THE ISLAND OF GOLD
VOLUME II
BY
WILLIAM GORDON STABLES

Freeditorial

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter One

"Just Three Years Since Ransey Went to Sea."

"O father," said Babs one autumn evening, "aren't you frightened at the roaring of the sea?"

Tandy and his child were sitting together, that autumn evening, in the best parlour. They were waiting for the postman to come round the corner; and as the waves were making a clean breach over the black, smooth rocks down yonder, and the spray was dashing high over the road and rattling like hail upon the panes of glass in the little cottage window, the postman would be wearing his waterproof cape to-night to keep the letters dry.

Babs had been watching for a man in a glittering oilskin, very anxiously, too, with her little face close to the glass, when a bigger wave than any she had yet seen rolled green and spumy and swiftly across the boulders, till meeting the resistance offered by the cliff it rose into the air for twenty feet at least, then broke like a waterfall on the asphalt path which was dignified by the name of esplanade.

No wonder she rushed back from the window, and now stood trembling by her father's side.

He took her gently on his knee.

Though five years have elapsed since the night they had visited mother's tree, and she is now eight years of age, she is but a little thing. Ay, and fragile.

As she sits there, with one arm about his neck, he looks at her, and talks to her tenderly. She has her mother's eyes.

But how lonely he would be, he cannot help thinking, if anything happened to his little Nelda—to Babs. The thought causes him to shiver as he sits there in his easy-chair by the fire, for chill is the breeze that blows from off the sea to-night.

"Daddy!"

"Yes, dear."

“To-morrow, when it comes, will make it just three years since Ransey went to sea.”

“Three years? Yes, Babs, so it will. Oh, how quickly the time has flown! And how good your memory is, darling!”

“Flown quickly, father? Oh, I think every one of those years has been much, much longer than the other. And I think,” she added, “lazy postie will never come to-night. But I dreamt, daddy, we would have a letter from Ransey, and it is sure to come.”

Three years. Yes, and years do fly fast away when men or women get elderly.

Those years though—ay, and the whole five—had been very busy ones with Ransey Tansey, very eventful, I might almost say.

Old Captain Weathereye had proved a right good friend to Ransey. Nor did he take the least degree of credit to himself for being so.

“The boy has got the grit in him,” he told Miss Scragley, “and just a spice of the devil; and without that, I can assure you, madam, no boy is going to get well on in this world.”

Miss Scragley didn’t care to swallow this doctrine quite; but Eedie, whom Ransey looked upon as a kind of fairy, or goddess, immeasurably better than himself, took the captain’s view of the matter.

“Oh, yes,” she astonished Miss Scragley by exclaiming, “the devil is everywhere, auntie. Mr Smith himself said so in the church. He is in roaring lions and in lambs when they lie down together, and in little boys, and then they are best and funniest.”

Miss Scragley sighed.

“It is a world of sin and sorrow,” she murmured.

“A world of fiddlesticks, madam!” cried Weathereye. “I tell you, it is a splendid world, a grand old world; but you’ve got to learn how to take your own part in it. Take my word for it, Miss Scragley, the world wasn’t made for fools. Fools have got to take a back seat, and just look on, while men of grit do the work and enjoy the reward. Ahem!”

“I’ve got to make a man of that lad,” he went on, “and, what’s more, I’m doing it. He needs holy-stoning—I’m holy-stoning him. He may want a little polishing after, but rubbing against the world will do that.”

“You’re very good, Captain Weathereye; you will be rewarded, if not in this world, in the next—”

“Tut—tut—tut,” cried the old sailor impatiently, and it must be admitted somewhat brusquely, “women folks will talk, especially when they don’t know what to say; but pray keep such sentiments and platitudes as these for your next Dorcas meeting, madam. Reward, indeed! Next world, forsooth! I tell you that I’m having it in this. I live my own early days over again in the boy’s youth. It is moral meat and drink for the old—well, the middle-aged, like myself, ahem!—to mingle with the young and get interested, not so much in their pursuits, because one’s joints are too stiff for that, but in their hopes and aspirations for the future which is all before them. Ever hear these lines, Miss Scragley?

“‘In the lexicon of youth
That fate reserves for a bright manhood,
There is no such word as fail.’

“I’d have them printed on the front page of every copybook laid before a child in school, and I’d have him to learn them as soon as he can lisp.”

Well, right happy years these had been for Ransey Tansey, and little Babs as well, to say nothing of gentle Eedie. As the world began to smile upon Tandy himself, he tried to do all he could for his children’s comfort. Even the little cottage at the foot of the hill was made more ship-shape, and furnished with many a comfort it had previously lacked.

Tandy was a man of a speculative turn of mind, and moreover inventive. His speculations, however, did not succeed so well as he could have wished. I am never sorry for the downfall of speculators; for, after all, what is speculation but a species of gambling—gambling for high stakes? And supposing that a man wins, which once in a way he may; supposing even that he is strong enough in pocket to establish a “corner,” as it is called in Yankee-land, to buy up the whole of some great commodity, and shut it up until the people are starving for it and glad to pay for it at three times the original value, well, the corner knight becomes a millionaire. Yes; and very often a miser, and miserable at that. Can a millionaire enjoy sport or play any better than you or I, reader? No, nor so much.

Has he a better appetite from the fact that he can afford to coax it with every costly dainty that cash can purchase? More likely a worse.

Is he more healthy? That were impossible.

Is he more happy? Ah, here we come to the test question. Well, he can have a larger and a finer house than most people, and it may be furnished like a palace. Pictures of the old masters may adorn its walls; musical instruments of rare value, works of art and vertu, may meet the eye at every turn; the gardens, and rose lawns, and conservatories may be more gorgeous than the dream of an Eastern prince. But can he live in more than one room at a time, or enjoy anything around him a bit better than the friends do whom he invites to his home that they may admire everything and envy him?

But even the millionaire tires of home. He is satiated with the good things his gold has brought him; and if he travels abroad he will not find half the enjoyment in those beauties of nature—which even the millionaire's gold cannot deprive the poorest man of—that the poet or the naturalist does.

I think there is one thing that most of us have to be thankful for—namely, that we are not over-ambitious, and have no desire to become millionaires.

Yes, but Tandy's ambition was not a morbid one; it was not selfish. He felt that he could die contentedly enough, could he make as sure as any one can be sure that his boy and girl would not become waifs and strays on the great highway of life.

How to make sure? That had been the question he had tried to answer many and many a time as he lay on the poop of his little craft and sailed slowly through the meadows and moors.

I have said he was inventive. His inventive faculties, however, took him far too high at first, like a badly ballasted balloon. He thought of ministering to governments of nations—of putting into their hands instruments for the destruction of his fellow mortals that should render war impossible, and many other equally airy speculations.

He failed, and had to come down a piece. There is no use in soaring too high above the clouds if one would be a useful inventor and a benefactor to mankind. Darning-needles are of more service to the general public than dynamite guns, and they are more easily manufactured. So Tandy failed in all his big things. That balloon of his was still soaring too high.

"I guess," he said to himself, "I'll have to come a little lower still before I find out just what the world wants, and what all the world wants."

Food? Physic? Fire?

Ha! he had it. Fire, of course. How many a poor wretch starves to death in a garret just because coals are too dear to purchase. “And why?” he asked himself; and the answer came fast enough, “Because coals are wasted by the rich.”

Then Tandy set his brains on to simmer, and invented one of the simplest contrivances in the world for saving waste.

Yes, he had it at last, and in two years’ time he began to gain a competence, which was gradually increasing.

This little cottage down by the sad, sad sea, as sentimental old maids call it, was his own. He and Babs—or little Nelda, as we may now call her—had only been here for six months. The place was by no means a fashionable one, although many people came here in summer to seek for health on the glorious sands and rocks, and among the fields and woods that stretched northwards into the interior.

As for Ransey Tansey, Captain Weathereye had really done his best to secure the welfare of this half-wild lad, just as Miss Scragley tried to assist his wee sister.

Impressionable children learn very quickly, and in a year’s time Ransey was so much improved in manners that Miss Scragley rather encouraged his visits to the Hall than otherwise, especially when the Admiral and Bob came along with him.

Grand old lawns and shrubberies surrounded the Hall, and these ended in woods. There were artificial lakes and islands in them too. These islands were the especial property of many beautiful ducks; but one was so large, and surrounded by such a big stretch of water, that the only thing to make it perfect—so Ransey thought—was a boat or skiff. Eedie was of the same opinion; so was Babs and Bob.

“Isn’t it possible to build one?” thought Ransey. He felt sure it was; so did Eedie.

Before two months had passed, that skiff, with the assistance of Weathereye, was a fait accompli; and the old captain was just as proud of it as the children themselves.

The ducks didn’t have it all their own way now on the island. For here a wigwam was built, and almost every fine day—that is, when Ransey was not at his lessons—the children played at Crusoes and wild Indians, and I don’t know what all.

There was no end to Tansey’s imagination, no end to his daring, no end to his tricks, and in these last, I fear, Eedie encouraged him.

She was but two years younger than Ransey, but she was four years older as far as worldly wisdom was concerned; and with her assistance the dramas, or theatrical performances, carried out on the island were at times startling in the extreme.

When Eedie brought children friends of hers to see these plays, Ransey would have felt very shy indeed had he not had, figuratively speaking, Eedie's wing to shelter under. Encouraged by her, he soon found out that real talent can make its own way, and be appreciated, however humble its possessor may be.

