast."

Eager for a good look at their new surroundings, the boys finished their meal in a trice, and, after shouting in vain for their Malay henchman, "Harry", sallied forth for a walk round the town.

But "Harry" (who by this time answered to his new name as readily as to his own) was just then otherwise engaged. Heathermoor and Thurraboy, now that they were actually in sight of the mountains among which they believed their friend to be held captive, wished, of course, to set about his rescue at once, and had sent for Harimau to take counsel with them.

"The one thing that troubles me in this business," said Thurraboy, "is that, as you saw last night, no one here seems to have heard anything of a white man being taken by the Acheenese, though it's more than five weeks since that shipwreck. Now, from what I know of Eastern ways, it is hardly credible that a gang of savages should keep such an important prisoner so long (if they really had got him) without sending to demand his ransom, or at least letting the white men know he was there."

"It does look bad," admitted Heathermoor; "but, after all, there may be some reason for it of which we know nothing. Those Somauli fellows who took you didn't put

you to ransom, you know."

"Yes, but that was because they hoped to get more by selling me for a slave. These Acheen fellows couldn't do that with the colonel, you know. But here comes our young Rob Roy, looking Tiger by name and tiger by nature."

In fact, the Tiger of the Golden Mountain had suddenly shown an ominous change in his look and bearing. Once more in view of his native hills, the fierce instincts of his race were awake again, and he entered with the quick, springy step, fiery glance, and savage alertness of his terrible namesake.

The two men exchanged a meaning look, filled with a secret fear that the new influences of civilization, which this wild spirit had just begun to feel, would prove too weak to resist the overwhelming force of the impulse that was dragging him back to barbarism.

"Inche (chief) Harimau," said Heathermoor, who was always careful to treat the young chief with studied courtesy, "you know more of Acheen than we, and we want you to advise us. Why is it, think you, that, if Tuan Huntley is captive to your people, they have never sent to the whites for a ransom for him?"

"It is hard to say, Tuan Ingrez (English master). He may have been sick or hurt in the shipwreck, and then they could do nothing till he was well again; or perhaps

they could not agree what ransom to ask for him; or the messenger whom they sent may have been killed by some other tribe."

"Then you still think he is alive yet?"

"Why not, Tuan? You have told me that he could swim well; and, if he escaped the sea, no son of the mountain would be such a gheela (fool) as to slay him?"

"And what, then, do you think we had better do?"

"Were I you, Tuan, I would send a native messenger up into the hills to find out if the sons of the mountains hold any white man captive, and who he is. Gladly would I go on your errand myself; but you know what the prophet has spoken: 'Till the appointed day is past, my foot must not tread our hills again'. But money draws all men after it, and assuredly it will be no hard matter to find a man who will do your bidding for a sufficient reward."

The two Englishmen dismissed their young adviser with many thanks, and quickly agreed that they could not do better than follow his counsel.

"And the best man to recommend us a reliable messenger," added Heathermoor, "will be our friend Van der Haagen of Willemsdal; and, if we don't hear anything of him to-day, I'll send him a note the first thing to-morrow morning."

Meanwhile, the two boys had quickly exhausted the quiet little Malay town, which consisted chiefly of three or four neat white Dutch villas, lying a little back from the road amid feathery bamboos and fan-like palm leaves; of a few open-fronted shops kept by Chinamen or Portuguese half-castes; and of a number of rude native hovels of wood and dried grass, perched on strong piles several feet in height, and looking, as Wyvil said with a grin, "like a gang of centipedes crawling away through the mud". Then, finding no ground to walk on save the high-road itself—for the soft soil of the encircling plantations had been whipped

into a perfect custard by the recent rains—they struck out along it at a brisk pace.

"I say," cried Wyvil, "do you remember that black panther that gobbled up the old magician in Doctor Basilius?

I wonder if they have any of 'em here."

"I dare say they have," said Alfred coolly. "Dr. Basilius hung out in Java, but they say the animals are much the same in both. Wouldn't it be fine if we could manage to shoot one? But what's that enclosure yonder? It looks like a public garden of some sort."

It was a garden, but not such as they thought; for one glance at the mouldering wooden crosses and crumbling headstones told them that they had reached the burial-

ground of the settlement.

"Well, I do think they might keep it in better order," said Marmaduke. "Why, these two stones have crumbled so that you can't make out the name; and just see how those crosses are rotting away. They'll all be down together, the first time there's anything of a wind."

"But how can they help it in such a climate? Besides, it's not that the wood's decayed; it's been eaten by the

ants. See, there they are at it now."

In fact, so completely was the cross to which he pointed undermined by the swarming destroyers that it must have fallen but for the support of a splendid tropical creeper, which had twined lovingly around the mouldering wood as if striving to hide its decay. Wyvil put aside the clustering leaves, and saw the rudely-painted words:

"Karel Willem, geboren April 24, 1881; gestorben

Mai 24, 1882."

"Only lasted a year, poor little fellow," said the English boy pityingly. "I suppose the climate is very bad for children."

"It must be, for here's a poor little mite that only lived thirteen days," said Alfred, stooping over the next cross, which told its own story: "Gerrit Christian Frederick Beurhof, Mai 11-24, 1877."

"Here's one Englishman at least," cried Wyvil, who had moved a little to the right, "and buried pretty lately too."

"And here's a Bohemian and a Swiss. Terribly homesick they must have been, poor fellows! I've heard the Swiss always are when they go and live abroad."

"See these two graves here. They must belong to some of the big men of the place, for there's been a lot of work

spent on 'em, and a lot of money too."

The tombs to which Marmaduke pointed—which lay a little apart from the rest—did indeed show marks of unusual care. Though so freshly made that they were still unmarked with either headstone or slab, the one was encircled with a tasteful iron railing about eighteen inches high, and the other edged with a neat border of white stone, at the corners of which stood four pretty little red vases filled with earth, whence the first green shoots of tropical plants were just beginning to peer.

"Well," cried Marmaduke, looking about him admiringly, "who'd ever have thought of coming across such a pretty little place in the middle of all this mud and mess?"

In truth, in this quiet little grave-yard on the edge of the boundless forest, Death himself seemed robbed of half his terrors by the loving and tender care bestowed upon his victims by the great mother on whose breast they reposed. The very boundary of the enclosure, instead of a bare wall of cold grey stone, was a ring of green boughs and gorgeous flowers, the many-coloured brightness of which would have tasked the pencil of Turner himself. Stately palms bent mournfully over the dead. The hard outline of the roughhewn crosses was lost in the embrace of twining creepers. Clustering leaves and huge bell-like flowers hid the mouldering stones. To a poet's eye all this freshness, and brightness, and beauty might well have seemed an offering laid by mighty Nature in late repentance on the tombs of the poor mortals whose feeble life had shrivelled like a

blighted flower under the blasting breath of her fierce

tropical might.

Here their sight-seeing might fairly have ended, especially as the sun was now high in the sky, and the scorching tropical heat began to make itself felt in earnest. But, in an evil hour for both, Wyvil saw, beyond the narrow belt of cleared ground that encircled the grave-yard, a bristling forest of wild grass (the famous "tiger-grass" of the East Indies, high enough to hide a man on horseback), forming the vanguard of the untamed jungle beyond.

"I say, Alf, here's a chance!" he cried. "We've never been in a real tropical jungle yet; let's go in now and see

what it's like."

"But how about the snakes?"

"Oh, bother the snakes! You don't suppose there's bound to be a rattlesnake or a boa-constrictor under every blade of grass that we tread upon? If a snake attacks us, we'll kill it and take it home for breakfast. Come along! I've heard Mr. Thurraboy talk of grass high enough to lose your way in, and I want to see how it feels."

How it felt poor Marmaduke soon found out to his cost. Snakes, indeed, they saw none; but hardly had they gone fifty yards through this grass-forest (the feathery tops of which rose far above their heads) when Alfred, who was a

few paces in the rear, called out in dismay:

"I say, old fellow, have you cut yourself? your breeks

are all bloody."

Sure enough, Wyvil's white trousers were blotted with a broad red stain a little above the ankle. Hastily pulling them up, the boy saw a huge black leech clinging to his flesh; and Huntley, stooping to pull it off, found two more of these horrible creatures fastening on himself.

"We'd best be off out of this," cried he, facing about.

"Right you are. I've bled for my country quite enough for one day, and I don't want to be turned into a set of cuts by Leech." "I ought to have warned you of that," said Heathermoor, on hearing the story. "That long grass just swarms with these wood-leeches, and no one ever thinks of going into it without knee-high boots. It's lucky you went no farther."

That evening, to their great satisfaction, came a note from Van der Haagen to say that he would have all ready for them next day, and send a carriage for them between four and five in the afternoon.

CHAPTER XX

ON A SUMATRAN PLANTATION

VERY glad to see you, gentlemen. I've got some tea ready for you, and we shall have dinner in about an hour."

So spoke the hospitable Van der Haagen as his guests drove up to the door in the carriage sent for them, a small

cart following with their luggage.

The boys looked at the house with much interest, this being the first Dutch country-house that they had visited in the East, and it was certainly worth looking at. Larger and loftier than the bungalow of British India, Van der Haagen's mansion (approached from the highway by a short curving drive) reared its broad white front amid the trees of a spacious garden, in the arrangement of which much taste as well as labour had been employed. From a thatched porch, wide enough to shelter twenty men with ease, a flight of wooden steps led up to a roomy veranda set with light tables and basket-chairs of the well-known East-Indian pattern. This veranda, extending along the whole house-front, and completely shaded by the overhanging eaves, communicated by two doors with the neat and well-furnished drawing-room (which looked delightfully cool and shady after the blistering glare outside), while under the building ran a kind of colonnade, formed by the stout posts that raised its foundation well above the damp soil; and in this seclusion fowls were scratching and dogs playing hide-and-seek unmolested.

Laying aside their vast umbrella-like sun-hats, our tra-

vellers gathered round the tea-table—which was standing all ready on the veranda,—while Mynheer's native servants

carried up the luggage.

For the first few minutes the talk turned on indifferent subjects, and the two lads were delighted to find that not only had their host spent several years in England (as might be guessed by his excellent English), but he had actually visited the Charterhouse itself, and, indeed, had more than one acquaintance among their former school-fellows.

Just at first, however, Lord Heathermoor himself was markedly silent and preoccupied; for, eager as he was to open at once the question of Colonel Huntley's release, he naturally shrank from the seeming discourtesy of entering upon his own affairs with a comparative stranger just after setting foot in the latter's house for the first time.

But the thought that his best friend was a captive among savages, and in hourly peril of death, overbore every other consideration, and ere the meal ended Van der

Haagen had heard the whole story.

"I am glad you've told me all this," said he heartily, "and I need hardly say I shall be most happy to give you any help I can. By the bye, you have not told me your friend's name yet."

"You may possibly know it, for he has travelled a good deal in these parts. His name is Colonel Randolph

Huntley."

"Randolph Huntley!" echoed the host. "I have good cause to know his name, for but for him I should not be here now."

"How was that?" asked Heathermoor and Thurraboy both at once.

"A Malay rogue in Borneo was going to stab me in my sleep, when a shot from Huntley's revolver broke his arm just in time to save me."

"They may well call him 'Rescue Randolph'," said

Heathermoor with a grim smile; "he seems to be always

saving someone."

"I dare say he never told you of it," resumed the planter, "for he was not the man to talk of his own exploits; but you see I'm doubly bound to do all I can for him, and I'm the more sorry that all I can is just now very little."

Heathermoor's brightening face clouded visibly.

"Allow me to explain," said the other, noticing this. "If it were only a question of finding a capable messenger I could find you a dozen, but, unluckily, there is far more needed than that. You see, these restless mountain tribes in Acheen are always, as regards us Dutchmen, on a footing either of open war or of armed neutrality, which your Captain Marryat very truly defined as usually meaning a charge of bayonets; and at present all the tribes of the coast where your friend's vessel was wrecked are so bitter against us that to send a native scout to them would simply ensure his being murdered directly it was known (as it soon would be) that he came from our settlements."

"But in that case," said the guest, looking graver still, "might they not murder Huntley too in the belief that he

was a Dutchman?"

"Not likely, for many of them have had a good deal to do with the English, and they would know the difference at once. I think there can be no doubt of his safety; the difficulty is to get at him. There is only one man here who could help us, if he chose."

"And who is he, pray?"

"The Rajah of Medan, who, though he has adopted many European ways, and associates quite as much with the white men as with his own people, has always kept up friendly relations with the Acheen Malays, and has great influence among them, being related to several of their most powerful chiefs. Unfortunately, he is a flighty young fellow, constantly quarrelling with someone about nothing

at all. He is not very fond of us Dutch at any time, and, unluckily, an Englishman offended him just the other day, so I doubt if either you or I would be well received by him just now."

Here Wyvil, who had looked up eagerly at the first

mention of the Rajah, broke in unceremoniously:

"Did you say the Rajah of Medan? Why, I've got a letter to him myself that the Maharajah of Johore gave me; I'd quite forgotten it. Hold on a minute and I'll fetch it you."

Away he ran, and returned in a trice with the allimportant letter, which, boy-like, he had suffered to lie forgotten for many weeks in the pocket of his portmanteau.

"Well, with that the thing is as good as done," said Van der Haagen, visibly brightening after a moment's scrutiny of the straggling, long-legged Eastern characters, which looked as if someone had trodden on a dozen spiders at once. "I know this man would do anything for the Maharajah of Johore, and, as a rule, he's friendly to Englishmen, though he happens to be out of humour with them just now. It's too late to send it to him to-day, but I'll despatch it by special messenger to-morrow morning, and then he'll most likely ask you to come and see him, and give you all the help he can."

This assurance was a cordial to his hearers' drooping spirits, and even the anxious Huntley felt more hopeful when, early next morning, he and Wyvil stepped out on

the veranda after their bath.

The first rays of sunrise were just lighting up the vast procession of wooded mountains along the northern sky, and over hill and valley, field and wood, brooded a stillness as deep and solemn as if the world had that day come fresh from the hand of God. All along the foreground (which the distant jungle enclosed as if in a dark frame) extended a rich crop of tall grass, relieved by the lighter green of the young rice. Hump-necked Brahmin oxen, with upcurved

horns forming a complete ring, grazed drowsily in the low, deep pasture-lands. Gaunt, bare-limbed, brown-faced men, who, as Alfred said, looked as if made of the tobacco on which they laboured, were creeping like ants along the edge of the jungle, and on every side started up, like rocks out of this sea of vegetation, the long, low, barrack-like sheds built for the pressing and drying of the tobacco leaves, in which were at work the four hundred Chinamen who had been called to their task half an hour before by the blast of a cow's horn.

"Isn't it grand?" cried Alfred; "and I can afford to enjoy it now that there seems a chance to get Daddy out of these fellows' claws. Just think that he's really among those hills we see yonder. Why, it's almost as if we saw him!"

"And now that we are so near him we'll have him out of that somehow, never fear!" cried Wyvil valiantly. "I had no idea, though, that it would be such a business to do it. I thought we'd just go and take him away from them, slap-off. But I suppose it's as Mr. Thurraboy says—it's only in story-books that people overcome difficulties and rescue prisoners as easily as one would eat a mince-pie."

"If Mr. Thurraboy made that remark," chimed in that gentleman's voice from behind, "he never said a truer word in his life; and you will do me the justice to admit that I have never in any book of mine made my hero rout a whole tribe of savages single-handed, or carry off a rescued lady in one hand while fighting half a dozen robbers with the other, or spirit away a chained captive from an underground dungeon through the midst of fifty armed guards, or any other idiotic nonsense like that. But here comes our tea and bread-and-butter, and after it we'll go for a walk."

They did so, and found plenty to look at even in the garden itself. The boys were delighted to find, growing in the open air, so many shrubs and plants which they had hitherto seen only in glass houses, and they looked doubly interested when they saw, hanging overhead, like prickly cannon-balls, several specimens of the famous "durian" or jack-fruit, that strange jumble of pine-apple, melon, and cocoa-nut, equally renowned for the exquisite flavour of its taste and the horrible foulness of its smell, which can only be realized by eating bad eggs and decayed fish over an open drain.

All at once Marmaduke, who was a few steps in advance, drew back with a loud "Hollo!", and Alfred, springing forward, saw the whitened skull of an elephant, with a tell-tale bullet-hole in its vast frontal-bone, starting up just in front of him, amid the twining green leaves and brilliant

flowers.

"There," said Thurraboy, pointing to it with a look of sombre meaning, "is the best type of Sumatra."

The ominous words, though not yet supported by the terrible proof which was to confirm them ere many days were over, awed for a moment even the reckless boys who heard them. In truth, no fitter emblem could be found than this of the ambushed death that lurks on every side beneath all the gorgeous tropical beauty of this magnificent temple of destruction. Corpses come drifting down its smooth, shining rivers. Crocodiles lie lurking in every lagoon. Snakes coil and hiss in every thicket. The deadly "black panther", and the deadlier pestilence, against which no care or caution can avail, haunt the shadowy depths of its stately forests. A thousand perils, each with its own tale of terror and doom, lie hid beneath the smiling surface of its calm, sunlit seas. Amid the soft, dreamy beauty of its wood-crowned hills the thin wreaths of bluish-white smoke that curl venomously upward tell but too plainly of the quenchless fires below. All the rich colouring, all the barbaric splendour, of this wondrous region, is but a beautiful mask hiding the eyeless horror of a death'shead.