When Tandy first met Captain Weathereye, he wanted to be profuse in his thanks to this kindly staff-commander. But the latter would have none of this.

"Tandy," he said, "I know by your every action that you are a true sailor, like—ahem!—myself. Perhaps what you call kindness to your boy is only a fad of mine, and therefore selfishness after all."

"No, no."

"But I can say 'Yo, yo,' to your 'No, no.' Besides, we are all of us sailing over the sea of life for goodness knows where, and we are in duty bound to help even little boats we may sight, if we see they're in distress."

Tandy and Weathereye had soon became good friends, and smoked many a pipe together; nor did Tandy hesitate to tell the navy sailor about all his inventions and little speculations, to which account the latter listened delightedly enough.

"I say," he said to Tandy one day, "your lad is now over ten, and we should send him right away to sea. I tell you straight, Tandy, I'd get him into the Royal Navy if it were worth while. But he'd never be a sailor, never learn seamanship."

"Confound their old tin-kettles," he added, bringing his fist down on the table with a force that made the glasses jingle, "there isn't a sailor on board one of them; only gunners and greasers. (Greaser, a disparaging name for an engineer in the Royal Navy.) Let Ransey rough it, Mr Tandy, and you'll make a man of him."

An apprenticeship in a Dundee trader, owned in Belfast, and sailing from Cardiff, this was secured; though what use a lad not yet eleven might be put to on board such a craft, I confess I hardly know. But this I do know, that the sooner a boy who is to be a British sailor goes to sea the better.

Babs ventured back to the window at last, and glanced once more out into the now gathering gloom. Far away beyond Selsea Bill the sun had set behind lurid coppery clouds, that boded little good for ships that were toiling up the Channel.

“O daddy, here is postie at long, long last, and he’s all, all dressed in oilskins! He is coming to the door! Oh!”

She could not say another word for a few moments, but flew toward her father.

“It is—it is—O daddy! it’s Ransey!”

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Two.

“Ship-Shape and Seaman-Fashion.”

There wasn’t a doubt about that, and no lad surely ever got a happier welcome home.

Bob and Murrams knew him, and the Admiral too, who danced for joy in the back-garden when Ransey Tansey went to see him.

Everybody, with the exception of the father, seemed to walk on air that night. Mr Tandy was simply quietly happy.

Ransey was quite a man, Babs told him, and she felt sure he would soon have a moustache. Indeed, she brought a small magnifying-glass to strengthen her convictions on this point.

What a lot lads have to tell when they return from sea for the first time! and their friends cannot give them greater pleasure than by listening to all their adventures and “hairbreadth scapes;” sympathising with them in sorrows past and gone, and dangers encountered, and thanking Providence that they have been spared to come safely home from off the stormy ocean.

Ransey had gone to the old cottage first, not knowing anything about the change. He had found strangers there, and his heart had sunk to zero.

“Perhaps,” he thought, “they are dead and gone.”

No Bob to meet him! no Babs! no dancing crane!

He hadn’t had the heart to go in; he just ran right away to Captain Weathereye’s, and he told him all.

Ransey had had to sling his hammock here the first night, and visit Miss Scragley’s next day.

And Eedie was now ten years of age, and shy, but welcomed Ransey with a soft handshake and a bonnie blush, and in her little secret morsel of a heart admired him.

“Didn’t I tell you I’d make a man of him, Miss Scragley? See how tall he is. Look at those bold blue eyes of his, and the sea-tan on his cheeks,” said the captain.

No wonder that it was Ransey’s turn to blush.

“Tell your father, dear boy, that in four or five days I’m coming down to B— to see him. A breath of the briny will do an old barnacle like me a power of good.”

“That I will,” the boy had replied.

Then, after saying good-bye, Ransey went off to see Mrs Farrow; and that good lady was indeed pleased, for she had always had an idea that those who went to sea hardly ever returned.

She had to put the corner of her apron to her eyes now; but, if she did shed a tear, it was one of joy and nothing else.

Well, it would have done your heart good to have witnessed the happiness of Ransey and Babs, as they wandered hand in hand along the golden sands. Bob, too, was so elated that he hardly knew what to do with himself at first. This joy, however, settled down into a watchful kind of care and love for his young master; and he used to walk steadily behind him on the beach as if afraid that, if he once let him out of sight, he might be spirited away and never be seen again.

The Admiral was quite a seafarer now, and wonderful and sweet were the morsels he found or dug up for himself on the wet stretches of sand. The sea-gulls at first had taken him for something uncanny; but they now took him for granted, and walked about quite close to him, although at times, when this marvellous bird took it into his long head that a dance would do him good and increase his circulation, they were scared indeed, and flew screaming seawards.

But the Admiral didn’t mind that a bit; he just kept dancing away till there really didn’t seem to be a bit more dance left in him. Then he desisted, and went in for serious eating once more.

One beautiful day, while the dancing crane was holding a levée of sea-gulls, with a sprinkling of rooks, far seawards on the wet sands, while Mr Tandy was seated, smoking as usual, on a bench with his children near him, Bob uttered a defiant kind of a growl, and stood up with his hair on end from ears to rump. A gentleman dressed in blue, with

sailor's cap on his head, and reading a newspaper, was approaching the seat, on which there was plenty of room for one more.

But it was not at him that Bob was growling. No, but at a beautiful Scottish collie which was walking by his side.

Bob rushed forward at once, and the two met face to face and heads up.

Scottie carried his tail defiantly high.

Young England would have done the same with his, had he had anything to show.

The conversation seemed to be somewhat as follows:—

"You and I are about the same size, aren't we?" said Bob.

"There isn't much to figure on between us, I think," replied Scottie.

"Lower your flag, then, or I'll shake you out of your skin."

"Scotland never lowered flag to a foreigner yet. Why don't you raise your standard? Why, because you haven't got one to raise. Ha, ha! what a fright you are! I only wonder your master lets you go about like that."

"Yah—ah—r-r—r-r—r-r!"

"Waugh—r-r—r-r—r-r—r!"

And there was war next second.

Tandy rushed to the scene of action.

"I'm very sorry, sir," he said. "Which dog, do you think, began the fight?"

"I think they both began it," said the newcomer, laughing.

Scotland and England were having a terrible tulzie, as Scotland and England have often had in days long, long gone by.

They were rolling over each other, sometimes Bob above, sometimes Bob below, and the yellow sands were soon stained with blood.

Little Nelda was in tears, and the Admiral scray-scraying and dancing with joy.

“I think,” said the stranger, “they’ve both had enough of it, and my proposal is this—I’ll pull my dog off by the tail, and you do the same by yours.”

“I’d gladly do so,” said Tandy, laughing, “but, my dear sir, the fact is that my dog is like Tam o’ Shanter’s mare after she escaped from the witches—

“‘The ne’er a tail has he to shake.’”

Dogs are just like men, however, and these two, seemingly satisfied that neither could kill the other, soon made it up, and presently they went galloping off together to the sea to wash the sand out of their shaggy jackets.

Down sat the stranger between Ransey and his father. He rolled up his paper and lit his pipe, and soon the two were engaged in a very animated conversation.

Sailors all three. No wonder that the acquaintance thus brought about by their honest dogs ripened into friendship in a few days.

Captain Halcott—for so this new friend was named—had, some months before this, reached England after a very long and strangely adventurous cruise.

“Are you like me, I wonder?” he said to Tandy, as they sat smoking the calumet of peace together on a breezy cliff-top, while Ransey and his sister were fishing for curios in the pools of water left among the rocks by the receding tide. “Are you like me, I wonder? for I am no sooner safely arrived in Merrie England than I begin once more to long for life on the heaving billows.”

“You’re a free man, Captain Halcott; I’ve got a little family; and you’re a somewhat younger man, as well.”

“Yes, yes; granted. But, before going further, tell me what is your Christian name?”

“Dick.”

“Well, and mine’s Charlie. We’re both seafarers; don’t let us ‘Mr’ each other, or ‘captain’ each other either. You’re Tandy or you’re Dick, I’m Halcott or I’m Charlie, just as, for the time being, the humour may suit us. Is that right?”

“That’s right—ship-shape and seaman-fashion.” Two brown fists met and were shaken—no mincing landlubber’s shake, but a firm and hearty grip and wholesome pressure; a grip that seemed to speak and to say,—“Thine, lad, thine! Thine in peace or war; in calm or tempest, thine!”

How is it that sailors so often resemble one another? I cannot answer the question. But it is none the less true.

Tandy and Halcott appeared to have been cast in the same mould; the same open, bronzed, and weather-beaten faces, the same eyes—eyes that could twinkle with merriment one moment and be filled with pity the next.

Even Captain Weathereye himself, although older than either, and somewhat lighter in complexion, might easily have passed as brother to both.

“Well,” said Halcott, “I daresay you have a story to tell.”

“I’ve had strange experiences in life, and some were sad enough. For the sake of that dear boy and girl, I thank God I am no longer in the grip of poverty; but, my friend, I’ve seen worse days.”

“Tell us, Tandy.”

Tandy told him, sitting there, all the reader already knows and much more, receiving silent but heartfelt sympathy.

“So you’ve sold the Merry Maiden!”

“Yes; although some of the happiest years of my life were spent on board of her, and in the little cottage. Heigho! I wish I could bring back the past; but if I live to be able to afford it, I shall build a house where the old cot stands, and will just end my days there, you know. And now for your story.”