But these gloomy fancies were scattered at once by their host's hearty voice from the veranda above.

"Good-morning, gentlemen! I'm just going to send off that letter to the Rajah, and then I'll show you over the plantation, and let you see what we planters are doing here."

Twenty minutes later the party were tramping off to the tobacco-sheds with their host, who said, as they went along:

"It's a pity you were not here in spring, for then you would have seen the whole thing from beginning to end—planting, growing, picking, and all the rest. But just now there is nothing going on except the drying of the leaves, which is being done in that shed yonder. You seldom get two tobacco crops in succession from one piece of land. Some of our neighbours have done it, but in general we find it better to plant it with rice or something of that sort, and not try tobacco upon it again for six or seven years, which is just what I'm doing here, as you see."

And, so saying, he pointed to a wide belt of padi (rice) which stretched far away to the right, its tender green contrasting very prettily with the dark mass of uncleared woodland behind it. In the nearer edge of the jungle gaped a deep gash, showing where fresh ground was being cleared for new tobacco-plantations, and right in the centre of the great rice-field, towering far above the rustling sea of smooth green blades below, a vast tree stood in solitary grandeur, like some aged Indian warrior, the last of his race, lingering alone amid the settlements of the palefaces.

"That's one of the sacred trees of the Malays," said Van der Haagen, in answer to the questioning looks of his companions. "There are several which they hold sacred, and when we begin cutting away the jungle, to clear fresh soil for planting, the natives come to us and beg us to spare this tree or that tree, and of course we always do it. Now, here we are at the drying-shed. Shall we go in?"

In they went accordingly, and found the interior very much like a farm-yard, the hay-stacks being replaced with huge piles of tobacco-leaves, among which a perfect army of half-clad Chinese coolies, four hundred strong, were hard

at work sorting, ranging, and stowing.

Little conversation was possible here, for the four visitors (none of whom were smokers) were all but stifled by the atmosphere, in which the seasoned Chinamen breathed as freely as in the open air. In fact, so overpowering was the smell of the half-dried tobacco that a smoker might have enjoyed his favourite pastime gratis, merely by taking an empty pipe with him and inhaling the air through it.

"That is how we measure the heat, you see," said the planter, pointing to a hollow bamboo thrust through each stack of tobacco leaves, with a stick inside it, which, when drawn out, was almost too hot to be touched. "It must never be above or below a certain point, you know. stead of stripping the whole plant at once, we hang it up to dry, and don't strip the leaves till quite dried. The Sumatra tobacco, however, won't do for cigars; it's only used for the deck-blatt (cover-leaf) that covers the outside of the cigar. Last season America took a great deal of our tobacco, and we expect they'll take more still, in spite of the high duty. The usual price is two and a half guilders (four shillings) per pound, and the cost of transport to Europe four shillings per bale of one hundred and sixty pounds."

Midway along the grove of leaf-stacks, each as high as a man's head, hung a ponderous iron steam-punch, all ready to squeeze the loose leaves into bales as firm and even as

mosaic.

But what most struck them all was the healthy, muscular look of the coolies, who, as Van der Haagen told them, had three meals of rice and fish daily.

(B 533)

"Ten hours' work," added he. "The horn blows at five in the morning, and then they breakfast, and are at work by six. They leave off at eleven to lunch, and start again at twelve. At five, work is over for the day, and they go to dinner. I'll show you their kitchen presently, and I think you'll find it in pretty good order."

"Do they ever give you any trouble?" asked Thurraboy.

"Very seldom. Now and then some man stands up and says he won't work; but it never lasts long. You see, they're just like children with their fits and their humours, and all you have to do is to be quite quiet and firm, and, above all, never to lose your temper or seem the least bit afraid. In all the time I've been on this plantation I've only had one really serious row."

"And what was that?" asked Wyvil eagerly.

"Well, it was all the fault of one man—one of those rascally half-castes, part Chinese and part Malay, who are generally the worst sort that we have. I had just begun to keep my eye upon this fellow, as likely to make mischief among the men, when one morning the whole three hundred broke loose as soon as the horn sounded, and came trooping down to the house with this fellow, Lu-Yan, at their head, all shouting and yelling at once.

"I stood on the veranda, just at the head of the stair, so that only one man could reach me at a time, and I said

to them quite quietly:

"'Speak one at a time, and then I can understand you.'

"So they put Lu-Yan forward, and up he came and demanded double wages all round, and half a dozen other things more absurd still, adding some insolence of his own in a blustering kind of way, which showed me that he was really afraid, and only swaggering to hide it.

"Before he could finish I hit out with all my might, and knocked him head-over-heels to the bottom of the stair, upsetting in his fall two or three others who had crowded

up after him.

"'There!' I cried, 'you see what a coward you've taken for your leader. Carry him away, and go to your work at once!"

"And did they do it?" enquired Marmaduke, to whom the idea of this quiet, pleasant-looking, modest young fellow facing three hundred mutineers single-handed had quite a heroic sound.

"Every man of them," replied the young Dutchman, smiling; "and as for the half-caste, I discharged him on the spot, and told him never to show his face on my land again. And since then (this was a year ago) all has gone well."

"And what became of Lu-Yan!" asked Alfred.

"Well, he may have slipped off to Singapore, or to the Acheen hills, like many of our black sheep; but I've heard no more of him."

By this time they were at the coolies' quarters, which, on the outside, were an exact copy of the drying-shed itself, but on entering they seemed to be in a military encampment, the tents being fairly represented by two long lines of mosquito-curtains, some blue and some white, with an open space down the middle.

Inside each curtain was the indispensable pipe and one of those curiously-painted boxes that one sees in every Chinese shop from Penang to Shanghai, and in the middle of the central avenue rose a rude altar made of two old packing-cases, and adorned with "joss-sticks", coloured paper, and crabbed Chinese characters.

But the most striking thing was the spotless cleanliness, which suggested a Dutch village at home rather than an Eastern plantation; and, fresh from the sight of the "Chinese town" in Singapore, they were amazed at such neatness in a building tenanted by four hundred Chinamen.

"I'm always careful of that," said the planter, "for men can never be healthy if they don't keep clean. I make them keep their place in good order, and so we hardly ever have any sickness. Now, will you come and see our head Chinese overseer? You'll find him a very good fellow."

As they entered the trim little garden encircling the big thatched house of the Chinese "boss", he appeared at the door with a smile of welcome, and greeted them in Chinese fashion by shaking his own hand instead of theirs, the boys imitating him with great glee.

"You b'longee top-side," was his first salutation; "dlinko one piecee demon-water chop-chop' (i.e. you come up and

drink a glass of demon-water at once).

"Can do," said Heathermoor, whose travels in China had

familiarized him with pigeon (i.e. business) English.

The "demon-water" came, in the form of three big bottles of soda-water, which the hospitable Chinaman uncorked by the simple process of knocking off their necks against the door-post.

His front room, opening to the veranda, was a perfect museum of quaint Chinese carvings in wood or ivory, and long, narrow, scarlet streamers hanging down the walls, inscribed in black Chinese characters; these latter being keepsakes from native friends. And now his wife and children, conquering their first shyness, came forward to greet the strangers in turn.

While Heathermoor and Thurraboy talked to the parents, our boys had a game with the children, not a little amused at the perfect gravity of these solemn wee yellow images with braceleted wrists and narrow black eyes, who, though evidently enjoying the fun, never once relaxed into a smile.

"Do all Chinamen talk such queer English?" asked Wyvil

as they left.

"To be sure. Haven't you ever seen the translation into pigeon English of 'Mary had a Little Lamb'?

"'Maly hab littee piecee lamb,
He wool all same he snow;
What time he Maly b'long one side,
He lamb make all same go.'"

"That Chinese overseer of mine will be a rich man some day," said Van der Haagen. "He makes one thousand pounds a year, and knows how to take care of it too. I wish the coolies would do the same; but they gamble away their money as fast as they get it. Now, yonder is the coolies' kitchen," pointing to a long thatched shed open on all four sides, "but I think I had better show you that later on, when they're having their dinner."

"Do you do much coffee-growing in these parts !" asked

Lord Heathermoor.

"No, Java's more the place for that. Here we grow little, for, as a rule, it don't even pay its own expenses. I have a small plantation near here, but I doubt if I shall ever make much out of it. Tobacco's the great thing in Sumatra."

"But if you so seldom get two crops running off the same ground, and have to clear fresh land every year for

planting, the plantations must be very large."

"They are. One plantation, belonging to the Deli Tabaks-Matschaapij (Tobacco Co.), which you must have passed on your way here, stretches thirty-six miles, and there are others even larger than that. In fact, there being from four hundred to five hundred men employed on each plantation, and each man having the care, during the planting season, of a patch of ground three hundred feet long by twenty feet broad, you may think how much space is needed in all. Well, I think you have seen everything now, except the coolies' kitchen, which I'll show you to-night."

That evening, between five and six, they came up to the coolies' kitchen and found it all in a bustle. One man was drawing water as if for a wager, another watching a huge iron pot, and a third filling with cooked rice the bowls handed by the coolies as they came up. Others were already eating their allowance, and those who had finished were washing their dishes and carrying them away.

At the entrance of the Fan-Kwei (foreign demons) all looked up with visible interest, and when Van der Haagen,

saying a few kind words here and there in passing, helped himself from one of the rice-buckets with a flat wooden spoon, and Heathermoor followed suit, the general satisfaction rose to a height.

"You try littee piecee chow-chow (food) too, master," said a tall Chinaman, offering Alfred a spoonful of rice;

"chow-chow muchee good."

This trick, if tried on the headlong Wyvil, might have succeeded; but the cooler Alfred did not fail to notice the quick glance of eager expectation shot at him by the coolies as he put out his hand for the spoon; and he guessed at once that the rice was burning hot!

Quick as thought, he seized the spoon, and thrust the scalding mess into the mouth of the joker himself, who, thus caught in his own trap, sputtered it out with a choking screech like the cry of a strangled parrot. A shrill cackle of glee from the coolies mingled with a lusty roar from the English, and the discomfited joker slunk away, looking very foolish indeed.

This completed the survey, and back they went to the house, well satisfied with their sight-seeing, and much impressed by their host's kind and thoughtful care of his

labourers.

"If all Dutch settlers in the East had been like him," said Lord Heathermoor in a tone of grave meaning, "it would have been a very good thing both for them and for their colonies!"

And well might he say so; for, in truth, there are few sadder or darker stories in that great Newgate Calendar of nations which men call history, than the rise and fall of Holland's Eastern empire. Never were such glorious possibilities offered to any nation; never were they more hopelessly and miserably cast away. When the Dutchman came, in the fulness of time, to supplant those cruel, profligate, rapacious Portuguese viceroys, who were the shame of mankind in the sixteenth century, he came crowned

with the glory of a triumph over the mightiest of modern tyrannies, secured against both bodily and spiritual despotism by his Protestant creed and his republican institutions, with all his energies developed to the utmost by that long battle with man and nature that had raged ever since the green pastures of Scaldmariland first received the name of Bet Auw (good meadow), softened by the elegant Roman into Batayia.

Then came to Holland and her people, had they but known it, the day of salvation not only for themselves, but for the whole Eastern world. The richest field of enterprise upon the face of the earth lay open before them. Spain and Portugal had fallen. England was still but a faint shadow upon the farthest horizon. In India, Japan, and Malacca, Holland had supplanted Portugal; in Amboyna and the Moluccas, she had torn down the flag of Spain. The civilized world's whole carrying-trade, and the civilized world's wealth along with it, were pouring into the stately harbour of Amsterdam. In the West, the sturdy republicans who had defied the whole might of Spain were a match for the combined strength of France and England. In the East, millions of men, weary of Portuguese treachery and Spanish oppression, were ready to hail any change as a change for the better. The Amboyna massacre, the Java rebellion, the crimes of Warren Hastings and his successors in India, the Opium War, the Sepoy Mutiny, long generations of sin, and misery, and ruin, would never have been, could the hero of the hour have been content to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God.

But it was not to be. Spain had sinned like a fanatic; Holland sinned like a tradesman. The selfish greed of gain was slowly eating away the stout manhood of that noble nation which had buried its fairest tracts beneath the sea to save beleaguered Leyden. In an age that could remember the battle of Nieuport and the siege of Ostend, a Dutch trader, accused of supplying stores to the enemy, avowed it with coarse frankness: "We merchants trade where we will, and were aught to be gained by trading with Satan, I would risk burning my sails". The Amsterdammer's Bible was his ledger, and his creed was: "There is no God but Mammon, and cent per cent is his profit".

CHAPTER XXI

CALLING ON THE RAJAH

THE satisfaction of the English party was further heightened by a piece of good news which the afternoon had brought them; for, between three and four o'clock, the messenger sent by Van der Haagen to the young Rajah, with the Prince of Johore's letter, had come back to bring them word that his highness had given the letter a favourable reception, and would be ready to receive them at noon on the following day.

This was better than Heathermoor had bargained for, knowing as he did that the golden rule of most Asiatic potentates is never to do to-day what can be put off till to-morrow; and accordingly the four set off next morning in good time to keep their appointment, borrowing a carriage from their host for the trip, which was somewhat over six

miles.

"I should have been glad to go along with you," said the hospitable planter, "but, as I've told you, the Rajah is not very fond of us Dutchmen, and my presence would do you more harm than good. Anyhow, I wish you good success."

The two boys—whose minds were still full of all the wonders of the Maharajah's palace at Johore—were sadly disappointed to find the royal residence of this new Rajah nothing but a big country-house with a whitewashed front and red-tiled roof, half-buried in the clustering trees of a huge garden, and defended by an army of four or five men, in a uniform compounded of Scotch caps, blue livery coats

edged with very shabby gold lace, and boots that seemed all made for the left foot.

But the interior startled them yet more, adorned as it was with wretched coloured prints of steeple-chasing, shooting, and fox-hunting (such as one sees in old English inns), which some knavish trader had palmed off on the poor Rajah as genuine Landseers and Turners. Nor was this all. As they entered the principal room, a large musical-box on one of the tables (evidently wound-up for the occasion) struck up "Champagne Charlie", which the Rajah somehow supposed to be the English national anthem!

But though they had hard work to keep from laughing at every turn, the visit was a great success. The Rajah (a good-looking young man of twenty-five, though already too stout for his age) received them very politely, and seemed vastly pleased when Alfred, by a lucky inspiration, greeted him in Malay, and even gave him his native title of *Tunku* (your highness).

The prince listened attentively to Heathermoor's story, and seemed much interested to learn that its hero was Colonel Huntley; for, though he had never met the colonel, he had heard much of him, and had owed to Huntley's skill and energy the settlement of a claim preferred by him

against a business house in Singapore.

Hence the Rajah hastened to assure them that a trusty messenger should at once be sent off to the hills to find out what had become of the colonel, and bring them word with all speed. He despatched the courier before their eyes; and the man, with a silent salaam, set off as composedly as if a journey alone through one of the wildest and most perilous regions on earth were no more than a picnic.

Nor did his Highness's courtesy end here. When the boys took leave of him, he gave Wyvil a silk scarf embroidered with the badge of his family, and Huntley a fine ivory-handled hunting-knife, to the great delight of both, though they little guessed how and where those gifts were to prove their value.

"The messenger, being on foot, will take three days to get there, and three more to come back," said Heathermoor, as they drove home; "and we must allow him at least a week to find out what we want to know. Say a fortnight in all. We'd better go back to our hotel, then, for it really won't do for us all five to quarter ourselves on this good fellow for two whole weeks."

But Van der Haagen would not hear of this, urging, with some show of reason, that, should any important news arrive suddenly, it would save him much trouble to have them on the spot; and he seemed so vexed at the idea of seeing the son of the man who had saved his life quit his house for a hotel, that his guests let themselves be persuaded to remain where they were, at least for the present.

Next morning, at breakfast, the talk happened to turn on crocodiles and the various ways of hunting them; and Heathermoor spoke of having seen the West African negroes kill them in the water, with no weapon but a short knife.

"If it hadn't been my father who said that," said Wyvil after the meal, "I'd have thought it was only chaff; for it does sound queer for a creature whose hide's bullet-proof to be killed with a knife!"

"It true, all same, Tuan," put in Harimau, who stood

near; "me done it plenty time myself!"

"You?" cried both lads at once, eyeing the speaker's smooth face and slender frame with pardonable amazement.

"You tink me no say true?" asked the young hero with a quiet smile; "s'pose Tuan like see, me go do it now!"

Wyvil's eyes sparkled; but just then his father's voice was heard:

"Don't encourage him, Duke; I hope you would never be so mean as to let this brave lad risk his life just for your amusement."

Wyvil, somewhat abashed, hung his head; and his father

added with still greater emphasis:

"If he risked it to save a life, or do any good, I would be the last man to check him; but there's no manliness in running into danger just for the brag of it, and anyone who does so is a boaster and a fool."

The bold young Malay opened his eyes wide at this new doctrine; but he made no reply, and the subject dropped for the time.

On the following afternoon the boys went out for a walk in the heat of the day, to Van der Haagen's great amusement.

"I wish I could do that," said he; "but though it's cooler up here than down on the Deli flats, I shouldn't care

to try it."