“Oh, that is a strange and a sad one; but as your friend is coming down to-morrow, I propose postponing it. This Captain Weathereye must, from all you say, be a real jolly fellow.”

This was agreed to; and next morning Tandy met bluff old Weathereye at the little railway station.

“I’ll stay a week, Tandy, a whole week. Yes, my hearty, I’ll gladly make your house my home, and shall rejoice to see your friend, and hear the yarn he has got to spin.”

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Three.
A Quarterdeck Dream.

"Once a sailor, gentlemen," began Halcott, as he filled his pipe, gazing thoughtfully over the sea, "always a sailor.

"That's a truism, I believe. Why, the very sight of the waves out yonder, with the evening sunlight dancing and playing on their surface, makes me even at this moment long to tread the deck again.

"And there are, perhaps, few seafarers who have more inducements to stay at home than I, Charlie Halcott, have.

"I have a beautiful house of my own, and some day soon, I hope, you will both come and see it, and judge for yourselves.

"My house has a tower to it. Many a night, while walking the quarterdeck keeping my watch, with no companions save the silver-shining stars, I have said to myself—'Charlie Halcott,' I have said, 'if ever you leave off ploughing the ocean wave, and settle down on shore, you must have a house with a tower to it.'

"And now I've got it.

"A large, square, old-fashioned tower it is, with a mullioned window on each side of it; and up the walls the dense green ivy climbs, with just enough Virginia creeper to cast a glamour of crimson over it in autumn, like the last red rays of the setting sun.

"One window looks up the valley of the Thames, where not far off is a little Niagara, a snow-white weir: I can hear the drowsy monotone of its foaming waters by night and by day, and its song is ever the same. Another window looks away down the valley, and the river here goes winding in and out among the meadows and the green and daisied leas, till, finally, it takes the appearance of a silver string, and loses itself, or is lost to me, amidst the distant trees. A third window, from which I dearly like to look early on a summer's morning, while the blackbirds are yet in fullest, softest song, shows an English landscape that to me is the sweetest of the sweet. As far as eye can reach, till bounded by the grey horizon's haze, are woods and wilds and meadows green, with the red gables or the roofs of many a stately farm peeping up through the rolling cloudland of foliage; and

many a streamlet too, seen here and there in the sunbeams, as it goes speeding on towards the silent river.

“But though this house of mine has a tower to it, it is not a castle by any means, apart from the fact that every Englishman’s house is his castle. I have a tower, but no donjon keep. My castle is a villa—‘a handsome modern-built villa,’ the agent described it when I commenced correspondence with a view to its purchase. It is indeed a beautiful villa, and it is situated high up on the brow of a hill, all among the dreamy woods.

“Though I have been but a short spell on shore, my town friends already call me the ‘Sailor hermit,’ because I stick to my castle and its woods and gardens. Not for a single day can they prevail upon me to exchange it for the bustle and din of hideous London. But I retaliated on my city friends by bringing them down to my ‘castle’ in spring time, when the early flowers were opening their petals in the warm sunshine, and the very tulips seemed panting in the heat, and when there was such a gush of bird-melody coming from grove and copse and hedgerow that every leaf seemed to hide a feathered songster. And I rejoiced to see those friends of mine struck dumb by the wealth of beauty they beheld around them. For Philomel was making day melodious with a strange, unearthly music.

“All through the darkness the bird sang to his mate, and all through the day as well. No bolder birds than our nightingales live. They sing at our side, at our feet; they sing as they fly, sing as they alight, sing to us, ay and at us defiantly. No wonder we all love this sweet bird, this sweet spirit of the spring.

“So my quarterdeck dream has become a dear reality.

“Strange to say, it is always at night that I think most of the ocean. And on nights of storm—then it is that I lie awake listening to the wind roaring through the stately elms, with a sound like the sough of gale-tossed waves. It is then I long to tread once more the deck of my own bonnie barque, and feel her move beneath me like a veritable thing of life and reason. My house with the ivied tower is well away among the midlands; and yet on nights of tempest, sea-birds—the gull, and the tern, and the light-winged kittywake—often fly around the house and the trees. I can hear their voices rising shrill and high above the roar of the wind.

“‘Kaye—kay—ay—ay,’ they scream. ‘Come away—come away—ay,’ they seem to cry. ‘Why have you left us? why have you left the seas? We miss you. Come away—come away—ay—ay.’

“Never into my quarterdeck dreams, gentlemen, had there come, strange to say, a companion fair of womankind. My house with the tower to it should be just as it is to-day, just what—following out my dreams—I have made it. Its gardens all should bloom surpassing fair, my woods and trees be green; the rose lawns should look like velvet; my ribboned flower-beds like curves of coloured light; the nightingales in spring should bathe in the spray of my fountains,—there should be joy and loveliness and bird-song everywhere, but a wife?—well, I had somehow never dreamt of that. If any of the officers—for I was captain and part owner of the good barque Sea Flower—had been bold enough to suggest such a thing—I mean such a person, I should have laughed at him where he stood. ‘Who,’ I should have said, ‘would many a simple sailor like me, over thirty, brown-red in face, and hard in hands. Who indeed?’

“But into my quarterdeck dreams companions had come. Should I not have jolly farmers and solid-looking red-faced squires to dine with me, and to smoke with me out of doors in the cool of midsummer evenings, or in the cosy red parlour around the fire in the long forenights of winter, and listen to my yarns of the dark blue sea, or talk to me of the delights of rural life? Well, it was a pretty dream, it must be admitted.

“But it never struck me then, as it does now, that all the joys of life are tame indeed, unless shared by some one you love more than all things bright and fair.

“A pretty dream—and a beautiful dream. A piece of ice itself is beautiful at times; but perhaps, as we stand and admire it, the sunshine may steal down and melt it. Then we find that we love the sunshine even more than we loved the ice.

“It is not every sailor who has the luck to be captain, or, to speak more correctly, master, of so fine a sailing craft as the Sea Flower, at the age of twenty-six. But such had been my fortune; and I had sailed the seas in her for six long years, and, with the exception of the few accidents inseparable from a life at sea, I had never had a serious mishap. Many a wild gale had we weathered in her, my mate and I; many a dark and tempestuous night had we staggered along under bare poles; more than once had we sprung a leak, and twice had we been on fire.

“But all ended well, and during our brief spells on shore, either in England or in some foreign port, though James and I always managed to enjoy ourselves in our own quiet way, yet neither he nor I was sorry when we got back home again to our bonnie barque, and were once more afloat on the heaving sea.

“James was perhaps more of a sailor than I. Well, he was some years my senior, and he was browner and harder by far, and every inch a man. And though a very shy one, as far as female society is concerned, he was a very bold one nevertheless. But for his

courageous example on the night of our last fire, the Sea Flower would have helped to swell the list of those ships that go to sea and are heard of no more.

“When we were taken aback in a white squall in the Indian Ocean, and it verily seemed that we had but a few minutes to float, James was here, there, and everywhere, his manly voice, calm and collected, ringing high above the roaring of the wind and the surging of the terrible seas. The very fire of his bravery on that occasion affected the men, and they worked as only bold men can work in face of death and danger, till our craft was once more righted and tearing along before the wind.

“And just as brave on shore as afloat was sturdy James Malone.

“When our steward was attacked by fifty spear-armed savages on shore at the Looboo Island, my mate seized a club that a gorilla could hardly have wielded, and fought his way through the black and vengeful crowd, till he reached and saved our faithful steward.

“And, that day, it was not until he had almost reached the ship that he told me, with that half-shy and quiet smile of his, that he believed he was slightly wounded. Then he fainted dead away.

“I nursed poor James back to health. Yes, but more than once, both before and after that event, he nursed me, and I doubt if even a brother could have been half so kind as my mate James.

“For many a long year, then, James and I had sailed the salt seas together. Without James sitting opposite me at the table at breakfast or at dinner, the neatly painted and varnished saloon, with all its glittering odds and ends, wouldn’t have seemed the same. Without James sitting near me on the quarterdeck on black-dark evenings in the tropics, I should have felt very strange and lonesome indeed.

“But James and I didn’t agree on every subject on which we conversed. Had we done so, conversation would have lost its special charm. No, he aired his opinions and I shook out mine. There were times when I convinced James; there were times when James convinced me; there were times when neither convinced the other, and then we agreed to differ.

“‘Very well, sir,’ James would say, ‘you has your ’pinions, and I has mine. You keeps to your ’pinions, and I sticks to mine.’

“It will be noted that James’s ordinary English would scarcely have passed muster in the first families of Europe. But, like many of his class, James could talk correctly enough when he set himself the task. But there was no better sailor afloat for all that, and on the stormiest night or squalliest day I always felt safe when my first mate trod the planks.

“James could tell a good story too, and I used to keep him at it of an evening—any evening save Sunday. On Sunday, James did nothing in the intervals of duty except read the Bible—the ‘Good Book,’ as he called it. This New Testament was one of those large type editions which very old people use.

“His mother—dead and gone—had left him that Book, and also her gold-rimmed specs, and it was interesting, on a Sunday afternoon, to see James sitting solemnly down to the Book, and shipping those specs athwart his nose.

“‘What on earth,’ I said once to him, ‘do you use the specs for, my friend?’

“When James looked up at me, half-upbraidingly, those eyes of his, seen through the powerful lenses, looked as big and wild and round as a catamount’s. It was unearthly.

“‘My mother bade me. Would you disobey your mother?’

“This was a bombshell, and I said no more.