"Nor I," said Heathermoor; "for tropical nature will have its way, even with us pig-headed English. I knew a young fellow in Madras who laughed to scorn the idea of resting in the hot hours, and said that even if he could not go out, he could study Hindustanee; but when I looked in an hour later, I found him studying Hindustanee with his eyes shut, and his book lying on the floor!"

"So I suppose," put in Thurraboy. "There's an Italian proverb that no one but a pig and an Englishman can stand the hot wind, which a man politely quoted to me when I was taking a mid-day walk at Aden; and I, not to be behind him in courtesy, answered that he must be right, for he and I seemed to be the only living things abroad."

"I should think he wouldn't try to chaff you again, Mr. Thurraboy," chuckled Wyvil, as he followed his chum down

the steps of the veranda.

Scarcely had they set off, when the inseparable Harimau was at their heels, in a costume ill-suited to such weather.

Two days before, Van der Haagen, as a reward for some trifling service, had given him an old blue uniform cape (once worn by himself when serving in the local militia), which, with its braided collar and shining gilt buttons, seemed surpassingly splendid to the Malay, who had all a savage's love of finery. He put on the cloak at once, and could hardly be persuaded to take it off again, even to go to bed; and now, in the hottest part of the day, he went out wrapped in his beloved cape, which Wyvil jokingly styled: "The Cape of Good Hope".

Strolling onward, and finding something new to admire at every turn, our heroes at length reached the end of the cleared land, and found themselves on the very edge of the gloomy jungle beyond. By this time Harimau had begun to find his cherished cape too hot, and compromised by hang-

ing it over his arm.

Seeing that bristling mass of impenetrable thickets, the prudent Huntley called to mind their adventure with the wood-leeches, and was about to propose turning back, when he beheld a sight that froze the words on his lips.

Amid the great tangle of intertwined boughs was seen, all at once, a ghastly face—gaunt, haggard, spectral, and deformed by a fearful scar, altering the shape of the left eyebrow so as to give to the narrow, rat-like black eye a kind of hideous leer.

But, frightful as this grim visage was from its goblin features and corpse-like hue, its chief terror lay in the horrible expression of mingled rage, wonder, hatred, and fierce murderous joy with which it glared at Alfred and his unsuspecting comrades. Just for one moment the phantom was before him, terribly distinct; and then, ere he had time even to shout to his companions, it vanished as if it had never been.

CHAPTER XXII

DEATH'S AMBUSH

MR. THURRABOY, lying in a canvas deck-chair on the veranda, was in the full enjoyment of his afternoon nap, when he was awakened by a clatter of feet up the steps, and a voice shouting:

"What do you think, Mr. Thurraboy? we've seen a

robber!"

"A robber?" cried Van der Haagen, who had also been aroused by the noise. "Impossible! There are none about here, whatever there may be in the mountains."

"Well, ask Alf, then; he saw the fellow plain enough."

Alfred briefly told his story, and minutely described the apparition. As he proceeded, the planter's incredulous smile faded into a look of grave anxiety, which deepened at Huntley's mention of the hobgoblin's dull, brownish-yellow complexion, coarse black hair, and slanting eyes; but when the boy spoke of the disfiguring scar, up sprang the Dutchman, as if at an electric shock, and darted down the steps, crying:

"I must send men at once to beat the thickets; there's no safety for anyone while that rascal is prowling about."

The boys stared after him in amazement, and even the stoical Thurraboy looked disturbed. But Van der Haagen's excitement was fully accounted for when he returned, which he did just as Heathermoor joined the group.

"I hope my men will catch the fellow," said he, "for, by your description, Mr. Huntley, he must be that scoundrelly half-caste, Lu-Yan, who, as I told you, stirred up my coolies

to riot."

"And if you do catch him, what will you do with him?"

asked Thurraboy, while Wyvil hastily explained to his father what had occurred.

"Hand him over to the authorities, who will take care he sha'n't do any more mischief; for I find he tried to stir up a mutiny on several other plantations as well as mine."

Just then Harimau, who was standing behind him, said to the planter, with peculiar emphasis:

"You know why he do it, Tuan?"

So rarely did the taciturn Malay speak without being addressed that everyone started, and the planter eyed him keenly; for the boy's look was even more significant than his tone.

"Out of revenge, I suppose, or to get a chance of stealing something in the confusion."

"No; he do it for make big disorder all over country; give Acheen man chance for come down and kill all Dutchman."

The listeners exchanged looks of mute amazement.

"Before my father send me away," went on Harimau, "come two, t'ree, four runaway from Dutchman to my people in mountain. My father say: 'Send 'em back; no want here'. My uncle say: 'No send back; good work do; wait a bit. One time dem man go down to Dutch plantation, stir up big fuss wid coolie, make Dutchman plenty busy; den come we, kill all!'"

Even Thurraboy began to look grave, and the young planter's bright face darkened ominously; for, though no one knew better than he the undying hatred which burned against his whole race among these savage mountaineers, it was something startling to find it so suddenly and terribly

brought home to him.

"Why should your people want to kill Mynheer Van der Haagen?" asked Thurraboy. "He has never done them any harm."

"He Dutchman!" replied the young savage pointedly. "Look—see! You all been plenty good to me—me tell

you what no tell other man. S'pose my uncle get chance, he kill you all!"

This was pretty plain speaking, and made his hearers look graver still. But at that moment Heathermoor, who had not yet uttered a word, said to the young chief:

"Inche Harimau, was this half-caste, Lu-Yan, among the runaways who came to your people from here before you left them?"

"No can tell," replied the Malay carelessly. "May be so, may be not."

When the party had broken up, and the boys had retired to make themselves tidy, Heathermoor drew his host aside,

and said gravely:

"Mynheer, this is worse than I thought. It's plain as print that Lu-Yan's behaviour on your plantation was part of a great plot; and his reappearance to-day shows there is mischief afoot. If he has recognized Harimau (as it's ten to one he has), the young fellow's loving uncle will soon know that the nephew he hates and fears is within his reach, and that means one of two things—either Harimau will be murdered by some of these ruffians, or this house will be burned over our heads."

So emphatically was this said, so terribly probable did it appear, that the planter looked very grave as he listened; and he looked graver still when the beaters sent in search of the half-caste came back to report that they had seen

nothing of him.

The next few days were the most trying time that our heroes had spent since the fatal morning when they watched their shattered vessel drifting helplessly toward the cruel rocks of Acheen Head. Haunted day and night by a peril which they were powerless to avert, forced to remain inactive, feeling their lives threatened at every turn, while disabled from making any effort to defend them, the brave men might well feel (as their leader said) like men flung into the sea with their hands tied.

As day after day went by without the return of their messenger, or any news from Acheen, even Thurraboy and Heathermoor began to grow restless and unnerved, while the boys were excited to such a degree that they found it literally impossible to remain still for five minutes. Only by rushing about the plantation during the day, till they were fairly tired out, could they manage to get any sleep at night; and, in spite of Van der Haagen's repeated warnings, they again and again plunged recklessly into the surrounding jungle, in the hope of surprising and capturing their skulking enemy Lu-Yan. But no trace of him could they ever find.

Thus matters stood when, on the sixteenth day after the departure of the Rajah's courier, Wyvil and his chum went out in the afternoon as usual, but this time without the escort of their trusty henchman, Harimau, who had gone to the town on some errand for Heathermoor.

Having just been cautioned once more by Van der Haagen against venturing into the uncleared jungle (which, apart from the risk of meeting Lu-Yan or some other ruffian, swarmed with hungry panthers and poisonous snakes), the boys resolved to go not one foot beyond the safe limit. So they headed toward a point where the clearings extended to within a few hundred yards of the Deli River, while the thickets along the bank had been so thinned that neither man nor beast could have lurked there undetected.

Here, then, they thought themselves safe, and strolled along the bank till they came to a small native boat moored beside it.

"Here's a chance!" cried Wyvil. "I say, Alf, let's go

for a voyage in it along the river."

"Better not," said Huntley; "we mightn't be able to bring it back, and it would be a shame to lose the poor fellow's boat for him. Besides, the river's as full of shoals as——"

(B 533)

He broke off so suddenly that Wyvil turned round in surprise, and saw him staring at a face that peered out of the thickets on the farther bank, with the brownish-vellow tint and small, cunning eyes of the man they had sought so long—the wretch Lu-Yan!

One hurried whisper, and the boat was loose, and shooting across the river. Ere it was half-way, the face had vanished; but the noise made by the fugitive in forcing his way through the bushes was guide enough, and after him

they went like stag-hounds.

For the first hundred yards there was actually a kind of path; but it soon deserted them, and they had to tear their way through the untamed jungle, tripping over projecting roots, catching their feet in coiling creepers, and more than once barely escaping a headlong fall into a clump of thorns

as long as knitting-needles.

Such exercise within half a degree of the Line was too exhausting to last; but, happily for our panting heroes, it seemed to tell even more severely on their adversary. The crash and crackle of his flight through the thickets sounded nearer and nearer in front, and at last he stumbled and fell all his length, while they pounced upon him with a gasping shout, only to discover (with what feelings may be imagined) that he was not Lu-Yan at all!

"What on earth do you mean by running away like that," growled Wyvil, "and leading us such a goose-chase for nothing?"

"Master no be angry-no my fault," whined the captive.

"Me tink master want catchee, beatee-so me run."

"I fancy he's a runaway coolie," said Alfred in a low tone; "and, anyhow, he isn't Lu-Yan, so he'll be no good to us. We'd better go back."

"I suppose we had," grunted Marmaduke; "but when we do get hold of Mr. Lu-Yan, he shall lose nothing by

waiting."

And, leaving the man where he was, they turned back

through the jungle, very tired, very sore, very dirty, and very cross.

For some time both were silent, partly from disgust and partly from want of breath; but at last Huntley said:

"I say, old fellow, are you quite sure we're going right?"
This was the very question that had been tormenting
Wyvil, and it was no sooner asked than answered. They
were lost in the jungle!

Such a discovery, in such a place, had broken down many a strong man's nerve altogether. But Huntley had inherited no small share of his renowned father's cool and indomitable firmness, and he faced this fearful dilemma like a man.

"If we could only get a glimpse of the sun, we'd have some notion which way to steer," said he, "but there's no seeing anything through this jolly old cobweb of leaves. We'd better try and find a clear place, and then take our bearings."

They at length succeeded in doing so, and, having ascertained as well as they could in which direction the river must lie, headed toward it at their best speed.

A weary struggle it was, with many a stumble and bruise, and more than one hair's-breadth escape from the venomous serpents that started up with a threatening hiss amid the rank wiry grass which rose nearly a yard above the wanderers' heads. And still, as they struggled on, the gloomy jungle seemed to stretch itself out interminably before their weary eyes, tree beyond tree and thicket beyond thicket, as if it would never end.

Worse still, the few stray glimpses that they could catch of the sky overhead, amid this rank wilderness of horrible abundance, showed them that it was darkening slowly, as if the day were drawing to a close; and Wyvil (whose impulsive nature was more easily depressed than the steadfast temper of his comrade) was beginning to despond, when a shout from his chum made him look up, to catch, through the tangled leaves, a glimpse of the long-sought river!

A moment more and they came out on the bank, but only to be confronted with a new and formidable perplexity. How were they to cross the stream?

This time no boat was at hand, and nothing was to be seen that might serve as a raft. The current, indeed, was not strong, and the distance a trifle for such swimmers;

but then, the crocodiles!

The chill white mist of evening, heavy with fever and death, was beginning to curl up venomously over the foul, beer-coloured stream, all along either side of which the bare white roots of the mangroves, digging into the black, oozy slime below, looked like monstrous crabs feasting on a drowned corpse. Here and there a dead bough, thrusting itself gauntly out, like a skeleton hand, from the mass of dark snaky leaves, threw its spectral shadow on the sullen waters beneath. Far down the western sky, one angry gleam of red, just visible above the endless treetops, showed where the sinking sun was fading into the gloom of a coming storm.

Suddenly a huge carrion-bird, startled from the thicket by the unwonted sound of footsteps, flapped heavily away into the deeper shadows with a hoarse, ominous shriek. But this was the only sight or sound of life in that dismal panorama. No brightness, no freshness, no beauty in this great charnel-house of nature; all was foul, rotting, hideous. An immense silence, an awful loneliness and desolation.

The very leaves, as they rustled, seemed whispering to each other some horrible secret which they dared not speak aloud.

Tired, hungry, worn out, the boys were more than usually exposed to the depressing influence of this gloomy scene; and for some moments neither spoke a word.

"Look here, Alf," cried Wyvil at length, with the air of one driven to desperation, "the more we look at it the less we'll like it. We must get across somehow, so let's just swim it and take our chance." "Hold hard!" said Huntley, holding back his impetuous comrade as the latter was about to jump in. "Yonder's a dead tree stranded close to the bank; let us try if we can shove it off, and float ourselves across on it."

This task proved easier than they expected, for, luckily for them, the greater part of the trunk was afloat, being only kept to the bank by the hold of the larger roots upon the mud. The weight of the two boys as they scrambled on to the tree tilted up the higher end sufficiently to disengage it, and, guided by the dry bough which Alfred had broken off to use as a steering-oar, the mass drifted slowly out into the stream.

But, though safety was actually within sight, they were not destined to attain it even now.

The current bore them downward, despite Alfred's efforts to guide the raft straight across; and they were not yet half-way over when their tree, with a shock that almost threw them off, ran bump on a rock in mid-stream, and they tried in vain to push it off again.

"We've no luck to-day," said Wyvil; "we must just swim it after all. But stay, here's a log drifting down;

let's try and get hold of it as it passes."

He was just springing to the edge of the rock to do so, when Alfred, after one quick glance at the approaching "log", clutched him by the arm, shouting:

"Keep back, for your life! It's not a log-it's a

crocodile!"

CHAPTER XXIII

FACING A MONSTER

THE words were hardly spoken when they were terribly confirmed; for the seeming log suddenly whirled round with a rush, and they saw, so close as almost to touch their feet, the horny snout, gaping jaws, and small, cunning, cruel eye of a monstrous crocodile.

Both lads sprang up on to the stranded tree, shouting with all their might in the hope of scaring the monster away. But the fierce and ravenous brute was not to be baulked of its prey so easily; and instantly its hideous head was seen rising above the edge of the low rock, followed by a huge scaly fore-paw. Wyvil set his teeth in desperation, and drew his knife, and Alfred, holding the broken bough spear-wise, prepared to deal a vigorous thrust at the monster's only assailable point—the eye.

But a sudden shout from the other bank made the doomed pair look up, just in time to see a light form come bursting

through the bushes-Harimau!

On his return from the town, the young Malay, learning that the boys had gone out alone, started at once in quest of them, naturally fearing some mishap. He had tracked their footprints down to the river, but, seeing no means by which they could have crossed (for the Malay boat had long since drifted away), he was scouring the bank for some trace of them, when their shouts drew him to the scene of action, and one glance told him the whole story.

But it seemed as if, after all, he had come too late; for the monster had already dragged itself right up on to the rock; and as the huge, clumsy, mud-plastered mass rose inch by inch from the thick, oily stream, the doomed lads felt even the horror of death itself deepened by their disgust at the foul creature that was about to inflict it.

But help was at hand. Harimau, plunging into the water without a moment's hesitation, shot over it so swiftly that he seemed to cross at one stroke, with his famous blue cape in a bundle on his head. Passing the crocodile so close as almost to touch it, he scrambled on to the stranded tree, and stood between the reptile and the boys, rolling his cloak round his left arm, and drawing his broad-bladed dagger.

By this time the monster had got all its four feet planted firmly on the rock, and, turning savagely upon this new enemy, it dealt a blow at him with its huge tail that would have broken the back of a buffalo, snapping off like reeds two thick boughs that met-its sweep, and making the whole tree quiver so violently that the two lads were all but hurled

into the river by the shock.

But the brave Malay was no novice in such combats, and, ere the blow could reach him, he had leaped off into the water.

The reptile darted after him with savage eagerness; but, so far from avoiding its rush, Harimau faced boldly round upon it, and thrust his left arm, swathed in the thick folds

of the cloak, right into the terrible jaws.

Two cries broke forth like one from the dismayed boys, who thought that all was over with their brave young champion. But Harimau knew well what he was about. The tightly-rolled cloak, hard and compact as a cotton bale, filled the crocodile's mouth so completely as to give it no space for bringing into play the leverage of these tremendous jaws, one snap of which would have crushed an ox; and the monster, half-choked by this new kind of gag, was struggling convulsively for breath, when the Malay's dagger dealt it a fearful stab in the softer part of its exposed throat.

A hoarse snort answered the blow, and the vast scaly

bulk quivered with agony; and, quick as thought, a second stroke, dealt with a force of which the young savage's slight frame seemed incapable, buried his weapon to the hilt in the soft flesh beneath the jaw-bone. Frantic with pain, the brute lashed the water with its tail till the boys were drenched with the yellow spray, and then, with one last convulsive effort, plunged down into the depths below, carrying its young assailant along with it.

The boys drew a short, quick breath, feeling too sure that the gallant boy had lost his life to save them. But ere either could speak, the Malay's lithe brown figure shot up again like a cork, and then the crocodile's huge ungainly bulk was seen drifting down the dark river, limp

and dead.

"Well done, Harry!" cried Marmaduke, grasping his champion's dripping hand. "Just let me catch anyone saying, after this, that you can't kill a crocodile with a knife! But why on earth do you look so glum?"