“But there was one subject on which James and I never disagreed—namely, ‘the ladies,’ as he called women folks. ‘They are deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked,’ James would say, ‘and I means to steer clear on ’em.’ And James always did.

“There was one pleasure James and I had in common—namely, witnessing a good tragedy on the boards of Liverpool theatre. You see this was our port of destination on our return from the far, far south. Mind, we wouldn’t go to see a drama, because there might be too much nonsensical love business in it, and too many of ‘the frivolous antics of women’—James’s own words. But in a tragedy the women often came to grief, which James thought was only natural.

“So we chose tragedy.

“Now, one night at this same theatre, I had one of the strangest experiences of my life; and never yet have I found any one who could explain it.

“James and I had gone early that evening, because there was something specially tragic on, and we desired to secure good seats. We sat in the front row, and at the left end of

the row, because we wished to leave the theatre between each act to enjoy a few whiffs of tobacco.

“The play was well begun, and my eyes were riveted on the stage. There was a momentary silence, and during this time I was sensible, from a slight rustling noise, that the private box behind and above me was being occupied.

“Did you ever hear psychologists mention the term or feeling ‘ecstasy’? That was what stole over me now. For a few minutes I saw nothing on the stage; only a feeling of intense happiness, such as I have seldom experienced since that night, stole over me, occupying, bathing, I may say, my whole soul and mind.

“I turned at last, and my eyes met those of a young lady in that private box. Never before had I seen such radiant beauty. Never had I been impressed with beauty of any kind before. My heart almost stood still. It was really an awful moment—that is, if intense happiness can ever be awful.

“Well, if it is possible for a sailor, with a face as brown as the back of a fiddle, to blush, I blushed. She, too, I think, coloured just a little.

“What was it? What could it mean?

“I know not how I sat out the act. When I rose with James to go out, I dared one other glance towards the box. The lady had gone, and a feeling of coldness crept round my heart. I felt as depressed now as I had recently felt happy.

“‘James,’ I said, ‘take me home, I—I believe I’m ill.’

“‘Why,’ said James, ‘you look as though you had seen a ghost.’

“I got home. Something, I knew not what, was going to happen; but all that night dream after dream haunted my pillow, and of every dream, the sweet young face I had seen in the private box was the only thing I could remember when daylight broke athwart the eastern sky.”

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Four.

"Dear, Unselfish, but Somewhat Silly Fellow."

"I never had a secret from James Malone; no, not so much as one. Had I known what was the matter with me on the evening before, I should have told James manfully and in a moment.

"But when he came to my rooms in the morning, to share my humble breakfast, and consult about the duties of the day, we being just then fitting out for sea,—

"'James,' I began—

"And then—well, then I told him all the story, even down to my strange dreams and the sweet young face that had haunted them.

"'Why, James,' I concluded, 'I have only to close my eyes now to see her once again, and I can neither read nor write without thinking of her.'

"James sat silently beholding me for fully a minute. His face was clouded, and pity and anxiety were in every lineament of his manly features.

"'I'm taken aback,' he stammered at last. 'White squalls is nothin' to it. Charlie Halcott, you're in love. It's an awful, fearful thing. No surgical operation can do anything for you. It's worse by far than I thought. A mild touch of the cholera would be mere moonshine to this. A brush wi' Yellow Jack wouldn't be a circumstance to it. O Halcott, Halcott! O Charlie! what am I to do with you?'

"'James,' I interrupted, 'light your pipe. Did you see the beautiful vision—the lovely child?'

"'I followed your eyes.'

"'And what saw you, James?' I asked, leaning eagerly towards him.

"'I saw what appeared to be—a woman. Nothin' more and nothin' less.'

“‘James, did you not notice her blue and heavenly eyes, that seemed to swim in ether; her delicately pencilled eyebrows; the long lashes that swept the rounded rosy cheeks; her golden hair like sunset’s glow; her little mouth; her lips like the blossom of the blueberry, and the delicate play of her mobile countenance?’

“‘Delicate play of a mobile marling-spike!’ cried James, jumping up. He rammed a piece of paper into his pipe and thrust it into his pocket.

“‘Charles Halcott, I’m off,’ he cried.

“‘Off, James?’

“‘Yes, off. Every man Jack shall be on board the Sea Flower to-day, bag and baggage. We’ll drop down stream to-morrow morning early, ship a pilot, and get away to sea without more ado.’

“He was at the door by the time he had finished but he stopped a moment with a look of wondrous pity on his handsome face, then came straight back and clasped my hand in brotherly affection, and so, without another word, walked out and away.

“Now, I was master of the Sea Flower, but in the matter of sailing next day—three or four whole days before I had intended—I should no more have thought of gainsaying honest James Malone than of disobeying my father had he been alive. James was acting towards me with true brotherly affection, quite disinterestedly in my behalf, and—quien sabe?—probably saving me from a lifetime’s misery.

“I would be advised by James.

“So after he had left, and I had smoked in solitary sadness for about an hour, I rose with a sigh, and commenced throwing my things together in the great mahogany sea-chest that while afloat stood in my state-room, and which on shore I never travelled without.

“For the whole of that forenoon I wandered about the streets of Liverpool, looking chiefly at the photographers’ windows. I was bewitched, and possessed some faint hope of seeing a photograph of her who had bewitched me. I even entered the shops under pretence of bargaining for a likeness of my sailor-self, and looked over their books of specimens.

“Had I come across her picture, the temptation to purchase it would, I fear, have proved irresistible.

“Suddenly I pulled myself taut up with a round turn, and planked myself, so to speak, on my mental quarterdeck before Commander Conscience.

“‘What are you doing, or trying to do, Charles Halcott?’ said Commander Conscience.

“‘Only trying,’ replied Charles Halcott, ‘to procure a photograph of the loveliest young lady on earth, whose eyes shine like stars in beauty’s night.’

“‘Don’t be a fool, Charles Halcott. Are you not wise enough to know that, even if you procure this photograph, you will have to keep it a secret from honest James Malone? His friendship is better far than love of womankind. Besides,’ added Commander Conscience, ‘you need no photograph. Is not the image of the lady who has bewitched you indelibly photographed upon your soul? Charles Halcott, I am ashamed of you!’

“I stood at a window for a few minutes, looking sheepish enough; then I threw temptation to the winds, put about, and sailed right away back to my chambers, studding-sails set low and aloft.

“I finished packing, saw my owners in the afternoon, and when James came off to the ship he found me quietly smoking my biggest pipe in the saloon of the Sea Flower.

“He smiled now.

“‘Better already,’ he said; ‘His name be praised!’

“James was a strange man in some ways. This was one: he thanked Heaven for every comfort, even the slightest, and did nothing without, in a word or two, asking a blessing thereon.

“In three days’ time we were staggering southwards, and away across Biscay’s blue bay, with every inch of canvas set. And a pretty sight we were—our white sails flowing in the sunshine—the sea as blue as the sky, and the waves sparkling around us as if every drop of water contained a diamond.

“All the way to the Cape, and farther, James treated me as tenderly and compassionately as if I had been an invalid brother. He never contradicted me even once. He used to keep me talking and yarning on the quarterdeck, when he wasn’t on watch, for whole hours at a stretch; and in the evenings, when tired spinning me yarns, he would take his banjo and sing to me old sea-songs in his bold and thrilling voice. And James could sing too; there were the brine, and the breeze, and the billows’ roll in every bar of the grand old songs he sang, and indeed I was never tired of listening to them. Sometimes I closed my

eyes as I sat in my easy-chair; then James's banjo notes grew softer and softer, and ever so much farther away like, till at last it was ghostly music, and I was in the land of dreams.

"When I awoke, perhaps it would be four bells or even six, and there would be James, with his specs athwart his great jibboom of a nose, poring earnestly over his mother's Bible.

"'You've had a nice little nap,' he would say cheerfully. 'Now you'll toddle off to your bunk, and when you're safe between the sheets I'll bring you a tiny little drop of rum and treacle.'

"Poor James! Rum and treacle was his panacea for every ill; and yet I don't believe any one in the wide world ever saw James the worse of even rum and treacle.

"When we got as far as to Madeira, he proposed we should anchor here for a few days and dispose of some of our notions. Notions formed our cargo; and notions must be understood to mean, Captain Weathereye, all kinds of jewellery and knick-knacks, including table-knives and forks, watches, strings of bright beads, cotton cloths, parasols, and guns. Now I knew very well that we could easily dispose of all our cargo at the Cape and other parts; but I also knew very well that James's main object in stopping at Madeira was to give me a few delightful days on shore.

"This was part of the cure, and I had to submit with the best grace I could.

"We had, at that time, as handy and good a second mate as any one could wish on the weather side of a quarterdeck. So it was easy enough for myself and James to leave the ship both at the same time, though this had very seldom been our custom, except when in dock or in harbour.

"To put it in plain language, James did not seem to know how good to be to me, nor how much to amuse me. The honest, simple soul kept talking and yarning to me all the while, and pointing out this, that, and the other strange thing to me, until I was obliged to laugh in his face. But James was not offended; not he. He was working according to some plan he had formulated in his own mind, and nothing was going to turn him aside from his purpose.

"About midday we entered the veranda of a cool and delightful hotel, and seating ourselves at a little marble table, James called for cigars and iced drinks. Then he proposed we should luncheon. No, he would pay, he said; it was not often he had the honour or pleasure of lunching with his captain, in a marble palace like this. So he

pulled out an old sock tied round with a morsel of blue ribbon, and thrusting his big brown paw into it, brought forth money in abundance.

"'Never been here before?' he asked me quietly.

"'No,' I said; 'strange to say I've touched at nearly every port in the world except this place.'

"'Well, I have,' said James, 'and I'm going to put you up to the ropes.'

"'Now,' he continued, when we stood once more under the greenery of the trees that bordered the broad pavement, 'will you have a hammock or a horse?'

"Not knowing quite what he meant, I replied that I would leave it to him.

"'Well,' he said, 'this must be considered a kind of picnic, them's my notions, and as you're far from well yet, I'll have a horse and you a hammock.'

"Both horse and hammock were soon brought round to the door. The hammock was borne by two perspiring half-caste Portuguese, and was attached to a pole, and on board I swung, while James got on board the horse. The saddle was a hard and horrid contrivance of leather and wood, the stirrups a pair of old slippers, and the horse himself—well, he was a beautiful study in equine osteology, and I really did not know which to pity most, James or his Rosinante. But in my hammock I felt comfortably, dreamily happy.

"We passed through the quaint old town of Funchal, then upwards, and away towards the mountains. The day was warm and delightful—hot indeed James must have found it, for he soon divested himself of coat and waistcoat, and even then he had to pause at times to wipe his streaming brow. The peeps at the beautiful gardens I caught while being carried along were charming in the extreme; the verandaed and trellised villas, canopied with flowers of every hue and shape, the bright green lawns where fairy-like children played, and the flowering trees—the whole forming ever-changing scenes of enchantment—I shall never forget. Then the soft and balmy air was laden with perfume.

"'How nice,' I thought, 'to be an invalid! How kind of James to treat me as one! And he jogging along there on that bony horse's back, with the boy holding fast by the tail! Dear, unselfish, but somewhat silly fellow!'

"Upwards still, steeper and steeper the hill. And now we seemed to have mounted into the very sky itself, and were far away from the tropics and tropical flora.

“We came at last to a table-land. For the life of me I could not help thinking of the story of ‘Jack and the Bean-stalk.’ Here gorgeous heaths and heather bloomed and grew; here birds of sweet song flitted hither and thither among the scented and the yellow-tasselled broom; and here solemn weird-like pine-trees waved dark against the far-off ocean’s blue.

“Under some of these trees, and close to the cliff, we disembarked to rest. We were fully half a mile above the level of the sea. Yet not a stone’s throw from where we sat was the edge of the awful cliff that led downwards without a break to that white line far beneath where the waves frothed and fumed against the rocks.

“But far as the eye could reach, till lost in distance and merged into the blue of the sky, lay the azure sea, with here and there a sail, the largest of which looked no bigger than a white butterfly with folded wings.

“A delicious sense of happiness stole over me, and for the first time, perhaps, since leaving England I forgot the sweet young face that had so completely bewitched me.

“I think I must have fallen asleep, for the next thing I was sensible of was James tuning a broad guitar.

“Then his voice was raised in song, and I closed my eyes again, the better to listen.

“Poor James, he played and sang for over an hour; no wild, wailing sea-songs this time, however, but verses sweet and plaintive, and far more in harmony with the notes of the sad guitar. The romance of our situation, the stillness of our surroundings, unbroken save in the intervals of song by the flitting of a wild bird among the broom, and the low whisper of the wind through the pine-trees overhead, with the balmy ozonic air from the blue ocean, continued to instil into my soul a feeling of calm and perfect joy to which I had hitherto been a stranger.

“Just as the sun was sinking like a great blood orange through a purple haze that lay along the western horizon, James laughingly handed the guitar to the boy who had carried it. Then laughing still—he was so strange and good this James of mine—he pulled out a silver-mounted flask and poured me out a portion of its contents.

“It was a little rum and treacle.

“‘The dews of night isn’t going to harm you after that,’ said James.

“Lights were glimmering here and there on the hills like glow-worms, and far beneath us in the town, long before we reached the streets of Funchal.

“We went straight to the hotel and discharged both horse and hammock.

“Then we dined.

“I thought I should be allowed to go on board after this. Not that there was the slightest hurry.

“However, I was mistaken for once. James had not yet done with me for the night. I had still another prescription of his to use; and as I knew it was part and parcel of James’s love cure, I could not demur. He had given me so much pleasure on that day already, that when he asked me to get up and follow him I did so as obediently as the little lamb followed Mary.

“But that he, James Malone, who feared womankind, if he did not positively hate them, should lead me to a Portuguese ballroom of all places in the world, surprised me more than anything.

“I could hear the tinkling of guitars, the shuffling of feet, and the music of merry, laughing voices, long before we came near the door.

“I stopped short.

“‘James,’ I said, ‘haven’t you made some mistake?’

“His only answer was a roguish laugh.

“I repeated the question.

“‘Not a bit of it,’ he answered gaily.

“‘Charlie Halcott,’ he added, ‘if you were simply suffering from Yellow Jack I’d hand you over to a doctor, but, Charles Halcott, it takes a man to cure love. And you’ve been sorely hit.’

“This had been a day of surprises, but when I entered that ballroom there came the greatest surprise of all. Those here assembled were not so-called gentle-folks. They were the sons and daughters of the ordinary working classes; but the taste displayed, the banks of flowers around the orchestra, the gay bouquets and coloured lights along the

walls, the polished and not overcrowded floor, the romantic dresses of the gallants that transported one back to the middle ages, the snow-white costumes of the ladies, and, above all, their innocent, ravishing beauty, formed a scene that reminded me strongly of stories I had read in the Arabian Nights' Entertainments.

"I was almost ashamed of my humble attire, but the courtesy of the master of ceremonies was charming. Would the strangers dance? Surely the stranger sailors would dance? He would get us, as partners, the loveliest señoritas in all the room.

"So he did.

"I forgot everything in that soft, dreamy waltz—everything save the thrilling music and the sylph-like form of my dark-eyed partner, who floated with me through the perfumed air, for surely our feet never touched the floor.

"But the drollest thing of all was this—James was dancing too. James with his—well, I must not say aversion to, but fear and shyness of womankind, was dancing; and I knew he was only doing so to encourage me. A handsome fellow he looked, too, almost head and shoulders taller than any man there, and broad and well-knit in proportion. The master of ceremonies had got him a partner 'for to match,' as he expressed it; certainly a beautiful girl, with a wealth of raven hair that I had never seen equalled, far less surpassed. I daresay she could dance lightly; but James's waltzing was of a very solid brand indeed, and he swung his pretty partner round the room in a way that seemed to indicate business rather than pleasure. Several couples cannoned off James and went ricochetting to the farther end of the room, and one went down. James swung past me a moment after, apparently under a heavy press of canvas, and as he did so I heard him say to his partner, referring to the couple he had brought to deck,—

"'They should keep out o' the way, then, when people are dancing.'

"The hours sped quickly by, as they always do in a ballroom, and by the time James and I got on board the Sea Flower four bells in the middle-watch were ringing out through the still, dark night. But all was safe and quiet on board.

"I took a turn on deck to enjoy a cigar before going below, just by way of cooling my brow. When I went down at last, why, there was James seated at the table, his mother's Bible before him, and, as usual, the awful specs across his nose.

"Poor James, he was a strange man, but a sincere friend, as the sequel will show."

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Five.

"Till the Sea Gives up its Dead."

From Madeira, where we stayed for many days, going on shore every forenoon to sell some of our cargo to the shopkeepers, and every afternoon for a long ride—horse and hammock—over some part or other of this island of enchantment, sometimes finishing up with a dance—from all this pleasure and delight, I say, we sailed away at last.

"South and away we sailed, and in due time we reached and anchored off Saint James's Town, Saint Helena.

"Now, Saint Helena had not figured in our programme when we left Merry England. But here we were, and a most delightful place I found it. Hills and dells, mountains and glens; wild flowers everywhere; and the blue eternal sea dotted with many a snow-white sail, engirdling all. This, then, was the 'lonely sterile rock in the midst of the wild tempestuous ocean,' to which Napoleon had been banished.

"James had been here before, although I had not, so everything was of interest to me, and everything new. And my good mate determined to make it as pleasant for me as possible. He seemed to know every one, and every one appeared delighted to see him. Such remarks as the following fell upon our ears at every corner:—

"'Well, you've got back again, James?'

"'What! here you are once more, James, and welcome.'

"'Dee—lighted to see you, certain—lee!'

"'Ah! Jeames,'—this from a very aged crone, who was seated on a stone dais near her door, basking in the warm, white sunshine—'ah! Jeames, and sure the Lord is good to me. And my old eyes are blessed once more wi' a sight o' your kindly face!'

"'Glad to see you alive, Frilda. And look, I have got a pound of tea for you. And I'll come to-night and read a bit out of my mother's Good Book to you.'

"'Bless you, Jeames—bless you, my boy.'

“We went rambling all over the island that day. We visited the fort, where James had many friends; then we went up a beautiful glen, and on reaching the top we struck straight off at right angles, and a walk of about half a mile took us to one of the most pleasantly situated farms I have ever seen. It was owned by the farmer, a Scotsman of the name of MacDonald. Nothing flimsy about this fine house. The walls were built of sturdy stone, and must have been some feet thick, so that indoors in the cheerful parlour it was cool and delightful, especially so with the odour of orange blossom blowing through the open window and pervading the whole room.

“‘Man, James, I’m so pleased. Here! Hi! Mrs Mac, where are you? Here’s James Malone, the honest, simple sumph come back again. Jamie, man, ye must stop all night and give us a song.’