"Look see, Tuan," said the Malay despairingly, "me

gone lost fine blue cloak!"

"Well, I never!" laughed Wyvil; "here's a fellow been within an ace of being gobbled up by a crocodile, and he begins howling about an old cloak! Bother the cloak, man, well buy you another!"

"But dat no all, Tuan," said Harimau with the air of one who felt that circumstances really had been too hard on him. "Crocodile float away; no can catch him; plenty good meat go waste!"

"Good meat? You don't mean you'd really eat that

nasty brute?"

"All Malay eat him when get him; plenty good—call him ikan bezar (big fish)."

"Everyone to his taste," muttered Wyvil.

"And now," put in Alfred, "the sooner we're across, the better. Harry, come and help us to shove off this old tree; we can't stir it."

"Root catch in crack," said Harimau, after a moment's inspection; "s'pose turn tree over, all right."

This was soon done, and, under the Malay's skilful guid-

ance, they safely reached the farther shore.

Eager to relate their adventures, the boys flew to the house; but they found it in such a fever of excitement that their arrival seemed quite unnoticed. The Rajah's envoy had come back from Acheen at last; and it was but too plain from the clouded faces of Thurraboy and Van der Haagen, and the settled sternness which darkened Heathermoor's handsome features, that his news was of no pleasing kind.

CHAPTER XXIV

EVIL TIDINGS

Hastilly changing their wet and mud-besmeared clothes the boys hurried to the veranda, where they found Heathermoor, Thurraboy, and the planter himself in close conference with the Rajah's courier and a tall, dark, haughtylooking man in the dress of an Acheen mountaineer, whom neither of them had seen before. But he was evidently no stranger to Harimau, whose keen black eyes shot forth a flashing glance of fierce and menacing recognition at the first sight of him.

"Ular Bukit Mas!" (the Snake of the Golden Mountain) he muttered with a stern emphasis which showed that he had good cause to remember the name, and to remember it

in no friendly way.

On a small table beside Van der Haagen lay a torn and dirty piece of paper, upon which a few words were scribbled in pencil. Alfred Huntley glanced carelessly at it in passing; but the next moment he was bending over it with eager attention, for the hand-writing was one which, though it was long since he had last seen it, he was not likely to forget; and the words were these:

"I am alive and getting well, but closely guarded; all

my companions were drowned.

"RANDOLPH HUNTLEY."

"Thank God!" said the boy with a fervent emphasis that showed how intense was this sudden relief from the burden of those fears for his father's safety which had so long weighed him down like a nightmare.

But just then, as he looked up, he saw Heathermoor's eyes fixed upon him with a look of deep pity, which made the brave lad's stout heart sink again with a foreboding of some fresh evil of which he as yet knew nothing.

"Well," said Van der Haagen aside to his guests, "I think we have heard all they can tell us; so we may dismiss them. We'll keep them here to-night, and to-morrow we'll send back this Golden-Mountain man with our answer."

As he spoke, he glanced at Heathermoor, who, seeming

quite to understand him, said to the young chief:

"Inche Harimau, you had better go down with them and get some food; and keep your eye on that Golden-Mountain fellow, who seems to be our enemy as well as yours."

Harimau obeyed with an alacrity that showed how much the commission was to his taste; and Van der Haagen said

to his guests:

"Here's dinner ready, and you must be ready for it;

come along."

But this time the usually hearty meal was a wretched pretence. Even Thurraboy, who had eaten heartily, a few weeks before, while awaiting the onset of hundreds of bloodthirsty savages, appeared to have now as little appetite as the rest; and it was a relief to all when the meal was over.

Then their host led the way, not to the veranda as usual, but to his office, and, having carefully locked the door, said:

"There's no risk of being overheard here, so we can talk over our plans; and the best way to begin will be to let these young men know what we have just learned."

The statement that followed, gently and kindly as it was made, came upon the unsuspecting boys like a thunderbolt. The Rajah's envoy had done his work well, and had kept the secret of the connection between the English party and Colonel Huntley, saying only that some English who were

visiting Medan had heard that a countryman of theirs was in the hands of the Acheenese, and were willing to ransom him at a reasonable rate.

He soon learned that there was an English captive among the men of Bukit-Mas; but, this being a tribe over which his master's influence did not extend, he was in doubt whether to venture among them himself, or get his host, the chief of Utan-Itam (Black Forest), to send a messenger thither, when the question was settled for him by the arrival of three envoys from Bukit-Mas, the people of which were evidently aware, not only of his presence in the district, but also of its object.

The leading envoy (no other than Ular, the haughty-looking warrior whose sudden appearance had so unpleasantly surprised Harimau that evening) announced that he bore a special message from Gajah (elephant), the present chief of Bukit-Mas. Harimau's worthy uncle, Gajah, had just succeeded Harimau's father; the latter having, by a most unfortunate accident (as Van der Haagen said with grim irony), fallen over a precipice while hunting with his brother and some of that gentleman's particular friends.

The message brought by this worthy was as stern and haughty as himself. The chief of the Golden Mountain, he said, forbade the Rajah's servant to tamper with his neighbours, the men of the Black Wood, or in any way to make mischief between him and them. Moreover, the great chief had learned that his nephew, Harimau (who was said to have been killed by English pirates at Pulo-Tombak) was still alive, and with a party of white men at Medan; and he now laid his commands on those white men, who presumed to interfere between him and his prisoner, to give up Harimau to him forthwith, or the captive for whom they were so anxious should be burned alive.

To give weight to his words Ular had brought with him a brief note in Randolph Huntley's own writing—the same which Alfred had seen that evening,—and announced his intention of accompanying the Rajah's courier on his return journey, and himself delivering the note and his chief's message to the white men at Medan. The courier, though by no means eager for the honour of his company, was forced to consent; and the two had reached Willemsdal that afternoon.

Such was the case laid before our heroes; and nothing could be simpler. They must doom their best friend to die, or connive at a cowardly murder; for it was certain that Harimau's uncle, could he once get the boy into his power, would dispose of him as he had already disposed of his father.

There was a gloomy silence when the planter ended, broken at length by Alfred Huntley, who, seeming to feel himself appealed to as the nearest relative of the imperilled man, spoke out as firmly as ever, though his white, rigid face told what it cost him.

"If I know anything of my father," said he, "he'd rather be killed a dozen times over than be saved like that; and I'm sure he would never forgive me if I were even to think of it."

"Spoken like a man," cried Heathermoor, clapping him on the shoulder. "I hope we shall rescue your father, my brave boy, though not in that way. It was just for that reason, to tell the truth, that I got Harimau out of the way to-night; for if he were to know how matters stood (which he won't find out from the messengers themselves, for these fellows never chatter) he'd be quite capable of giving himself up to that ruffian to save your father's life!"

"Well," put in Thurraboy, "of course that's not to be thought of for a moment; so let us consider what we can

do instead."

"I'll tell you what we might do," cried Heathermoor.

"As you know, I got a note to-day from my first officer to say that he has brought over the yacht in good trim, and that she's at anchor here in the mouth of the river; so all

we have to do is to take her round to the north-west coast, anchor off Bukit-Mas, and then (as soon as we've surveyed our ground a bit, and seen how to get at 'em) land our crew and any other men that we can muster, storm their crow's nest, and carry off the colonel."

"That seems to me rather risky, with all deference to your better knowledge of native ways," objected Thurraboy. "I should advise joining forces with some neighbouring tribe with which they're at war (there are sure to be plenty of them), and attacking from the land side, with the tribesmen to help us."

But the planter, to whom both looked for approval,

shook his head with a quiet smile.

"Gentlemen," said he, "you speak like brave Englishmen, but we need craft here more than courage. If you take my advice you will send back Ular to-morrow to tell the chief of Bukit-Mas that you will come up to the hills yourselves as soon as you can and bring Harimau with you. That, you see, will gain time at the outset, especially as you can travel slowly, as if the boy were not strong enough for a rapid journey."

"And what then?" asked Heathermoor, looking puzzled.

"Then take the Rajah's courier with you, and make him present you to the chief of Utan-Itam, who is devoted to the Rajah, and send a message thence to Harimau's uncle, inviting him to a conference on neutral ground, with so many friends on each side, he bringing the colonel with him, and you Harimau. You understand?"

"I do; it's a first-rate idea, and many thanks for it."

"Well, I'm glad you approve, for I really think it's the best thing to be done. I only wish I could go with you, but I know enough of these fellows to be sure that the presence of a Dutchman would simply spoil all. In fact, you had better impress on the Acheenese, as strongly as you can, that you are not Dutchmen at all, but belong to a race that has often been at war with us."

This hint was turned to good account by the ready Englishman next morning when he gave his answer to the envoy.

"Tell the great chief, too," he added, after giving the message dictated by Van der Haagen, "that we hope he will not shame us by taking us for Dutch planters. We are none such; we belong to a nation that has fought against the Dutchmen many a time. Fail not to let him know all this, and tell him I shall have more to say to him on that point when I can speak to him freely amid the Dark Mountains of Acheen."

The sudden change in Ular's dark face told the observant speaker that the savage had attached to his last words the very meaning he intended to convey; and, in fact (for reasons that will appear later on), these few words were destined to have a more important influence on coming events than anything else which Heathermoor could have said or done.

CHAPTER XXV

UP INTO THE MOUNTAINS

I SAY, Alf, isn't it a queer fashion these Acheen fellows have of calling themselves after all kinds of beasts—the tiger, the elephant, the snake, and all that? Fancy finding one's self introduced suddenly to the hospitable Mr. Bengal Tiger, and the charming Miss Laughing Hyæna!"

"Well, it's just what Fenimore Cooper's Indians used to do, after all. You remember old Chingachgook, the Big Serpent, and his son Uncas, the Bounding Elk, and all

those other fellows."

"I like a deal better, though, the dodge my father says they have in Borneo, of calling the ladies after different flowers—Champak, Goolab, and so on. Pretty idea, isn't it?"

"Why, we do the same thing ourselves, if that's all—Rose, Lily, Violet, and all the rest of it. But hollo! what's old Ismail singing out about?"

"Wanting us to halt, I think. So I suppose we had

better do it."

Our heroes and their friends had been some time on their momentous journey to Acheen; but, following Van der Haagen's advice, they had travelled slowly, and though now close to the border of the hill-country, they had not actually entered it yet.

Nor, indeed, was the aspect of this wild region calculated to make anyone feel very eager to penetrate it. Seen as they had hitherto seen it, rising in a background of shadowy purple behind one of the most charming landscapes in the East Indies, it showed itself in holiday guise, concealing all

its terrors. But now, when only a few miles separated the formidable "Batak hills" from the bold travellers who were about to plunge into them, the grim "No Man's Land" looked what it really was—one of the wildest and gloomiest tracts upon earth; and at sight of that weird unending labyrinth of frowning heights, black tomb-like gorges, shaggy woods, savage precipices, dark impenetrable thickets, and roaring torrents, even the reckless Marmaduke began to look thoughtful, and the grave faces of the two elder men became graver still.

The party numbered six persons—the four Englishmen, the Rajah's courier Haji-Ismail, and Harimau himself, whose superstitious fear of defying the fatal prophecy had been overcome at last. In the first heat of his frantic grief and rage at the death of his father and so many of his friends (for Gajah was not one to do his work by halves, and had killed or banished all who might oppose his usurpation) Heathermoor easily persuaded him that a man who did not shrink from wholesale murder was not likely to scruple at falsehood; that the dreaded prediction was undoubtedly a mere trick of his uncle to get rid of him; and that it now behoved him to hasten back at once to his native place and punish the murderers as they deserved.

All six were well armed, for they were now on the border of a region where every man carried his life in his hand. Wyvil had a light rifle of his father's; Huntley one of Thurraboy's; Harimau was similarly equipped; and Haji-Ismail carried a splendid English double-barrel lent him by his master.

Ismail's cry proved to be a signal for Alfred and Marmaduke (who had got a little ahead) to close up to their party, and when they did so he warned them emphatically that it was not safe to straggle here. Meanwhile the two leaders hastily reviewed their plans, being now near the place where these were to be carried out.

"The yacht should be at her anchorage by this time,"

said Heathermoor. "I told them to take her round at once, and, with full steam on, she wouldn't be more than three days (or four at the outside) in getting to the place."

"It's a rocky islet off the headland of Bukit-Mas, isn't

it? I understood Van der Haagen to say so."

"That's it—and it seems just made on purpose for what we want. The rock's shaped like a half-open book, with the opening facing the mainland, and between the two projecting cliffs there's water enough for her to ride at anchor, quite sheltered on the seaward side and pretty well protected on the land side too, being only a mile from the coast."

"So that if we have to make a run for it-"

"She can help us with her guns—just so, or else she can send a boot to take us off, for there will be somebody on the watch day and night for our signal; or, if the worst comes to the worst, as she only lies about a mile from the shore, we can swim it."

"To be sure we can. But hollo! what place is that yonder? I suppose it must be the Chinese trading-station that Van der Haagen spoke of, where we're to leave our horses."

"That's it, no doubt. We'll halt there to-night, and send a messenger to the chief of Utan-Itam to tell him we are coming to see him to-morrow."

"What, another messenger?" cried Thurraboy. "Why, we've sent him one already, while we were on the road.

How many more does the fellow want?"

"Oh, that's the way in these parts! the more fuss and bother you make when you call upon anyone, the more credit it is both to him and to you. They have no idea of doing things quietly out here. Among these fellows—as you will soon see—a man can't even blow his nose without sending out a herald first to proclaim that he's going to do it."

When they reached the "factory", as these trading-

stations are usually called, the Chinese trader, an old acquaintance of Van der Haagen, received them very civilly, and readily agreed to have their horses sent safely back, and get them coolies next morning to carry their saddle-bags up the mountain; for he and his men, being (as in many parts of West Africa) the sole channel of supply between barbarism and civilization, went to and fro unmolested even among these wild mountaineers.

"Well," said Thurraboy that night, "we'll soon be in

the thick of it now."

In fact, Ismail, finding at the station three or four Utan-Itam men, who had come to make purchases, had offered to go back with them and announce to their chief the coming of the English party, so that our travellers expected to

make their final start next morning.

"We shall," rejoined Heathermoor. "But look here, my dear fellow, are you quite determined to see this job to the end? Once we're fairly among the hills, you know, there's no drawing back; and I don't see why you should risk your life for a matter that doesn't concern you a bit, though it's very good of you to volunteer. Think twice before you decide; it's not too late yet."

"It is too late," said Thurraboy calmly. "It's always too late to draw back when I've once passed my word. Let us say no more about that, but tell me how you mean

to communicate with Colonel Huntley."

"Well, as to that I must be guided by circumstances, for we can't tell how the fellows who have got hold of him may act. But in any case we must be careful; for there must be at least one man about him who can read English—the cautious wording of his note shows that."

"And that one man," replied Thurraboy in a low tone, as if the man spoken of might perhaps be within hearing, "is undoubtedly Lu-Yan; and it was he, of course, who told Harimau's precious uncle that the poor boy was still alive and in our company."

"No doubt; but I hope we shall be too smart for him

yet. Good-night!"

At sunrise the boys were aroused by the untiring Ismail, quite ready to start again at daybreak, though he had not returned from his mountain march till after midnight. They found the two seniors already astir, and hurrying their preparations in order to get well up the hills ere the heat of the day came on.

As the travellers, having left their horses behind, tramped slowly along the rude bridle-path into which the road degenerated at this point, they seemed to stand between savagery and civilization. Below lay beaten roads, trim plantations, neat country-houses; above rose craggy ridges, pathless forests, bristling jungles, and frowning precipices.

"Chance for you, Mr. Thurraboy," cried Wyvil. "Write

a farewell to civilization."

"No, I'm not fortunate in farewells. I once tried my hand at a farewell to London, and this was the result:

"Great city, farewell! thou must fade from my view;
Fate calls me, and I must away;
To-morrow the rent of my lodging is due,
A debt I can never repay.

Thy spires meet my eye, rising solemnly black
From the smoke that o'erhangs thy repose;
As the face of a collier, when veiled by a sack,
Protrudes thro' the canvas its nose.

"But torn though I be from thy sable embrace,
Yet crowned with thy gifts I retire;
Adorned with thy choicest of soot is my face,
And decked are my boots with thy mire.
Thy people have given me nought—'t is their way—
And to them I am equally kind;
I take but a borrowed umbrella away,
And leave but a tooth-brush behind!"

"Tiptop!" cried Wyvil; "can't you recollect some more?"

"Hush!" said his father; "look well to your feet, and don't talk."

The caution was needed, for the path, constantly mounting, had now narrowed to a mere ledge, barely wide enough for one at a time, and winding along the very brink of a black and frightful ravine so thickly wooded that even the tropical sun could not pierce its ghostly shadows, out of which rose sullenly the hollow roar of an unseen waterfall.

All at once started up right in their path, from behind a huge fern-clad boulder, a gaunt, dusky, wild-eyed spectre, unclothed save a tattered waist-cloth and its own shaggy black hair, with a long bamboo spear in its bony hand, and a short, curved Malay dagger at its side. The goblin shot a quick, cruel glance at them from its small, deep-set, glittering eyes, and in tones like the mingling of a bull-dog's growl with the croak of a frog, bade them halt, and asked what they wanted.