“‘We—ll—I—’

“‘No wells nor I’s about it. And your friend here too.’

“Mrs Mac was a very little body, with rosy cheeks, a merry voice, and blue eyes that looked you through and through.

“A little girl and boy came running in, and James soon had one on each knee; and while I and MacDonald talked in the window recess, he was deep in the mysteries of a mermaid story, his tiny audience listening with wondering eyes and rosy lips apart.

“Mrs Mac had gone bustling away to send in a dram of hollands, cunningly flavoured with seeds and fruit rind. She disappeared immediately again, to send orders down to James’s Town for fish and fowl.

“Of course we would stay all night?

“‘Well,’ I said, ‘the ship is safe, unless a tornado blows.’

“‘There will be no tornado, sir,’ said Farmer Mac.

“‘I’ll send off, then, and tell the second mate.’

“‘My henchman is at your service, Captain Halcott.’

“‘And look, see,’ cried James, ‘just tell your henchman to bring my Good Book and specs. I haven’t the heart to disappoint old Mother Banks.’

“‘And the guitar,’ I added.

“‘Well—well, yes.’

“The children clapped their hands with glee, and Maggie, the girl, pulled James’s face towards her by the whiskers and kissed him.

“We started next for Longwood and Napoleon’s tomb. Maggie and Jack—ten and nine years old respectively—came with us, and a right pleasant day we spent. There were bright-winged birds flitting hither and thither in the dazzling sunshine, and singing sweet and low in trees of darkest green; but the happy voices of the children made sweeter music far to my ears, and I’m sure to James’s too.

“All along the roadsides at some parts grew the tall cacti; they were one mass of gorgeous crimson bloom, and here and there between, the ground was carpeted with trailing blossoms white and blue; yet, in my opinion, the laughing rosebud lips of Maggie and Jack’s saucy eyes of blue were prettier far than the flowers.

“And here, on the top of the dingle or glen, and overlooking the sea, were Napoleon’s house and garden.

“‘Why, James,’ I cried, ‘this isn’t a dungeon any more than Saint Helena is a rock. It strikes me—a simple sailor—that Nap must have had fine times of it.’

“‘No, sir, no,’ said James, shaking his head. ‘Plenty to eat and drink, plenty o’ good clothes to wear, but ah! Charles Halcott, he wasn’t free, and there burned inside him an unquenchable fire. When in action, on the field, or on the march, he had little time to think; but here, in this solitude, the seared conscience regained its softness, and in his thoughts by day and in his dreams at the dead hours o’ night, Charles Halcott, rose visions of the terrible misery he brought on Europe, and the black and awful deeds he did in Egypt. O sir, if you want to punish a man, leave him alone to his conscience!’

“James Malone was in fine form that evening at Farmer Mac’s. He sang and he yarned time about—the songs for the children, the yarns for us. Parodying Tam o’ Shanter, I might say:—

“‘The nicht drave on wi’ sangs and clatter,
Wi’ childish glee, wi’ bairnies’ patter;
The sailor tauld his queerest stories,

The farmer's laugh was ready chorus;
Till, hark! the clock strikes in the hall
The wee short oor ayont the twal.'

"Before dinner that evening simple James had gone to see old Mother Banks, and he spent a whole hour with her.

"'Good-bye, dear laddie,' she said, when he rose to leave; 'I'll pray for ye on the ragin' sea, but I know the Lord will never let me behold ye again.'

"And simple James's eyes were wet with tears as he held her skinny hand for a moment, then dropped it and bore away up the street, never once looking back, so full was his heart.

"When the clock struck one, James shyly proposed a few moments' devotion. Then he mounted the awful specs and opened the Good Book.

"Half an hour after this, all in the great house were asleep, and not a sound could I hear—for I lay long awake thinking—save the sighing of the wind in the trees above my open jalousies, to me a very sweet and soothing sound.

"'Heigho!' I murmured to myself. 'Will I ever have a home on the green earth, I wonder, or shall I die on the blue sea?'

"Then I began to doze, and mingling with my waking thoughts came dreams which proved that poor James's prescriptions had not yet been entirely successful.

"Just three weeks after this we were far away in the centre of the South Atlantic Ocean, and bearing up for Rio de Janeiro. The sea around us was of the darkest blue, but sparkling in the sunshine, and there was just sufficient wind to gladden the heart of a sailor.

"What induced James and me to change our plans and sail west instead of south and east, I never could tell, though I have often thought about it. A friend of mine says it was Fate, and that Fate often rules the destinies of men, despite all that can be done to alter her plans and intentions. This line of reasoning may be right; my friend is so often right that I daresay it must be.

"But one thing now occurred to me that at times rendered me rather uneasy, and which, when I tried to describe it to James, caused that honest sailor some anxiety also. I have spoken of it more than once to so-called psychologists and even to so-called mediums;

but their attempted explanations, although seemingly satisfactory enough to themselves, sounded to me like a mere chaos of words, the meaning of which as a whole I never could fathom. But the mystery with me was this: I seemed at times to be possessed of a second self, or rather, a second soul.

"I struggled against the feeling all I could, but in vain. James read his mother's Bible to me, and otherwise, not in a spiritual way, he did all he could to cheer me up, as he phrased it. But—and here comes in the most curious part of it—I did not feel that I wanted any cheering up. I was happy enough in the companionship of my second self. This was not always present. Sometimes absent for days indeed, and never as yet did it talk to me in my dreams. At other times it came, and would be with me for hours; and it spoke to my mind as it were, I being compelled to carry on a conversation, in thought, of course, but never once did I have any notion beforehand as to what the remarks made were to be. They were simple in the extreme, and usually had reference to the working or guidance of the ship, the setting or shortening of sail, and making the good barque snug for the night.

"We called at Rio. The harbour here could contain all the war fleets in the world; grand old hills; a city as romantic as Edinburgh—that is, when seen from the sea—quaintness of streets, a wealth and beauty of vegetation, of treescape and flowerscape, that I have never seen equalled anywhere, and a quaintly dressed, quiet, and indolent people.

"We landed much stores here and filled up with others. On the whole, James and I were not sorry we had come, we drove such excellent bargains.

"Again, at Buenos Ayres, with its fine streets and public buildings, and its miles upon miles of shallow sea all in front, we did trade enough to please us.

"'When I retire from sailing the salt seas, sir,' said James, 'it's 'ere and nowhere else I'm goin' to make my 'ome; and I only wish the old lady were livin', for then I'd retire after the very next voyage.'

"Shortly after resuming our voyage southwards towards the stormy Cape Horn, we encountered gale after gale of wind that taxed all the strength of our brave barque, as well as the skill of the officers and seamen. Again and again had we to lie to for long dark days and nights; and when we ventured to run before the storm, we had literally to stagger along under bare poles.

"But when we reached the Cape at last, and stood away to the west around the bleak and inhospitable shores of Tierra del Fuego, or the Land of Fire, never before in all the years I had been to sea had I encountered weather so fearful or waves so high and dangerous.

So stormy, indeed, did it continue, that hardly did either James or I dare to hope we should ever double the Cape. But we both had a sailor's aversion to turning back, and so struggled on and on.

"The danger seemed to culminate and the crisis come in earnest, when one weird moonlight midnight we suddenly found ourselves bows on to a huge iceberg, or rather one vast island of ice that appeared to have no horizon either towards the north or towards the south. The barrier presented seemed impassable. We could only try, so we put about on the port tack, the wind blowing there with great violence from the west and north.

"This course took us well off the great ice island. It took us southwards, moreover.

"'But why not steer northwards?' said James. 'We'd have to tack a bit, it is true, only we'd be lessening our danger; leastways that's my opinion. This berg may be twenty or thirty miles long, and every mile brings us closer to great bergs that, down yonder, float in dozens. Before now, Charles Halcott, I've seen a ship sunk in the twinkling of a marling-spike by a—'

"'By striking against a berg, James?' I interrupted. 'So have I.'

"'No, sir, no; you're on the wrong tack. Wherever big bergs are there are small ones too—little, hard, green lumps of ice, not bigger than the wheel-house, that to hit bows on would scarcely spill your tea. But, friend, it is different where there are mountain seas on. These little green bergs are caught by a wave-top and hurled against the ship's side with the strength of a thousand Titans. And—the ship goes down.'

"There was something almost solemn in the manner James brought out the last four words. It kept me silent for minutes; and shading my eyes with my hand, I kept peering southwards into the weird-like moonshine, the ice away on the right, a strange white haze to leeward, and far ahead the foam-tipped waves, wild-maned horses of the ocean, careering along on their awful course.

"'James,' I said at last, 'danger or not danger, southwards I steer. Something tells me to do so; everything bids me. "Steer south—steer south," chimes the bell when it strikes; "steer south," ticks the clock. James Malone, my very heart's pulse repeats the words; and I hear them mournfully sung by the very waves themselves, and by the wind that goes moaning through the rigging. And—I'm going to obey.'

"For nights I had hardly slept a wink, but now I felt as if slumber would soon visit my pillow if I but threw myself on the bed. The moon, a full round one, was already

declining in the west when I went below and turned in all standing, and in three minutes' time I had sunk into a deep and dreamless sleep.

"James told me afterwards that it had taken him one long minute of solid shaking and shouting to arouse me, but he succeeded at last.

"'Anything wrong, James?' I said anxiously, as I sat up in my cot.

"'Can't say as there's anything radically wrong, sir,' he replied slowly. 'Leastways, our ship's all right. Wind and sea have both gone down. We've doubled the berg at last, and a good forty mile she was, and now we're nearing another. But the strange thing is this, sir. There is men on it, a-waving their coats and things, and makin' signs. I can just raise 'em with our Mons Meg glass.'

"'Some natives of Tierra del Fuego, perhaps,' I said. 'Anyhow, James,' I added, 'keep bearing up towards them.'

"'Ay, ay, sir.'

"In ten minutes' time I was on deck, glass in hand.

"It was a grey uncertain morning, the sun just rising astern of us, and tingeing the wave-tops with a yellow glare.

"I could see the people on the ice with the naked eye. But I steadied Mons Meg on the bulwark, and had a look through that.

"'Mercy on us, James!' I cried, 'these are no savages, but our own countrymen or Americans. I can count five alive, and oh, James, three lie at some little distance stretched out dark and stiff. Shake another reef out—those people want us. A sad story will be theirs to tell.'

"We got them all on board at last, though with difficulty, for the surf was beating high above the snow-clad ice, and twice our boat was dashed against the hard, green edge of the monster berg, her timbers cracking ominously. We brought off the dead too, and buried them in a Christian way, James himself reading over them the beautiful service of the English Church. Though they were strangers to us, yet, as their bodies dropped down into the darkling sea, many a tear was shed that our fellows scarce took pains to hide.

"'And there they'll sleep,' said a voice behind me, 'till the sea gives up its dead.'

“I turned slowly round, and the eyes of the speaker met mine. Hitherto I had paid most attention to the lifeless, and scarce had noticed the living.

“But now a strange thrill went through me as this man, who was the skipper of the lost ship, advanced with a sad kind of smile on his face and held out his hand.

“‘We have met before,’ he said.

“‘We seem to have met before,’ I answered falteringly, ‘but where I cannot tell. Perhaps you—’

“‘Yes, I can; I have seen you in a dream. We must both have dreamt.’

“I staggered as if shot, and pressed my hand to my brow.

“‘You seem puzzled,’ he continued, ‘yet I am not. I am a man who has studied science somewhat. I am often called a visionary on account of my theories, yet I am convinced that there are times when, in answer to prayer, the mind during sleep may be permitted to leave the body. You, sir, have saved the few poor fellows of my ship’s crew who have escaped death, and I thank you. Think nothing strange, sir, in this world simply because you do not understand it. But you have an errand of mercy yet to perform. Heaven grant you may be as successful in that as you have been in taking our poor helpless men from off the ice.’

“‘Come below,’ I said, ‘Captain—a—’

“‘Smithson,’ he put in.

“‘Come below, Captain Smithson, and tell your story. James, will you bear us company?’

“I and James sat on one side of the table, our guest, with his thin, worn face and dark eyes that seemed to pierce us with their very earnestness, on the other. He told his story rapidly—ran over it, as it were, as a school-boy does something he has learned by heart.

“‘It is but little more than five weeks since the good yacht Windward cleared away from San Francisco—’

“‘James,’ I said, interrupting him, ‘how long have we been at sea?’

“‘Wellnigh four months, sir.’

“‘How the time has flown! Pray, sir, proceed.’

“‘I have never known a quicker passage than we had. The wind was fair all the way, and our little craft appeared to fly with it. But it fell dead calm about the latitude of 20 degrees south of the line. My only passengers—in fact, it was they who had chartered the Windward to take them to Monte Video—a lady and her daughter, began to be very uneasy now. They had heard so much about the fleetness of the Windward that they never expected a hitch. No wonder they were uneasy. Their business in Monte Video was a matter of life or death. The doctor there had assured them that if they were not out by a certain time, the husband and father would never again be seen by them alive.

“‘But the calm was not of long duration. Worse was to come—a tornado burst upon us with awful fury, and all but sunk us. We were carried far to the west out of our course. Fierce gales succeeded the tempest; and when the wind once more sank to rest we found ourselves surrounded by a group of islands that, although I have sailed the South Pacific for many a long year, I had never seen before.

“‘That the natives of the largest and most beautiful of these islands are savages and man-hunters I have not the slightest doubt. The king himself came off, evincing not the slightest fear of us; but both he and his people remained so strangely pacific that it excited our suspicions for a time. We were glad, however, to be able here to repair damages and to take on board fresh water; and the kindness of the natives was so marked that our suspicions were entirely lulled, and for days we lived almost among them, even going on shore unarmed in the most friendly way.

“‘I must tell you, sir, that, owing to the heat and closeness of the atmosphere, a screen-berth or tent had been rigged for the ladies close to the bulwark on the port side, and almost abreast of the main-mast. The first part of the night of the tenth was exceedingly dark, and it was also hot and sultry. The ladies had retired early, for a thunderstorm that had been threatening about sunset broke over us with tropical fury about ten by the clock, or four bells—the first watch.

“‘And now, sir, comes the mystery. The moon rose at twelve and silvered all the sea, shedding its earth light upon the green-wooded hills of the mainland till everything looked ethereal. Not a sound was to be heard, except now and then the plaintive cry of a sea bird, and the dull, low moan of the breakers on the coral sand.

“‘As was her custom just before turning in, the ladies’ maid drew aside their curtain to see if they wanted anything, and to say good-night.

“‘I was walking the quarterdeck smoking, when pale and scared she rushed toward me.

“‘Oh!’ she almost screamed, ‘they are gone! The ladies have gone!’

“‘No one thought of turning in that dreadful night; and when in the morning the sun, red and flaming, leapt out of the sea, arming a boat as well as I could, I rowed on shore and demanded audience of the king.

“‘But we were not allowed to land. The savages had assumed a very different attitude now, and a shower of spears was our welcome. One poor fellow was killed outright, another died of his wounds only an hour afterwards. In fact, we were beaten off; and in an hour’s time, observing a whole fleet of boats coming off to attack our vessel, we were forced to hoist sail and fly.

“‘That is my story, and a sad one it is. I was on my way to the nearest town to seek assistance, when our vessel was crushed in the ice and sank in less than twenty minutes, with all on board except those you have seen.’

“Smithson was silent now. With his chin resting on his hand he sat there looking downwards at the deck, but apparently seeing nothing. For many minutes not a word was spoken by any one. The vessel rose and fell on the long, rolling seas; there was the creak of the rudder chains; there was occasionally the flapping of a sail; all else was still.

“James Malone was the first to speak.

“‘Charles Halcott,’ he said—and I think I hear the earnest, manly tones of his voice at this moment—‘Charles Halcott, we have a duty to perform, and it leads us to the northward and west.’

“I stood up now, and our hands met and clasped.

“‘James Malone,’ I replied, ‘Heaven helping us, we will perform that duty faithfully and well.’

“‘Amen, sir! Amen!’”

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Six.

"O my Friend, my Brother," I Cry.

"That same forenoon," continued Halcott, "the wind went veering round to the southward and east. The sea was darkly, intensely blue all day. The sky was intensely blue at night, and the stars so big and bright and near they seemed almost to touch the topmasts. But here and there in the darkness, on every side of us, loomed white icebergs like sheeted ghosts, and every now and then there rolled along our beam—thudding against the timbers as they swept aft—the smaller bergs or 'bilts' we could not avoid.

"James was on deck, and determined to remain there till morning, in order, as he said, to give me the quiet and rest my health so much required.

"In two days' time we had weathered the stormy Cape, bidden farewell to the ice, and, with every stitch of canvas set which it was possible to carry safely, were sailing westward and north, away towards the distant islands of the South Pacific.

"In a few days we got into higher latitudes, and the weather became delightfully warm and pleasant. The sky was more than Italian in its clear and cloudless azure; the rippling waves were all a-sparkle with light; they kissed the bows of our bonnie barque, and came lapping and laughing aft along our counter, their merry voices seeming to talk to us and bid us welcome to these sunny seas.

"Birds, too, came wheeling around our ship—strange, swift gulls, the lonesome frigate-bird, and the wondrous albatross, king of storms, great eagle of the ocean wave.

"Had we not been upon the strange mission on which we were now bound, and the outcome of which we could not even guess, both James and I would have enjoyed this delightful cruise; for, like myself, he was every inch a sailor, and loved his ship as a landsman may love his bride.

"'In five days' time,' said Captain Smithson to me one forenoon, 'if it holds like this, we ought to reach the Unfortunate Islands.'

"'Is that what you call them, captain?' I said, smiling; 'well, my first mate and I mean to change their name.'

“‘Heaven grant you may,’ he answered. ‘O sir, the loss of this yacht, clipper though she was, and a beauty to boot, is nothing to mourn for—she was well insured; even the death of my poor men is but an accident that we sailors are liable to at any moment; but the fate of those two innocent ladies—the mother so good and gentle, the daughter so childlike and beautiful—is one that, if it is to remain a mystery, will cloud my whole life. Think of it, sir. The savages must have crept on board in the midst of the thick darkness and the storm, crept on board like wet and slimy snakes, gagged their poor victims, and borne them silently away—to what?’

“‘It is all very terrible,’ I said.

“‘Well, now,’ said James, ‘it strikes me talkin’ about it isn’t goin’ to help us. Charles Halcott, I served on board a man-o’-war for seven years.’

“‘Yes, James.’

“‘Well, sir, I know what they’d do now in a case like this.’

“‘Yes, James.’

“‘They’d muster their forces, and prepare for ’ventualities.’