CHAPTER XXVI

AN EASTERN MONTENEGRO

EVEN Heathermoor was startled by this sudden and ghastly apparition, and not without reason; for, standing as he did on the inner side of the ledge-like path, the grim sentinel might have hurled them all over the precipice with one push of his lean brown hand. But a few muttered words from Haji-Ismail appeared to satisfy this Malay Cerberus, who, signing to them to follow, went striding up the break-neck ascent at a pace which few men could have equalled on level ground.

The travellers followed as best they might, the two lads halting every now and then for a glance at the wonderful panorama around them, the surpassing grandeur of which

was now fully visible in the growing sunlight.

As they ascended, their admiration of the scenery appeared to grow stronger and their halts to admire it more frequent, for the path became steeper and steeper, while, every time they glanced upward, tree-tops after tree-tops piled themselves up overhead, rank on rank, into the very sky, fully justifying the district's name of "Black Forest". Despite their natural agility and perfect training, the Charterhouse athletes were already panting like overdriven post-horses, when a sharp turn suddenly brought them in sight of the place whither they were bound.

Half-way up the great mountain-wall lay a broad belt of cleared ground, defacing the grand sweep of the virgin forest with a bare, unsightly scar. Not a tree, not a bush, not even a tuft of tall grass, broke the gaunt barrenness of this miniature desert; for those who had made it were not

the men to leave a hand-breadth of cover for an enemy within gun-shot of their fortress. On the farther side of the clearing rose a high bamboo stockade, such as one sees at every turn in Siam and Burmah, thick and strong enough to be proof against anything short of a cannon-ball.

At the gate of this primitive fort their goblin conductor halted and uttered a peculiar cry. A grim face looked over the top, and after the exchange of a few words the gate was unbarred, and our heroes found themselves, for the first time in their life, within a genuine Malay fortress.

"Well, these fellows know something of soldiering, if they know nothing else," said Thurraboy, glancing from the formidable palisade to the sinewy frames and stern faces of the wild figures that manned it. "Give me a few hundred men like these, and plenty of ammunition, and I'd

hold this place against an army."

"And, look here," rejoined Heathermoor, pointing to the little bee-hives of bamboo and dried palm-leaves around them, from which a few half-naked children crept forth wonderingly at their approach. "Curious, is it not, to see how much alike the dwellings of savages always are in every part of the world? Set down one of these huts in Algeria or Morocco (or in Zululand either, for that matter), and it would be quite at home."

The chief—a stalwart and rather fine-looking man of middle age—now came forward to greet his guests; and Heathermoor, knowing that in the East all visits of ceremony begin and end with presents, lost no time in presenting to him an excellent English dirk-knife, an embroidered sash, and a light chain of polished brass, glittering like gold in the sunshine—with all of which the worthy savage was as much delighted as with Heathermoor's polite greeting to him in his own language.

A few minutes later the baggage-coolies came up, and the English were shown to the quarters prepared for them, which proved to consist of a huge thatch of dried leaves and grass supported on stout poles eight feet high, the whole affair being, as Wyvil truly said, "a room without walls".

"Hollo!" cried he, "is this where we're going to hang out? Why, we shall have to eat and sleep and dress right before the eyes of the whole nation! I used to think it must be fine to be a public man, but I didn't bargain for being quite as public as all this!"

"Well, Duke," laughed his father, "I doubt if you'd be any better off in one of these huts; for, as the thatch is always alive with snakes and scorpions, and the inside fairly creeping with every living thing that crawls and bites, I think we should soon have you changing back again."

It had not escaped Heathermoor's watchful eye that, directly after their arrival, a man had hastily left the fort and darted down the mountain-side at racing speed in a direction nearly opposite to that from which the English party had ascended. Noticing this fact in as unconcerned a tone as possible to his Malay host, he was told that the man was a messenger from Gajah, the chief of Bukit-Mas, who wished to be informed as early as possible of the coming of the "white warriors", since he, too, wished to "let his eyes behold their faces, and his ears hearken to their words".

"Harimau's worthy uncle is no fool," muttered Heathermoor. "He means to keep his eye on us, I can see; but

he won't catch us napping."

As a precaution against this crafty enemy, he hinted to the chief that it might be well to keep watch on Harimau, the young chief of Bukit-Mas, and not let him stir out of the fort, lest his eagerness to see his native place again should lead him to rejoin his tribe, in which case (as the great chief of Utan-Itam was no doubt aware) some fearful calamity, foretold by a prophet of unquestioned holiness, would overwhelm not only Bukit-Mas itself, but every other tribe in Acheen.

This hint was not lost on the superstitious savage, who knew the whole story of the prophecy, and Harimau's consequent exile; and thenceforth the young Malay was watched with a sleepless vigilance that made Heathermoor

quite easy.

Of course the coming of the distinguished visitors was celebrated with a feast, and equally of course the worthy savages over-ate themselves fearfully in honour of their guests. What food they had, however, was more plentiful than choice; and our heroes, fresh as they were from the rough-and-ready feasts of an English school, were somewhat nonplussed when each in turn found a huge mass of half-raw goat-flesh, slippery with grease, plumped right into his lap on a vast curling plantain-leaf instead of a plate.

This last indulgence, however, was plainly due to their character as guests; for the Malays never troubled themselves about plate or leaf, but simply took a lump of greasy meat on their bare knees, and hacked it with their knives,

or tore it with fingers and teeth.

"They say one swallow doesn't make a summer," said Alfred. "I'm sure one such swallow as these chaps have got ought to last a whole year!"

"Right you are!" said Wyvil; "it's a sort of inter-school

match—the Charterhouse against Eatin'!"

"Well, I should rather call it a gobblin' vision."

The moment this gorging ended, these strange creatures, as if bent on reversing all civilized usages, jumped up and fell to various athletic sports, to the amazement of the boys, who, after such stuffing, did not expect them to move for an hour. But the native champions acquitted themselves so well as to earn the approval of even such athletes as Thurraboy and Heathermoor.

"These fellows," said the author, "would be awkward customers in a real fight. With such precipices to help them, I don't wonder General Van Swieten found 'em a

tough morsel ten years ago, brave as he was."

The two Charterhouse gymnasts were eager to try their strength with the Malay athletes; but Heathermoor, knowing how this would compromise their dignity in the eyes of the savages, flatly forbade it.

"It won't be long before we have to show what we can do," said he meaningly, "and in the meantime our best

plan is to keep quiet."

And now the Acheenese, having had enough of athletics, took to the favourite amusement of Eastern races, viz., story-telling; and a thin, little, sharp-nosed man, aptly

named Tikus (rat), led off as follows:-

"Two men had a dispute about a woman, each claiming her as his wife. One was a learned man, the other a peasant, who made his living by tilling the ground, and, as they could not agree, they went before the *kazi* (judge). Now, the matter was made all the more puzzling by the woman herself, who refused to say anything on one side or the other; so the kazi (who was a man of exceeding wisdom) heard all the witnesses to an end without himself saying a word.

"When all had spoken, the judge said: 'Leave the woman here, and return later on; then shall you hear my decision.'

"So they all saluted him and withdrew; and when they returned, he said to the learned man: 'Take thy wife', and sentenced the peasant to fifty strokes of a rattan. And when a friend asked him wherefore he decided thus, the judge said: 'I bade this woman fill my inkstand, and she did so most expertly, as one well used to the task; and thus I knew her to be the wife of the learned man, for what should a peasant's wife know of inkstands?'

"Then all men praised the kazi's wisdom, and his fame

as a judge went abroad far and wide."

When this story had been duly applauded, Mr. Rat—evidently a recognized wit in Utan-Itam society—launched forth into a second:

"In former days the Rajah of Kedah sent messengers

with a letter to the Rajah of Perak and all his chiefs, and there was found in it this one question only: 'Which is the higher, Gunong Jerei or Gunong Bubu?' Now, Gunong Jerei is a mountain in Kedah, and Gunong Bubu a mountain in Perak. When the letter had been read there was much stir among the Perak people, for many thought that such a message betokened war; and for three days the Rajah and all his chiefs consulted together as to what answer they should make to it. On the third day this reply was sent: 'Gunong Jerei is the higher of the two, but Gunong Bubu is the greater.'"

"Well, they seem to think all that very funny," muttered Wyvil, looking wonderingly at the mirthful faces around him, "but, for the life of me, I can't see the joke;

can you, Alf?"

"Well, you know, every nation has its own idea of fun," replied Huntley. "The Frenchmen always say that Shakespeare had no more humour than a post, and I dare say these Malay fellows wouldn't see any fun in Tom Hood or Dickens."

Just then several voices were heard calling the name of a solemn-looking old greybeard by the chief's side—manifestly the fashionable literary man of this miniature capital—and inviting him to contribute in his turn to the general entertainment; and the old gentleman, not being civilized enough to have learned the polite custom of refusing half a dozen times before doing as he was asked, complied at once.

"Prepare, then, my brothers," said he with a dignified air, "to hearken to the tale of *Bapa Ibrahim* (Father Abraham) and the King of the Giants."

His hearers assented with an alacrity from which no one unfamiliar with Eastern ways could have guessed that the story was as well known to them as to the narrator himself, and the latter began as follows:—

"When Sheikh Ibrahim was a child (may the blessing of

Allah be on all who descend from him!) the earth was given up to idolatry, and all men worshipped images of wood or stone, such as the true believers cast out of Mecca when the light of Islam first shone; for then the whole world lay in darkness, and not yet had the light of truth dawned on it through the birth of our holy Prophet (may his name be exalted!).

"Now, when Ibrahim, the father of the faithful, was born, he was straightway hidden in a cave, and nourished there in secret, to save him from the sword of the giant-king, even Nemroud (Nimrod) the Accursed, who in those days ruled over all the earth. For ye must know, brothers, that the sorcerers and cunning men of Nemroud's court, in whom was the spirit of Eblis (Satan), had foretold that on that day should be born a child who should destroy idolatry, and teach the children of men to pray to Allah alone.

"Then was King Nemroud sore troubled, and he sent forth his servants, and sought Ibrahim to slay him. But he found him not; for Allah cast a cloud before his eyes and the eyes of his servants; even as it is written in the Book (the Koran): 'Cast a cloud before them, that their eyes be darkened'.

"And when the dates had ripened and fallen sixteen times, Ibrahim came forth from the cave where he had been hidden; and it was night. Then said Ibrahim in his heart: 'Where is the true God, that I may go to him and be his servant?' And he spake to the beasts and birds: 'Who is he that made you?' But they gave him no answer.

"Then arose a star, bright and beautiful, and he thought that surely this must be God. But the star set, and Ibrahim said: 'I have no faith in gods that die.' When the moon rose, he thought that now he had found God; but the moon set likewise. At last arose the sun in his glory, and Ibrahim was glad, and cried aloud: 'Truly this can be no other than God, for there is nought else so glorious!' But the sun set also, and Ibrahim was amazed, and knew not what to do.

"Now Terah, Ibrahim's father, was himself a maker of idols; and when his son came to him, and said: 'Show me him who made the world,' Terah pointed to the images that he had made. But Ibrahim thought: 'How can these make anything, which have themselves been made by my father's hands? I will try them.' So he set corn and fruit before them, and said: 'If ye be gods, arise and eat.' But they stood still, and heeded him not. Then took Ibrahim a heavy staff, and smote all the gods in pieces save the largest, in whose hands he put the staff; and then he cried to his father to come and see what was done.

"When Terah saw it, he rent his mantle, and cast dust on his head, and cried: 'My heart is turned to water, and my face made black before men! Tell me, son, how befell this ill chance?' And Ibrahim said: 'The young gods were greedy, and snatched at the food ere the old one was ready to begin; so he took his staff and punished them as thou seest.'

"But his father was wroth, and cried aloud: 'Son, what dirt is this that thou hast been eating? Know I not that these images are the work of my own hands, and can neither move nor speak?' 'How then,' said Ibrahim, 'canst thou worship them, and say they are gods?' Then was Terah clothed with shame; neither found he any answer.

"But when the idolatrous people of the land (may dogs defile the graves of their fathers!) heard what Ibrahim had done, they were angry; and they came and seized him, and led him before Nemroud the king. And the king sat on his throne in royal array, terrible to look on; for he was fierce of countenance and huge as the giants whom the prophet *Moossa* (Moses) slew when he led the armies of the Beni-Israel. But Ibrahim feared not, for God was with him.

"Then said the king: 'Thou hast set at nought the gods of thy father, but thou shalt worship my god, or it shall go ill with thee.' 'And who is thy god, O king?' asked Ibrahim. 'My god is fire, the mightiest of all things; therefore worship it.' 'Nay, not the mightiest,' said Ibrahim, 'for water quenches it.' 'Worship water, then,' said the king, 'Not so,' quoth Ibrahim, 'for the clouds, which take it up, are stronger still.' 'Worship the clouds, then, prater,' cried Nemroud, waxing wroth; for never yet had man dared to beard him thus. 'Nay, O King,' said Ibrahim, 'for the wind that scattereth the clouds is mightier than thev.'

"Then cried the king in anger: 'By the gods of my fathers, this babbler's tongue is worse than the hot wind of the desert! Worship the wind, then, dog, and let us have done with thy prating.' 'Nay,' said Ibrahim, 'for lo! men withstand the force of the wind, and are stronger than it.' 'And I am the mightiest of men,' said the king proudly, 'therefore worship me, or thou shalt be cast forthwith into a fiery furnace.' But Ibrahim answered: 'If thou art indeed the mightiest of all, bid the sun turn back in his course, and set where he now riseth. But if thou canst not do this, I worship thee not!'

"Then the king commanded, and they bound Ibrahim, and cast him into the fiery furnace; but God delivered him from the fire, and made him a blessing unto many nations.

Brothers, the story is ended."

CHAPTER XXVII

LIVING DEATH

A FTER the toilsome march, and various excitements of this eventful day, the two Charterhouse lads slept as only English school-boys can. But with Heathermoor it was otherwise; for, now that he was actually face to face with the terrible problem on the solution of which hung the life or death of his best friend—and perhaps that of himself and his whole party likewise—the strain of this haunting and ever-present anxiety was almost too much even for him.

In truth he had enough to keep him awake. So far all had gone well; but what next? He knew that the fierce usurper of Bukit-Mas (now within a few miles of them with his whole tribe) would slaughter them to a man without hesitation, if by so doing he could get Harimau into his power; and who could be certain that their present hosts might not at any moment betray them to the enemy?

But even if the Malays did keep faith with them, the task that lay before them was all but hopeless. To get Colonel Huntley out of Gajah's clutches by stratagem seemed impossible, and to rescue him by force was equally so without the full co-operation of the Utan-Itam men, which was scarcely to be hoped for; for Heathermoor knew enough of the East to feel certain that two savage tribes of Mohammedan Malays, whatever private feuds might exist between them, would be far more likely to combine against a party of "white-faced unbelievers", than to side with the white men against each other.

Hour after hour the brave man lay pondering, with a

heavy heart, till he hit upon a plan so desperate that few men save himself would have thought it worth consideration.

"Hollo! this is having the eyes of the universe upon one with a vengeance!" cried Wyvil, awakening, to find himself in the midst of a hollow square of eager faces and staring eyes, formed by the throng of Malays that encircled the open-sided "shelter" in which he had spent the night. "I say, Alf, just look here!"

"It reminds me," said Huntley, "of that bit in Macaulay that we used to laugh at so, about Louis XIV dressing, and shaving, and all that before hundreds of people: 'He even took his emetics in state, and vomited majestically in the presence of the entire court'. Well, you fellows, what's it all about? Did you never see an Englishman before?"

But, as the boys started up, the crowd dispersed, the Malays having seemingly no other object than to see how the mysterious orang-orang-laut (men of the sea) looked when asleep.

But in spite of an inquisitiveness as rude and shameless as that of an interviewer, these bony, black-maned goblins proved to be not such bad fellows after all. The courage with which these mere boys had undertaken so rough and perilous a journey, and the hardihood with which they had sustained it, prepossessed the bold mountaineers in their favour; and, as usual, their knowledge of the native language was a passport to the hearts of all who spoke it.

The boys were beginning to think these savages not so black as rumour painted them, when they were suddenly confronted with a fearful proof to the contrary. In a deep, gloomy hollow, which they had not yet seen, they came all at once on a low bamboo frame, to which was bound a human form, seemingly lifeless, and wasted to an absolute skeleton.

The boys were turning to Harimau, who was with them as usual, to ask what crime had doomed this wretch to such

a death, when a low groan from the seeming corpse startled them both.

"Why, he's alive!" cried Alfred in horror; "and just see what they've done to him!"

In fact, the victim's swollen wrists and ankles, black with sores and vermin, were held fast by cleft sticks, in each of which a knife was so placed as to cut into the flesh at the sufferer's slightest movement.

"That is a shame and no mistake!" shouted Wyvil indignantly. "Whatever he's done, they oughtn't to torment

him like that. Here goes to cut him loose."

Whipping out his knife, he was about to sever the prisoner's bonds, when Harimau caught his arm, and at the same moment a tall, gaunt, savage-looking Malay sprang up from the deeper shadows of this evil place, as if he had risen through the earth, and, waving back Marmaduke with a menacing gesture, growled that the captive was his, and that no one must touch him.

Wyvil, in the first flush of his indignation at this brutal cruelty, was about to "punch the fellow's head", and get himself killed on the spot in return, but the more prudent Huntley drew him hastily back, and bade Harimau enquire the doomed man's offence.

The explanation was soon given. By mountain law, anyone who did to a tribesman any injury, which was judged worthy of death, was doomed to perish by the slow torture now before their eyes; being watched day and night by his adversary, or one of the latter's friends, to see that no one relieved his misery.

The victim before them had had a scuffle with the brother of the man who was guarding him, and had dealt him a blow that proved mortal. He vehemently protested that he had not meant to kill the man; but, ill-will being known to have existed between the two for some time, he was doomed to die, and, being given up to his victim's family, had lingered in this hideous trap for nearly a week, with

just food and water enough to keep him alive to suffer, as he would probably continue to do for three days more.

Harimau told all these horrors with a cool unconcern which showed that such things were too familiar to impress him; but the warm-hearted English lads were far from

sharing his pitiless composure.

"This won't do," said Alfred. "It's no use offering these fellows money, for they don't know what it's worth; but I'll give 'em everything else I've got, to the very shirt off my back, rather than let that poor wretch lie groaning there any longer."

Then, turning to the tall mountaineer, he said in Malay: "Son of the Black Forest, are you determined to kill this

man? Can he not be ransomed?"

At the word "ransomed" the savage's native greed sparkled in his keen black eyes; but he replied with affected coldness:

"Who would pay for such a thing as he is now a price that would satisfy us for what he hath done?"

"We would," replied Alfred firmly. "What say you?"

"I say nothing," answered the Malay with a cunning smile, "till I have spoken with my father and brother; for this concerns us all."

"Bring them hither at once, then," said Alfred, so authoritatively that Wyvil himself was startled; "and you, Harimau, go quickly and call the two English chiefs."

He was instantly obeyed; and, just as the tall Malay came up with his father and brother on one side of the hollow, Harimau appeared on the other, followed not only by Heathermoor and Thurraboy, but by a dozen of the leading tribesmen, including the bulky chief himself, whose size and strength amply bore out his name of Kerbau (Buffalo).

Harimau had already explained to the new-comers how matters stood; and, while Heathermoor whispered apart with his son and Alfred Huntley, the chief stepped forward, and, pointing to the prisoner, called out:

"In whose hands is the life of this 'son of the bamboo'?"
The father and brothers of the slain man stepped forward,
naming themselves as they did so.

"Where are they who wish to ransom him?" asked

Kerbau again.

"Here," answered Heathermoor, as he and his party came to the front, each in turn mentioning his own name.

"Well, for savages, they seem to do things pretty systematically," muttered Thurraboy. "I wouldn't have given 'em credit for it."

"Are ye three content to take ransom for this man's

life?" asked the chief.

"We are, if it be such as satisfies us," replied the father (a sullen, fearfully scarred old man) with a sneer which showed that he did not think such an offer very likely.

Half the camp had by this time gathered round the spot, and all eyes were fixed on Alfred as, at a whispered hint from Heathermoor, he went up to the elder brother, and, holding out the dagger given him by the Rajah at Medan, said:

"This was the Rajah's gift; it will cut a hair or split a

log. Try it."

The Malay's eyes flashed at sight of the splendid weapon, and, clutching it eagerly, he slashed away like a feather a stout twig overhead. Then he struck the point into a tree, and it sank several inches deep.

"I am content," said he; "the bamboo hath fallen from

my prisoner's right wrist."

Rightly interpreting this strange formula as an abandonment of his part in the family vengeance, Heathermoor put forward Wyvil to deal with the second brother, whose greedy glances at Marmaduke's embroidered scarf had not escaped either him or his father. "This is what I offer," said he, holding out the sash; "it was the Rajah's gift to me, and bears his badge."

"I am content," said the other, clutching the prize; "the

bamboo hath fallen from my prisoner's left wrist."

"But I am not," growled the father; "ye have received

gifts, but what gift have I?"

"This," said Heathermoor, presenting his cartridgepouch, which, with its glossy leather and scarlet cord, bright brass initials, and polished steel buckles glittering like silver, was the admiration of the whole camp. Even the old savage's thirst for vengeance gave way to the desire of owning such a treasure; and, snatching it from Heathermoor's hand as if fearing that the latter might repent of his offer, he growled:

"I am content; the bamboo hath fallen from my pri-

soner's feet."

The sufferer was at once freed from his horrible prison; and his mother and sister (who had tried vainly to soften these human tigers with the offer of all that they had) bore him tenderly away, casting on his deliverers a look of gratitude more eloquent than any words.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE MYSTERIOUS SOUND

WE'VE not much time left to work in now. So far as I can make the Mohammedan calendar square with our own, the last day of the term fixed by that prophecy, during which Harimau must not show his face among his own people, is the twenty-sixth of this month; and, after that, you know, we can have no possible excuse for not giving him up to them."

"Next Sunday week; rather a short term for getting a man out of the claws of a gang of bloodthirsty savages."

The speakers were Lord Heathermoor and Mr. Thurraboy, who stood side by side on the hill-top above the Malay village, looking down in the glory of the sunrise on the grand panorama below. But they gave little heed to it, the eyes of both being riveted on the point where, through a deep, gloomy, narrow glen that cleft the great mountainwall beyond them, they caught a distant glimpse of the bright blue sea, and of a small rocky islet that rose from it like a tower, under the lee of which lay at anchor their trim little yacht, with the flag of Old England waving jauntily over her.

The two grave faces lighted up at the sight, but only to

cloud again.

"Harimau's uncle, Gajah," said Heathermoor, "seems in no hurry to answer our message. It's two days since we sent that man to tell him that we are here, ready to confer with him, yet not one word of answer has he sent us, though his place is only a few miles off."

"Do you think, then, he's plotting some treachery?"

"I'm sure he is; and I suspect these Utan-Itam men, with all their friendliness, are plotting some treachery too."

"What makes you think so?" asked Thurraboy, looking rather disturbed.

"Well, I can give you no actual proof of it; it's more that I feel it in my bones, as the Yankees say. But judge for yourself. These men know Huntley's a prisoner in Bukit-Mas; and they know, too, that he's our countryman, and a man of note among us. Well, having seen us give, to save that poor wretch who was being tortured, a lot of things that seemed priceless treasures to them, they'll naturally think that if we gave so much for a man who didn't belong to us, we'll give ten times more to save an Englishman."

"I don't quite follow you."

"Well, then, suppose that, in the midst of our negotiations with Gajah and the Bukit-Mas men, these Utan-Itam people should make a sudden attack upon them, take Huntley out of their hands by force, and then refuse to give him up to us unless we ransom him from them?"

"Well, supposing they did, what then? We would ransom him from them, and there would be an end of it."

"You don't understand me yet. Don't you see that, if Gajah saw any risk of such a prisoner as Colonel Huntley being taken out of his hands by force, the first thing he'd do would be to kill him on the spot?"

"H'm!-that's true; I hadn't thought of that."

"Or, even if he did escape with his life, I feel certain that, in case the Utan-Itam men got the best of it, and carried off Huntley, their first move would be to seize upon us as well, and put us and him all to ransom together; and as for Harimau, they'd most likely kill him at once, for fear he should avenge the defeat of his tribe upon them later on."

"And what on earth do you mean to do, then?" asked

Thurraboy with a sharpness which told that even his iron nerves were beginning to feel the long strain of these wearing anxieties.

"I have my plan," replied the other with that cold composure which, as Thurraboy had already begun to learn, was habitual to him when he was specially dangerous.

The author would gladly have enquired what this plan was; but there was something in Heathermoor's tone and look that did not encourage questions, and for some minutes both were silent.

Then all at once was heard amid the deep, solemn stillness of early morning—coming apparently from the far distance, yet distinct as if close at hand—a harsh, hollow rumble, not so much like thunder as like the slow rolling of ponderous wheels over a rough and broken road.

"What on earth is that?" cried Thurraboy, starting.

Heathermoor, who seemed to be listening intently, made no reply; and none was needed, for hardly had his comrade uttered the query when it was strangely and terribly answered.

Thurraboy had noticed carelessly a small white cloud hovering over the hills, and was wondering why it should cling so persistently to the summit of a bare, black, grimlooking peak some miles to the north, when, gazing more attentively, he saw with secret dismay that it was no cloud, but smoke.

"What's that?" cried he, changing colour.

"A hint to us to stay here no longer than we can help," said the other, as coolly as ever; "but we won't take it. If all the hills in Acheen come tumbling about our ears, we won't go without Randolph Huntley."

As if in reply to this bold challenge, the mysterious sound was just then heard again, louder and nearer than before.

"Well," said the author, forcing a laugh, "it's hard to have to deal with savages and an earthquake as well; that's

being pretty heavily handicapped in a match for life and death. You think, then, this is some volcanic convulsion?"

"I'm sure it is. This Malay Archipelago, you know, is simply a great electric cable of volcanic forces, which runs all through Sumatra and Java, and is carried on to the east by the smaller islands of Lombok and Sumbawa to Floris and Timor, after which it takes a twist north to Amboyna and the Moluccas. Sumbawa itself blew up like a powdermine in 1816, shaking the earth for hundreds of miles round, and covering with ashes a space as large as Germany. What has happened once may happen again. Every one of these mountains on which we stand is volcanic, and this district is the most dangerous of all. You remember that strange sunset we saw off Ceylon, and what we found going on in the Sunda Straits, and what Captain Barshot said about it?"

The sudden gravity that clouded his friend's face showed that he did remember; and again there was a gloomy silence, broken at last by a sharp crackle in the thicket below, as if someone were forcing his way through it.

A moment later, up came a big Malay to announce that a messenger had just arrived from Gajah, the chief of Bukit-Mas, and that the great chief of Utan-Itam wished to speak with "the lord of the white men of the sea".

CHAPTER XXIX

MEETING AN OLD FRIEND

As the Englishmen strode down the hillside after the bearer of Kerbau's summons, Lord Heathermoor hastily reviewed in his own mind their present situation, and the measures by which he designed to meet it.

The survey was far from encouraging. He had to provide against three or four contingencies at once, and a failure in one point might cost not only the life of the man whom he was striving to save, but his own and those of all his comrades. He was now certain that his Utan-Itam allies, tempted by his liberality in ransoming the prisoner, were meditating some such treachery as he had suggested to Thurraboy. On the other hand, he felt equally sure that Gajah of Bukit-Mas was bent on getting Harimau into his power without giving up Huntley. Moreover, there could now be no doubt that the two chiefs were secretly plotting to unite the whole force of the border tribes against the Dutch (evidently expecting him and his friends to co-operate with all their might), and a refusal to do so would mean certain death to them all.

Fearless as he was, the brave man felt his heart grow heavy as he realized, more fully than ever, on the brink of what a precipice they were all standing. But whatever anxieties might rack him, the keenest eye could read no trace of them on his calm, handsome features.

The Bukit-Mas envoy proved to be no other than Ular, the haughty warrior who had brought to Willemsdal Gajah's demand for the surrender of Harimau, and his threat to put Huntley to death if they refused. Heathermoor found him looking greatly ruffled, as if his dignity had just received a severe shock; and so it had, and that shock was due to Marmaduke Wyvil himself.

The moment he recognized the Malay, our slap-dash hero ran up to him, in his usual headlong style, with a loud laugh, greeted the scandalized warrior at the top of his voice, and coolly asked why he had been so long with his message, and whether he had fallen asleep on the way.

But the wily savage, even while writhing at this unceremonious treatment, was shrewd enough to bethink himself that something worth knowing might be let slip by this incautious, outspoken boy; so he said carelessly:

"I suppose that fire-boat behind the islet is your

father's."

"Ah, you've seen her, then?" cried Wyvil; "isn't she a beauty? Yes, she's ours; we came in her all the way from our country beyond the sea."

"And plenty of your sea-warriors on board?" went on

Ular.

"Lots of 'em—and plenty of guns too," said the boy, elated at finding himself talking to a real live savage in his own language, and making himself quite understood. "My father never goes anywhere without her; and he sent her round here to wait for us."

This, as it happened, was the very best thing that our hero could have said. His father, knowing that the appearance of an armed vessel off their coast would cause great excitement and alarm among the men of Bukit-Mas, and rightly judging that the best way of dealing with such born rogues was to tell them the simple truth, had coupled with his last message to their chief the announcement that the strange ship was his own, and that she had been sent to that place by his special orders, to be ready for anything that might happen—a phrase which Gajah, remembering the tone of covert enmity to the Dutch that had marked

Heathermoor's former message to him from Willemsdal,

interpreted in his own way.

All this tallied so exactly with what Marmaduke had just said that even Ular himself, suspicious as he was, felt convinced of its truth.

"But why," asked he, "did you not come here in your fire-boat, instead of taking this long journey by land?"

"So we would, but she wasn't finished yet."
"Not finished?" echoed Ular, looking puzzled.

"Well, she had to be repaired, you know, after the storm," said the boy, who seemed to take it for granted that his new friend knew all about it. "A vessel needs some putting to rights after being all but wrecked!"

"You were nearly wrecked, then?" cried the Malay with a sparkle in his keen black eye; for, like all Acheenese,

he was a "wrecker" to his finger-tips.

"To be sure we were," said Wyvil, as gleefully as if the fact were rather creditable to them than otherwise. "We were just driving ashore off Acheen Head" (Ular started visibly), "and the whole beach was covered with men, all ready to murder us the minute we got to land, when, just at the last moment, we struck a cross-current, and managed to get past the cape."

"And when did this happen?" asked the savage

eagerly.

"Only a few months ago," said Wyvil; "the ship's only

just repaired again."

"Wonderful indeed are the ways of Allah!" cried the devout Mussulman. "When I first saw yonder fire-boat, I thought I knew her; and lo! now it seems that I thought rightly. Well do I remember how we rejoiced when we saw her come driving toward the rocks, thinking that the mercy of Heaven had sent us much good plunder; but when she veered round, and slipped past the headland, our hearts were heavy, for we saw then that it was our destiny to get nothing!"

"What? were you there?" shouted Wyvil with the full

power of his lungs.

"I had been sent by our chief with a message to the chief of that district; and when his people ran down to the shore, seeing your ship drifting on to the rocks, I went also."

"Well, this is a joke!" cried Marmaduke, clapping the astounded savage on the back with a roar of laughter. "Here, Alf, Alf! come here, quick! here's one of the chaps that were going to murder us that time off Acheen Head!"

And, to the Malay's amazement, Huntley seemed as much delighted as his chum at this chance meeting with

their would-be assassin.

"Of all beings that Allah hath created," said Ular later on, when describing this queer interview, "the strangest, assuredly, are these English heathen. Truly one might think they love their enemies more than their friends; for, when you lad knew that I was one of those who would have plundered and slain him, he laughed right merrily, and welcomed me as a man welcomes his brother! There be many madmen on earth, but maddest of all is a young English unbeliever."

When Heathermoor reached the camp, he learned that Gajah's message was an invitation to them to visit him in Bukit-Mas, and confer with him as friends on the points at issue between them. To the wary Englishman, this invitation seemed very much like that of Mrs. Bond to her ducks; "Ducky, ducky, ducky, come and be killed"; and he replied that while the young chief of Bukit-Mas, Harimau, formed one of their party, it would be a gross discourtesy to visit his native place without taking him with them, which the well-known prophecy forbade at present. Moreover, when matters of such importance were being discussed, it was only fair that his illustrious host, the great chief of Utan-Itam, who had so hospitably entertained him and his friends, should also be present.

This compliment, spoken in Kerbau's hearing, vastly pleased the worthy savage; but Ular, not so easily deceived, eyed the speaker with the look that a practised cardsharper might wear on suddenly encountering another cheat as skilful as himself.

It was at length decided, at Heathermoor's suggestion (though he cleverly contrived to make the proposal seem to proceed from the chief himself), that Gajah should be invited to appear on the border-line between Bukit-Mas and Utan-Itam, with twenty warriors of his tribe, and his prisoner, Colonel Huntley; and that Kerbau should meet him there with an equal number of Utan-Itam men, and Heathermoor's whole party, Harimau included. This being settled, Heathermoor said, loud enough for all to hear:

"I must now withdraw for a time, for I have to write an important letter to the Rajah of Medan, with which his messenger here (pointing to Ismail) must set off this very

day."

"What! are you going to dismiss our courier?"

whispered Thurraboy with a look of surprise.

"He can be of no more use to us here," said Heathermoor in the same tone, "and the Bukit-Mas men have nothing to do with the Rajah, and wouldn't care twopence for him. Besides, it will impress these fellows a good deal to see us sending off a letter to the Rajah, by special messenger, of which they don't know the contents. If they are plotting treachery, it'll make 'em think twice before trying it."

The letter was soon written, and, an hour later, Haji-Ismail started down the hill with it, escorted by two of

Kerbau's warriors.

CHAPTER XXX

WALKING IN DARKNESS

AS Lord Heathermoor had foretold, this public proof of a secret and intimate communication between the Rajah and their English guests made a visible impression upon the Utan-Itam men and their chief; and the wary Englishman did not fail to observe that it had its effect upon Ular likewise (for whose benefit, indeed, and for his master through him, this scene had been chiefly got up). In short, when the Bukit-Mas envoy set off homeward that evening, Heathermoor felt satisfied that his story would lose nothing in the telling, and that Harimau's respectable uncle would hear of something not at all to his advantage.

Ular himself returned no more; but another envoy came from Bukit-Mas on the next morning but one, to announce Gajah's assent to their proposal, and arrange the preliminaries of the meeting, which was fixed to take place at a spot about three miles from the Utan-Itam fortress, where

the boundaries of the two tiny principalities met.

During the preparations that filled up the next two days, Thurraboy noticed that his friend Heathermoor was very much in the company of the chief Kerbau, and seemed to be constantly asking him questions, the answers to which

he appeared to note with close attention.

The chief was visibly pleased at this marked interest in his country and people on the part of a man of another race and creed, who came from the end of the world. But Thurraboy soon noticed that his comrade's questions turned chiefly on the natives' mode of fighting, their weapons, and their skill in using them; and when Kerbau ordered up

two of his best warriors for a sham fight, to show his guest how such things were done, the author's growing suspicions deepened into certainty.

"I've guessed your plan," he said, the next time he and Heathermoor were alone; "you're going to provoke Gajah

to a single combat."

"Well, I didn't mean to tell you, but, as you have guessed it, I must admit you are right. That villain is the source of all our troubles, and without him the tribe will be like a body without a head. There's no safety for poor Huntley or that brave lad Harimau while he lives; and, though I have no love for bloodshed, I feel that mercy to such a ruffian, after all his crimes, would be like sparing a tiger or a mad dog!"

"I wouldn't try it if I were you; if he does accept, which I don't think he will, he's sure to attempt some

foul play."

"He can't refuse, before his own men and another tribe as well, without losing for ever his credit as a warrior; and as to foul play, I shall take that for granted, and be on my guard."

It was the night of the 24th August. On the following evening the two parties were to meet at the boundary, and encamp there for the night, the conference being fixed for

the next day.

The spot chosen was well suited to the purpose. It was the summit of a low, rocky bluff, which rose pyramid-like in the centre of the deep, narrow valley separating Utan-Itam from Bukit-Mas. Its top formed an irregular platform two hundred yards wide, sloping steeply toward Utan-Itam in a broken descent traversed by a winding path, while the Bukit-Mas side went sheer down in a precipice of a hundred feet, around the base of which another path, which only a goat or a Malay could have climbed, zigzagged upward till it reached the platform half-way along one of its more accessible sides.

Seen from its eastern or Utan-Itam face—by which it was usually approached—this curious hill-top wore the exact likeness of a gigantic chair, the back of which was formed by a vast tower-shaped mass of black volcanic rock, starting sheer up from the very brink of the precipice more than fifty feet into the air.

It was already close upon midnight, and the rising moon was just beginning to peer over the black mountain-ridges that surged up against the sky like rolling waves, when two dark figures came creeping, as silently as shadows, along the break-neck path which led up the eastern side of the boundary-bluff.

It might have startled a spectator (had any spectator been there) to see human forms in this ghostly spot at that unearthly hour; for it was at dead of night that the demons with whom Acheenese superstition had peopled these shaggy woods and gloomy gorges were believed to be abroad in all their terrors, and the boldest of these wild mountaineers would have shrunk from venturing forth in such a place and at such a time. Stranger still, the growing moonlight showed that one of these two night-wanderers was a native, the other being a tall man with the dress and complexion of an Englishman.

When the two prowlers, having wormed their way with marvellously little noise through the mass of thorny undergrowth that fringed the edge of the platform, had at length emerged from the thickets upon the open ground beyond them, the taller of the pair, after glancing keenly round him for an instant, said in a low whisper to his companion:

"You told me, Inche Harimau, that, if we have to run for it, the right-hand path is the one. But where is it? I see no sign of it."

"Were you to push back that bush that rises above the rest, Tuan Heathermoor, you would see it, and it is the only one by which you could escape from this spot. The path by which we have come leads, as you know, to Utan-



HE CAUGHT HARIMAU'S ARM JUST AS THE LATTER WAS ABOUT TO MAKE HIS SPRING

Page 274



Itam, and the left-hand one to Bukit-Mas; but the path to the right, though it seems to turn inland, strikes at last into a valley by which you can go straight down to the sea."

The other was about to reply, when Harimau, with a warning gesture, drew him back into the shadow of the thicket.

At first even Heathermoor's practised ear failed to catch the sound that had warned the young savage's acuter senses, but at length he caught a very faint rustle, which told that someone was picking his way cautiously up the perilous ledge-path pointed out by Harimau as the way to Bukit-Mas. Nearer and nearer came the sound, and then a man crept forth into the moonlight within twenty yards of them, facing round instantly as if to address or be addressed by someone still hidden by the bushes.

"I go no farther," said a deep voice from the thicket, "and you know what you have to do. Kill him, and your reward shall be great; fail me, or turn traitor, and my vengeance shall find you even in the depths of the sea!"

Low as was his tone, the unseen speaker, to whom his companion replied only with a low salaam, spoke with such deadly earnestness that his words were as terribly distinct to the ambushed listeners as if uttered in their very ears. The moment Harimau heard his voice he gave a slight start, and said to Heathermoor in a whisper so low that even the Englishman's quick ear could barely catch it:

" Abang!" (my uncle).

Brave as Heathermoor was, even he felt his heart beat quicker at this sudden intimation that the terrible Gajah, the man of a thousand crimes, whose hands were red with his own brother's blood, was actually before him at last. Eagerly did he strain his eyes into the thicket for a glimpse of the formidable adversary to whom he expected to be opposed in mortal combat ere two more suns had set. But amid the black shadow of that impenetrable under-

growth nothing was to be seen, and in another moment a faint and lessening footfall, far down the dark descent, told him that his foe was beyond his reach.

At that instant the man who was left behind turned half-round, as if to watch his departing leader. The moon shone full on his face, and they recognized the treacherous half-caste, Lu-Yan, who had incited Van der Haagen's coolies to riot, and played the spy on Harimau.

That the young chief himself had not forgotten this was plain enough, for he at once drew his dagger with a look at Heathermoor too terribly significant to be misunderstood.

Most men would have let him do his will, for, it being undoubtedly Harimau himself whom this wretch was commissioned to slay, it might well seem but justice for Harimau to slay him. But not so thought Heathermoor. Spy, traitor, assassin, though he knew this ruffian to be, yet to strike him down thus without warning seemed so like an actual murder that the brave man's English heart rose against it, and he caught Harimau's arm just as the latter was about to make his spring.

Ere either could speak, the question was suddenly settled for them. A gust of wind whisked off the half-breed's cap and tossed it toward the farther side of the clearing, whither its owner flew to seize it ere it could be carried in among the bushes.

Poor wretch! he was too eager in his pursuit to hear the quick, heavy breathing amid the dark undergrowth, or to see the two spots of pale, greenish-yellow light that shaped themselves all at once out of the encircling gloom. There came a sudden crash in the thicket—a black shadow shot athwart the moonlight—a sharp, angry snarl was heard, and a stifled cry—and the villain lay writhing on the earth in the clutch of a monster as pitiless as himself—the black panther of the Archipelago.

Heathermoor unslung his rifle, but, ere he could fire,

destroyer and destroyed had vanished together into the

deeper shadows beyond.

"You see now," said he solemnly to Harimau, "that no hand of man is needed to execute God's judgment on treachery and murder. Let us trust in Him to guard us and to save us from all our other perils as He has saved us from this."

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STROKE OF DOOM

ON the following evening the silent and lonely spot that had witnessed this midnight tragedy was full of life and bustle. The glare of two huge camp-fires lighted up the rocky platform and its encircling thickets, and around the blaze were grouped the two Acheenese bands, which had reached the spot at nightfall within a few minutes of each other.

Each party, however, kept to its own side of the clearing, for native etiquette forbade them to mix with each other till the pending council was over. The Utan-Itam men and their white allies were gathered close to the brow of the steep slope by which they had ascended, while Gajah and the warriors of Bukit-Mas had planted themselves farther back, beneath the shadow of the overhanging crag.

At any other time this evening halt would soon have become a revel, not a whit less blithe from the consciousness that the next morning might set the revellers at each others' throats. But on this occasion both sides had secret anxieties of their own which were more than enough to check the riotous gaiety of these overgrown children.

Gajah's keen eyes, strain themselves as they might toward the group around the opposite camp-fire, failed to discern whether it contained the nephew on whose track he had sent a practised cut-throat twenty hours before, and he remained in all the tortures of uncertainty if his plot had succeeded or no. On the other hand, Heathermoor and his friends were equally ignorant if the captive colonel (of whom nothing had been seen so far) was with the Bukit-Mas party as arranged, and they began to fear that their

wily foe had outwitted them after all.

But other and heavier burdens weighed down the bold hearts of the Malays, for all that day the march of both bands had been haunted by mysterious and terrible portents, which the superstitious fancy of the savages made even more terrific. On those breezy hills, usually the playground of all the winds of heaven, not a breath was stirring, and a sultry, unnatural closeness brooded over earth and sky. More than once during the journey, brief as it was, one or other of the Malays had paused to listen in secret terror to that dull, distant, unearthly sound which Heathermoor and Thurrabov remembered only too well. In passing along the crest of a high ridge overlooking the sea, the Bukit-Mas men had been startled by a strange agitation in the water below, which appeared to surge violently back from the shore. The Utan-Itam party, on their side, had been equally dismayed to find that a stream crossed by their line of march—which had never failed within the memory of living men-had suddenly disappeared, leaving its bed perfectly dry. And, more startling still at that season, the sun, instead of shining with its wonted cloudless splendour, had all day loomed dim through a ghostly haze.

Reckless though they were of any earthly danger, these savage mountaineers were as timid as children on the score of supernatural terrors. All these omens of evil (for such they held them) weighed them down like a nightmare; and after a few faint and spasmodic attempts at merriment—which served only to make the universal depression more glaringly manifest—a chilling gloom and silence sank down upon each and all.

"A Greek would have said," whispered Thurraboy to his comrade, eyeing these living statues as the darkness slowly deepened around them, "that these fellows were haunted by the Furies."

"And my countrymen up in the north," rejoined Heathermoor, "would say that they were fey (doomed). But, after all, I don't know that we have much cause to be in better spirits ourselves."

"Not much, certainly. It all amounts to this: we've got to outwit a set of men that we can't trust, with the help

of another set of men that we can't trust either."

"That's about it. We want to get hold of Huntley without giving up Harimau, and Gajah wants to get hold of Harimau without giving up Huntley; but to do that he must be a better man than I am."

"Then you still keep to your idea of the single combat?"

"I can see no other way—may God forgive me if I am wrong! But we must keep watch and watch over Harimau all to-night, for those fellows would think nothing of mur-

dering him right in the midst of us."

Thurraboy assented. But this special watch was hardly needed, for there was little sleep for any of the five that night. Marmaduke was excited by the expectation of a general affray on the morrow. Alfred was worked up to fever-pitch by the near approach of the crisis of his father's fate. Heathermoor and Thurraboy were in no mood for slumber on what might be their last night on earth. Harimau's fierce Malay blood was boiling at the thought of being at last within reach of the villain who had murdered his father and so many of his trustiest friends.

Yielding to the persistence of his comrade, who had offered to take the first watch, Thurraboy lay down, but not to sleep. Wrapped in his own gloomy thoughts (which harmonized well with the wild scenery around him, and the grim faces that started out spectrally ever and anon in the fitful glare of the dying fires) he lay broad awake for a full hour. But at last the utter silence and the refreshing cool-

ness of night began to make him feel drowsy, and he was almost in a doze when a cry of alarm from the savages around made him spring to his feet, thinking they were attacked.

But the wild cries of the Bukit-Mas men showed them to be equally terrified, and certainly not without reason. The moon, which had just risen in all its glory, was fast losing its silver light and deepening into a blood-red glare. Beneath that ghastly splendour the streams that trickled down the rocks seemed to run blood; the towering crags stood out as if red-hot against the gloomy sky; the clustering leaves around turned to quivering tongues of flame; and the wild faces of the savages, distorted with terror and amazement, looked wan and livid as those of the dead.

For a whole hour did this weird spectacle last, and then ended as startlingly as it had begun; for a black cloud swept athwart the moon and blotted it out as if it had never been.

There was no more sleep for either camp that night, and seldom has the first gleam of dawn been more eagerly welcomed than by those weary, downcast, gloomy men, whose haggard faces seemed already darkened by the shadow of death.

"Sunday morning!" said Heathermoor with a faint sigh, as he watched the glorious sunrise broadening over the dark mountains. "To-day all our people at home are going to church to pray. I hope some of them are praying for us, for we need it."

"We can pray here just as well," rejoined Thurraboy.
"Shall we have our service now? I've got my pocket
Bible."

"We will. I'll read a chapter, and then we'll have our favourite psalm."

A few minutes later the savages were startled by the deep, mellow cadence of the grand old psalm, which came

with peculiar fitness from the lips of men who knew not if they should ever see another sun go down.

"O God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast,
And our eternal home!

"Beneath the shadow of Thy throne
Thy saints shall rest secure;
Sufficient is Thine arm alone,
And our defence is sure."

The fierce mountaineers listened in silent awe. At any other time their Moslem fanaticism would have prompted them to interrupt with hard words (and probably with hard blows likewise) the devotions of men whom their ignorant bigotry believed to be worshippers of the Evil One himself; but now, shaken and unnerved as they were by the dreadful and mysterious portents of the previous day and night, the prayers of this little band of Christians, uttered so fearlessly in their very midst, had an overawing effect which they could neither understand nor resist, and which was unexpectedly deepened by a very startling phenomenon.

The sun had risen in cloudless splendour, as if to sweep away all memory of the past night and its terrors. But the last notes of the psalm were still echoing among the rocks when the dazzling light began suddenly to grow faint and dim (just as it had done on the previous day), as if seen through a rising mist. The Malays saw, and

shuddered.

"See'st thou, brother?" muttered one of Gajah's men; "the white sorcerers are working wonders with the power of their magic song!"

"And lo! the sun obeys them, and hides his face at their word," said a second in tremulous tones. "From the peril

of sorcerers and magicians, and all servants of Eblis (Satan), I will fly unto Allah, the Lord of all men!"

As the terrified savage faltered out this passage of the Koran (used by Mohammedans as a safeguard against witchcraft) a sudden movement in the Bukit-Mas group left visible a seated figure leaning against a rock. Heathermoor's heart gave a bound as if it would leap from its place, for the man, though in native dress, was unmistakably a white, and the keen-eyed Englishman knew at a glance his long-lost friend, Randolph Huntley!

He thought Huntley stole a glance at him in return, though making no sign of recognition, which was just as well, for the English had warily kept the secret of his close

connection with them.

And now, for the first time, our heroes had a full view of the Bukit-Mas band and their leader. Conspicuous among Gajah's warriors was the stately form of Ular, evidently watching them keenly, seeing which, Heathermoor whispered warningly to Alfred:

"There's your father at last, Alf; but whatever you do, don't let those fellows see you know him. One false step

now may spoil all!"

Just then he felt a touch on his arm, and saw Harimau, with an ominous gleam in his eyes, pointing to a tall man among the Bukit-Mas warriors, who, as the boy said in a

fierce whisper, was his uncle, Gajah!

Heathermoor looked keenly at the formidable champion, whom he expected to face in mortal combat that very day, and saw, to his surprise, quite a different man from what he had imagined. The dreaded chief's face, though scarred with wounds, had a bold and rather handsome outline, and, but for the wolfish restlessness of his small, deep-set, shifting eyes (which seemed to see everything without looking direct at anything), there was absolutely nothing to suggest the fearful reputation that credited him with all the crimes of Richard III. His limbs were finely formed, and the

suppleness of every movement told of an agility fully matching his giant strength.

"Tough work, I expect," said Heathermoor; "but, in a just cause like this, I'd face him if he were twice as

good."

All at once the usurping chief's massive features writhed themselves into a scowl of such deadly hatred that no further evidence was needed as to his real nature. He had caught sight of his hated nephew, and knew that his

murderous plot had failed.

The impatient boys thought the business of the day very long in opening. And in fact the only part of it which this Malay parliament seemed in haste to transact was the preparing and devouring of their morning meal; for with all the savage's amazing power of enduring privation the hill-men had also the savage's love of over-eating at every chance, and plainly held the opinion of the negro who said to his son: "Sam, my boy, if you ebber hab work to do 'fore breakfast, mind and git yer breakfast fust!"

While this motion was before the House (the only one that it was likely to carry unanimously), Heathermoor hastily whispered a few final instructions to his comrades, ending with a warning to remember that, if "anything happened" (by which convenient phrase he mildly expressed the possibility of a fight to the death between these two gangs of savages), their way of escape lay down the right-hand path, and that, in case of any confusion, they could not do better than follow Harimau.

Up to this time, in accordance with native etiquette, the two chiefs and their followers, though separated only by a hundred yards of open ground, had appeared studiously unconscious of each other's presence, resolutely pretending not to notice that there was anyone there but themselves. But now that breakfast was over, and the business of the meeting about to begin, these duodecimo potentates at last permitted themselves to become aware of the presence of

those who had been encamped beside them for fourteen hours.

"Salaam-aleikoum, Gajah Bukit-Mas!" (Peace be with you, Elephant of the Golden Mountain), said Kerbau, stepping before his men, and addressing Gajah as if he had not seen him for a year.

"Aleikoum-salaam, Kerbau Utan-Itam!" (With you be peace, Buffalo of the Black Forest), replied Gajah; and, this exchange of compliments serving the purpose of opening the

meeting, the speeches began forthwith.

But, to the boys' great amusement, the orators on both sides seemed to deal with every subject save the one in hand. Loud boasts of the speakers' feats of war, extravagant praise of the Acheenese in general and their own tribe in particular, coarse abuse of the Dutch and furious threats of vengeance on them, filled every speech from beginning to end.

This, however, was merely the usual frothy bluster that always preceded the real business in hand; and it came at last. After various minor orators had said their say, Gajah himself rose and poured forth a vehement tirade, which had a marked effect, not merely on his own band, but on the Utan-Itam men likewise.

And well it might. The savage scorn with which he spoke of the Dutch settlers, his artful allusions to the rich booty that might be wrested from them, the fiery vehemence wherewith he recalled former battles with the whites, and pointed to their scars on his own face, were well fitted to make a deep impression on these fierce and ignorant robbers, as their yell of applause amply showed.

But Kerbau, though as savage as his ferocious ally, was more cautious, and seemed inclined to moderate rather than inflame the general excitement. He reminded them that while they had always succeeded in repelling the Dutch from their mountains, they had uniformly got the worst of it when encountering the latter in the plain; and he suggested that it might be well to be assured of the other border tribes before committing themselves to open war.

These temperate counsels, however, were plainly not to the taste of Gajah, or of his lieutenant, Ular, whose warlike renown made him a leading personage in his own tribe. Ular warmly seconded his chief, and it was decided that the Dutch settlements should be attacked at once; and, this done, "the House adjourned for lunch", as Marmaduke whispered to his chum with a forced laugh.

But Wyvil's merriment was a poor pretence; for the near approach of this terrible crisis, and the consciousness that within a few hours—nay, perhaps even within a few minutes -their fate and that of Colonel Huntley would be decided, were more than enough to sober the reckless boys. Thurrabov began to look nervous and restless; and Heathermoor himself, with all his firmness, betrayed some emotion as the decisive moment drew nigh.

The second meal was despatched more rapidly than the first, the Malays having by this time begun to enter into the spirit of their day's work. As it ended, the English instinctively drew close together, knowing that the next subject of debate would be the disposal of themselves and

of Colonel Huntley.

Then a solemn hush fell over the whole assembly, every one seeming to feel that now the really serious part of the conference was about to begin, and amid that grim silence came another of those mysterious and appalling signs of evil which had haunted the whole of this ill-omened march. Though not a breath of wind was stirring, the surrounding trees suddenly began to quiver violently; in fact it might almost be said that they shuddered, for the motion was exactly that of one who shivers with fear.

A tremor of undisguised panic ran through the throng

of superstitious savages, and several voices were heard to suggest that they must have chosen an "unlucky day", and that they had better break up the council forthwith.

"Tell not me of unlucky days!" shouted Gajah in a voice like the roar of a storm. "Those who are cowards may go home if they will; I want none but warriors here!"

Then, turning to Kerbau and his men, he said emphatically:

"Children of the Black Forest, there are certain white chiefs among you, of a race that has often fought against the Dutchmen, whom we hate. Are they willing to go with us and fight against them once more?"

Kerbau looked enquiringly at Heathermoor, who, stepping forward, answered loud enough for everyone to

hear:

"Chief of the Golden Mountain, your words are good. Assuredly we will not sit still when there is work to do; but men say that the white chief who is your guest is mightier both in wisdom and war, and hath done great deeds of valour. Let him decide what is best for us to do. If he is willing to go, we will go with him at once."

He ventured to lay a slight stress on the last words, and saw by the sudden change of Huntley's face that the colonel

had caught their meaning.

"Ask him; he will speak for himself," said Gajah, innocent of this by-play; and his reply satisfied Heathermoor that the colonel had played his part well, and had adroitly humoured the mistake of his jailers in counting on him as an ally.

"Randolph," cried he to his old comrade, speaking French, lest any of the Malays should understand English, "can

you hear me?"

"I hear you, and I understand," replied Huntley in the same language; "but be careful."

"He says he hears and understands my words," said Heathermoor to the savages in Malay; and then he added in French to the prisoner:

"Are you bound, crippled, or hampered in any way, or

are you able to run and to fight?"

"I am fit for both, though they think I'm not; and I'll do whatever you tell me."

"Be ready, then, to run over to us whenever you hear me call."

Then he said impressively to the Malays:

"The great white chief is willing to join us, and now we are all of one mind. It is well that it should be so, and that we should speak freely and truthfully to each other; for if there be any falsehood or treachery among us, surely the hand of Allah will be heavy against us and our cause."

The sudden change in the faces of both chiefs at his last words did not escape the watchful speaker; and their looks changed yet more when, as if in answer to his solemn warning, the same dull, distant rumble that had startled them so often was heard again!

The superstitious savages exchanged glances of silent terror, and even the iron-hearted Gajah looked dismayed; but, recovering himself with a violent effort, he said in a

tone of assumed frankness:

"We are, then, friends and comrades henceforth; and you will now be ready to give back to me my young

nephew, who is your prisoner."

"Nay, no prisoner, but a guest, who has come with us of his own free-will. As for giving him back to thee, the term is not yet ended that was appointed by the prophecy which forbade him to appear among his own people, lest he should bring evil upon them."

This was a poser for Mr. Gajah, who must either give way or confess the dreaded prophecy to be a fraud of his own; and, with a very bad grace, he did the former.

"Thou art right," said he sullenly; "but when the appointed term is past, thou wilt be ready to restore him?"

"He is a free mountain chief, and can do as he will," said the Englishman coldly. "If he wish to return to thee, assuredly I will not hinder him."

And as Gajah ground his teeth in baffled rage, knowing what chance there was that the nephew whom he had done his best to murder would return to him willingly, the other went on:

"We are all friends and brothers now, and frankly as brothers must we speak. Thy nephew thinks—doubtless mistakenly—that he has foes among the men of Bukit-Mas, who might do him wrong. Now I know well how safe he would be in thy hands; but, that no shadow of doubt may be left betwixt him and thee, I call on thee to pledge thy faith to God and the Prophet, here before us all, that the young chief hath nothing to fear under thy care."

Hardened as the ruffian was, he shrank from the frightful and blasphemous perjury which he was thus called upon to utter; and his evil conscience suggested that this seemingly friendly offer must be really a snare, and that his missing agent, Lu-Yan, had betrayed him, and might even now be

at hand, ready to disclose the entire plot.

However, it was now too late to draw back; so, calling up all his firmness, he said aloud:

"My nephew has none but friends among our people; and as I shall deal with him, so let God's justice deal with me!"

Amid the freezing silence that followed this hideous perjury, Thurraboy was heard to draw a quick breath; for he saw that Heathermoor was about to give the speaker the lie direct, and utter the fatal defiance, which, between two such men, must result in the death of one or both.

But the dispute was destined to a very different ending. Hardly was Gajah's impious falsehood spoken when the mysterious sound was heard once more—louder, sharper, nearer than ever. The earth trembled—the trees bowed as if shaken by a mighty wind—and the towering crag overhead, torn from its place, fell with a crash that was heard miles away, crushing like flies Gajah himself, Ular, and a dozen of their band.

CHAPTER XXXII

THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 26, 1883

THE thunder of the falling rock—the sudden and terrific destruction which it wrought—the whirl of dust that for a moment darkened the whole air, above all, the instant following of this fearful catastrophe on the solemn appeal to Heaven's justice, changed at once these strong, savage men into a rabble of frightened children. Some fell flat on the earth, others cowered away into the bushes, and the majority took to their heels outright, in such confusion that several of the Bukit-Mas men, instead of making for their own country, fled down the slope towards Utan-Itam.

Amid this terror and disorder, while all was still hid by the whirling dust, Heathermoor felt a hand on his shoulder, and heard the colonel's voice say: "Here I am; let us run

for it!"

Instantly the whole party, led by Harimau, were flying like hunted deer along the right-hand path, and soon heard

the uproar die away behind them.

How long that race with death lasted none of them could ever have told. Just beyond this hill lay the vessel that would save them; but would they ever reach it? Crashing into matted thickets, stumbling over loose stones and projecting roots, bursting through tangled briers, on, on they flew, with throbbing hearts, and swimming eyes, and breath coming in laboured gasps.

All at once the breakneck path made a sharp turn, and began to slope steeply downward, and they suddenly found themselves in the valley spoken of by Harimau, at the far

end of which they caught a glimpse of the sea.

At that sight the boys waved their hands joyfully, and expended their last breath in a faint hurrah. But the poor lads were exulting too soon. Hardly was their shout uttered when it was answered by a hoarse clamour of harsh, angry voices, and they burst right into an armed band of Bukit-Mas warriors at least thirty strong.

The fact was that Gajah (always suspecting others of the treachery habitual to himself) had determined to anticipate any hostile intentions on the part of his friend Kerbau by keeping this force ready near the place of meeting; and the fugitives, by ill-luck, had fallen right into it.

But the savages were quite as much taken by surprise as their opponents; and, profiting by their confusion, the English broke through them with a headlong rush. Colonel Huntley, preserving his wonted coolness even in that terrible moment, called to his comrades to reserve their fire, and, singling out the Malay leader, struck him down with a spear that he had snatched up in the general flight. Heathermoor and Thurraboy, warily noting that only six of the savages had guns, beat down two of these with their clubbed rifles, while Harimau disabled a third with a dagger stroke; and, bursting through their astounded foes, they dashed headlong down the valley toward the sea.

After that all that passed was like the confused horror of a dream. Dropping shots, whizzing spears, grim faces appearing and vanishing by turns, rattling stones and whirling dust, savage yells (repeated by all the mountain echoes in hideous chorus), coming closer and closer behind; for, spent as they were, their pursuers, coming fresh to the chase, had a fearful advantage. How terribly far away seemed that pale glimmer beyond, which, faintly visible amid the deepening gloom, showed where the black mouth of the glen opened upon the sea. And still the wolfish cries of the pursuing savages drew nearer, and nearer, and nearer.

Twice they were forced to check the foremost pursuers by turning and firing on them; but the rest came on so furiously as to give them no time to reload, while such of the Malays as had firearms took flying shots at them in turn. Moreover, the strain of this headlong race over broken ground was too exhausting to last, as their quivering lips, swollen veins, and reeling steps showed but too plainly. Would they never get to the end of this valley of death?

At last, just as Heathermoor himself was beginning to despair, the last rays of the setting sun, breaking for an instant through the ghostly dimness that had obscured it all day, showed them, close in front, the steep rocky ridge that overhung the sea.

"Up-there-" gasped their leader; and the hunted band, with a last effort, struggled frantically up the ascent,

and sank exhausted on its summit.

There, hardly a mile away, lay the trim little yacht on which they would be safe; and Thurraboy, having no breath left to hail her, signalled her with three successive revolver-shots. But these were hardly needed; for the distant firing, and the yells of the savages, had already put her crew on the alert, and the moment they saw the white men appear on the crest of the ridge, they set to work to lower a boat.

Meanwhile the savages, who had expected their victims to rush down to the beach and be overtaken there, halted undecidedly on seeing them mount the ridge; for the sheltering brushwood ended half-way up, and to scale that bare slope in the face of practised shots was no inviting enterprise.

But the fierce Malays were not to be easily baulked. Skilfully availing themselves of every inequality of the ground, they began to ascend from several points at once, while the worn-out Englishmen, hardly able to lift their weapons, faced the attack in silent desperation.

Suddenly the air trembled with the burst of a mighty volume of sound, to which the loudest thunder would have been nothing. The earth shook—the forest quivered to its topmost boughs—the rocks fell thundering from their places—the sea started back from the shore. Instantly all was dark as night, and the English fell to the earth like dead men.

CHAPTER XXXIII

A BLACK SABBATH

MINGLING with the uproar came the fierce lash and hiss of bursting waves, and a whirl of snow-white foam glimmered spectrally through the blackness of that unearthly gloom. But so stunned were our heroes by a shock that seemed to unhinge the very earth itself, that, though in momentary expectation of being swallowed up alive by the heaving ground or the surging waves, many minutes passed ere they attempted to move.

The first to rise was Heathermoor himself; and, as he stood leaning dizzily on his rifle, Randolph Huntley scrambled to his feet on one side and Thurraboy on the

other.

"What was it—an earthquake?" asked the author.

"Either that or a volcanic eruption," said Heathermoor.
"Now, God grant that my poor lads on the yacht may not have had time to lower the boat before it came; for if they have, they are all dead men."

Most providentially the convulsion had come just before the boat was ready, and thus her gallant crew had escaped. The yacht herself, apart from the protection of the two great cliffs between which she lay, was riding with two anchors out; and, though one cable snapped like a thread, the other held fast, and the brave little craft remained unharmed.

In fact, Heathermoor and his party had had a far narrower escape themselves; for the mountain wave hurled upon the shore by the convulsion had rushed up the ridge to within a few feet of the spot where they lay—uprooting trees,

tearing away solid rocks, and even ploughing a yawning chasm in the hillside itself. But it had rid them of their foes, for the savages below were swept away to a man.

By this time it was pitch dark, what with the coming night and what with the black dust that filled the air. But this was nothing to the stout English sailors, who, as soon as the agitation of the sea had so far subsided as to make it safe to lower a boat, pulled ashore and brought off their commander and his whole party.

Oh, but that was a black Sabbath for Java and Sumatra! The fatal volcano of Krakatoa, standing between the two islands, dealt equal destruction to both. One great wave blotted from the earth the thriving Javanese town of Tieringin. At Anjer the inhabitants suddenly beheld, far out at sea, a piled-up mass of water standing up like a high wall, and sweeping landward with inconceivable swiftness. When it receded, Anjer was gone, and thirty thousand human lives with it; while Teluk-Betong, a large native town on the Sumatran side of the strait, was engulfed at the same moment, with ten thousand more.

In Western Java the burning ashes fell thickly over the whole country as far as Cheribon, blasting scores of flourishing plantations into a hideous desert, and destroying in one night the labour of years. Between sunset and sunrise the whole outline of the Sunda Strait was altered past recognition, and neither chart nor compass could save the bewildered seamen, who, voyaging through a channel which they knew by heart, suddenly found land where they had always seen water, and water where they had always seen land.

The sea, shaken to its lowest depths, rose and fell like a fountain-jet, flinging boats and even large ships far up on to the Java shore; and even in the streets of Batavia itself the volcanic cinders and lava-dust fell so thickly that, on the morning after that fatal Sabbath, the sun rose upon it in vain. A cloud of "darkness which might be felt" shrouded the affrighted city. Every lamp lit in that tainted air

flickered and died. The few who ventured to grope their way about the darkened town fell fainting in its streets. Houses and shops were shut and barred, and the inhabitants sat trembling within, thinking the last day at hand. But with the destroyed perished the destroyer. One line in a bulletin summed up the issue of this Miltonic conflict: "The sea now rolls where Mount Krakatoa once stood".

Early on the morrow of that fatal night the rescued group were gathered, silent and thoughtful, on the yacht's deck, as she headed north-west over the still heaving sea, beneath a blank, sunless sky. All looked sombre, but the gloomiest was Harimau, whose native superstition, revived by this fearful tragedy, ascribed it wholly to his own rashness in transgressing the limit fixed by the prophecy. He was somewhat comforted, however, by Heathermoor's assurance that, judging from what they had themselves seen in the Sunda Strait many weeks before, the great explosion must certainly have come, even had Harimau never set foot in Acheen again.

"We are saved," said Heathermoor solemnly; "but I daren't even think what the next news from Java will be, for, of course, it is Krakatoa that has done all this."

"As soon as we get to Singapore," cried the colonel, as he sat between his old friend and long-absent son, "we'll get up a subscription there to relieve the sufferers, and give all we can to it ourselves."

"Ay, that we will; and then, home to Old England!"

"The sooner the better," said Huntley. "I've had quite enough of the East Indies, and so, I should think, have you all."

"We have indeed," said Thurraboy meaningly.

"But you, Inche Harimau, what do you mean to do?" asked Heathermoor, turning to the young chief, who still sat silent and moody. "Will you stay with us, or go back to your own people?"

"Oh, do stay with us, Harry! We'll take you home with

us, and teach you to play cricket!" cried Marmaduke, evidently regarding this as the first and greatest rudiment of civilization.

"And if you like being at sea, you know, you can help us to sail the yacht," added the more practical Alfred.

Harimau made no reply, and Heathermoor resumed in his kindest tone:

"Understand me; we have not the least wish to part with you if you are content to remain; all I want you to know is that, if you prefer to go back to your own country, you are quite free to do so."

The young savage lifted his head quickly, and, as he met the Englishman's kindly look, an answering gleam of

emotion lighted up his bold black eyes.

"Why should I go back to my own land now?" said he with unconscious pathos. "My father and all my friends are dead, and the judgment of God has fallen upon my people, because there was treachery in their hearts. The world is wider than I thought, and I would fain see the wondrous lands of the West, and learn more of the God of the Christians, who teaches men to love their enemies. I will go with you, if you will have me."

"Won't we just?" cried Marmaduke, shaking hands with him with true school-boy energy; "and if we ever part with

you till you go yourself, call me a Dutchman!"

The strange compact was faithfully kept; but Prince Harimau's farther adventures with his English friends cannot be told here.