“‘You see, gentlemen,’ he added, ‘we may have a bit o’ good, solid fightin’ to do. Heaven knows that, if it would do any good, I’d gird up my loins and go all unarmed, save with the Word o’ God—my mother’s Bible—among those poor, benighted heathens, and try to bring ’em to their senses. But I fear that would do but little good. When we go among the more humble and simple savages of lonely islands in the sea, or on the mainland of Africa itself, our work o’ conversion is easy, because the creatures have no form o’ religion to place against the gospel. But these head-hunters—and I know them of old—have their own ghastly, blood-stained rites and sacrifices—I cannot call it religion, sir—and these they set up as an awful barrier against the glad tidings we fain would bring to their doors, to their lives.

“‘No, gentlemen, we may have to crack skulls before we get the Word in. But to save those helpless ladies Is a duty, a sacred duty we owe to our own white race, as well as to our own consciences, for we’d ne’er be happy if we didn’t try.’

“‘Heaven grant,’ I said, ‘they may still be alive!’

“‘That we must find out,’ said James. ‘Now, sir, shall we call all hands, and see to rifles and ammunition?’

“James’s suggestion was at once acted upon.

“The Sea Flower was a very large barque, and once had been a full-rigged ship. And our hands were more numerous than are generally carried, for many were working their voyage out, and might have been called passengers.

“So now forty bold fellows, including two strong and sturdy black men, and the negro boy we called the cook’s mate, put in an appearance, and drew shyly aft. There were, in addition to these, Captain Smithson and his four men.

“But these latter we determined the savages must not see, else their suspicions would at once be raised, and, instead of our being able to act peacefully and by strategy, we should have at once to declare red-eyed war.

“‘Will you speak first?’ I said to Captain Smithson.

“Without a word he strode forward, and, when he held up his hand, the men came crowding round him.

“‘Men of the Sea Flower!’ he began, ‘I am going to tell you a story. It is short and simple, but also a very sad one. Maybe you know most of the outs and ins and particulars of it already. My men must have told you all about our voyage and our lady passengers.’

“‘Repeat, repeat!’ cried the men; ‘we would have it all again from your own lips, sir.’

“Briefly and pathetically Smithson did so, relating to them all the particulars we already know.

“‘Men,’ he continued, ‘you are Christians, and you are Englishmen. It is on this latter fact I rely chiefly, in case we have to fight with the savages of those Unfortunate Islands. The elder of the two ladies we are going to try to save is English, though she married an American, though her home was on the Pacific slope, and her innocent and beautiful daughter was born in San Francisco. They are your country-people, then, as much as ours. But, apart from that, when I say they are women in bondage and distress, I have said enough, I know, to appeal to the brave heart of every Englishman who now stands before me.’

“A wild, heroic shout was the only reply.

“‘Thank you,’ said Smithson, ‘for that expression of feeling! and I will only add that these ladies, especially the younger, were, all the way out, the light and life of our poor, lost yacht, and that, by their winning ways, they made themselves beloved both fore and aft.’

“‘Now, lads,’ cried James, and as he spoke he seemed a head taller than I had ever seen him, ‘if we’ve got to fight, why, then, we’ll fight. But against these terrible savages we can’t fight with porridge-sticks. Luckily, in our cargo we have a hundred good rifles, and that is two for each of us; and we have revolvers, too, and plenty of ammunition. All good, mind you; for I chose the whole cargo myself. So now, bo’s’n, pipe up the guns; and this afternoon, men, and every day till we touch at the Unfortunate Islands, I’ll put you through your drill—which, bein’ an old navy man, I fancy I’m capable of doing. Are you all willing?’

“The cheer that shook the ship from stem to stern was a truly British one. It was their only answer, and the only answer needed or required.

“So the drilling was commenced, and entered into with great spirit. After all, this drill was merely preparation for ‘possible ’ventualities,’ as honest James called it, for fighting would be our very last resort, and we earnestly prayed that we might not be driven to it.

“At last, and early one morning, just as the sun was beginning to pencil the feathery clouds with gold and green and crimson, land was discovered on the lee bow.

“I brought the big telescope which James had named Mons Meg to bear upon it. Then I handed Meg to Smithson. He looked at the land long and earnestly, and glanced up at me with beaming face.

“‘That’s the principal island, Captain Halcott,’ he said; ‘the king’s own. How well we have hit it!’

“That same forenoon we cast anchor in Treachery Bay, close to the spot where the yacht had lain not many weeks before.

“Our sails were furled in quite a business-like way. We wanted to show the savages that we were not one whit afraid of them, that we had come to stay for a short spell, and hadn’t the remotest intention of running away.

“That you may better understand the shape or configuration of this strange island, gentlemen, here I show you a rough sketch-map. This will enable you also to follow more easily our subsequent adventures in the fastnesses of these terrible savages.

“Rude and simple though this plan is, a word or two will suffice to explain it. The island trends west and east, and is not more than sixteen miles long by about ten to twelve in width. It is divided into two almost equal parts by a very rapid and dark-rolling river, which rushes through rocky gorges with inconceivable speed, forming many a thundering cataract as it fights its way to the sea. It is fed from the waters that flow from the mountains, and, probably, by subterranean springs. The whole western portion of the island, with the exception of some green woods around the bay, is pretty low, but covered throughout with the remains of a black and burned forest. This forest is supposed by the natives to be inhabited by fearsome demons and witches, and is never visited, except for the purpose of sorcery by the medicine-men of the tribe, and to bury the dead. In the centre of the eastern portion of the island, which is beautifully clad with woodlands, and rugged and wild in the extreme, is a lake with one small, lonely isle; and around this the mountains tower their highest, but are clad to their very summits with forest trees, many of them bearing the most luscious of fruits, and all draped with wild flowers, and sweetly haunted by bird and bee.

“The only things else in the map I wish to draw your attention to, gentlemen, are the parallel lines. These mark the spot where was the only bridge leading into the fastnesses of these savages, and the only mode of communication with the lower land and bay, without walking round by the head of the river, or following its course to the sea and crossing in a boat.

“This bridge was primitive in the extreme, consisting merely of three straight tree stems, and a rude life-line composed of the twisted withes of a kind of willow.

“I have sad reason to remember that bridge, and shall not forget it while life lasts.

“I have said nothing in my story yet about Lord Augustus Fitzmantle. But it is time to do so. Lord Augustus was our cook’s mate. It is well to give a nigger boy a high-sounding name, and, if possible, a title. He always tries to act up to it. Lord Augustus was very, very black. The other niggers were black enough certainly, but they looked brown beside his merry, laughing little lordship. Yes, always laughing, always showing those white teeth of his and rolling his expressive eyes, and good-tempered all day long. Even a kick from the cook only made him rub a little and laugh the more. Lord Augustus wore a string of sky-blue beads about his neck, and on warm days he wore very little else. But if Lord Augustus was black, he was also bright. The sunshine glittered and glanced on his rounded arms and cheeks, and he had sunshine in his heart as well. It goes without

saying he was the pet of the Sea Flower and everybody's friend, and though all hands teased as well as petted him, he took it all in good part.

"So long as Lord Fitzmantle kept his mouth shut, and didn't show those flashing teeth of his, he was as invisible as Jack the Giant Killer on a dark night.

"Seeing our independence, the savages for hours held aloof. At last a white-headed, fearful-looking old man paddled alongside in a dug-out. From the fact that he had a huge snake coiled around his chest and neck, I took him to be the medicine-man, or sorcerer, of the tribe, and I was not mistaken.

"He was certainly no beauty as he sat there grinning in his dark dug-out. His face was covered with scars in circles and figures, so, too, was his chest; his eyes were the colour of brass; his teeth crimson, and filed into the form of triangles. But he climbed boldly on board when beckoned to, and we loaded him with gifts of pretty beads, and engirdled his loins with red cloth, then sent him grinning away.

"This treatment had the desired effect, and in half an hour's time the bay was alive with the boats and canoes of the head-hunters. Each of their tall, gondola-like prows bore a grinning skull, the cheek bones daubed with a kind of crimson clay, and the sockets filled with awful clay eyes—not a pretty sight.

"Presently the king himself came off, and we received him with great ceremony, and gave him many gifts. To show our strength, James drew up his men in battle array, and to the terror of all in the boats, they fired their guns, taking aim at some brown and ugly kites that flew around. When several of these fell dead, the alarm of the king knew no bounds. But he soon recovered; and when, a little later on, I with a dozen of my best men went on shore, the king placed a poor slave girl on the beach and made signs for us to shoot. I would sooner have shot the king himself.

"Lord Augustus came with us, and we soon found that he understood much that the king said, and could therefore act as our interpreter.

"It is needless to say that the men of the lost yacht were kept out of sight.

"Our walk that day was but a brief one. The king did not seem to want us ever to cross the bridge. On climbing a hill, however, I could see all over the wild and beautiful country. I pointed to the lake and little island, and was given to understand that the medicine-men dwelt there. But from the shiftiness of the savage's eyes, I concluded at once that, if they were alive, that was the prison isle of the unhappy ladies. The king dined with us next day, and we considered it policy to let him have a modicum of fire-

water. His heart warmed, and not only did he permit our party to cross the bridge, but to visit his palace. The sights of horror around it I will not dare to depict, but, much to my joy, I noticed from the king's veranda the flutter of white dresses on the little prison isle.

"My mind was made up, and that night I dispatched Lord Augustus on shore with a note. It was a most hazardous expedition, and none save the boy could have undertaken it with any hope of success. In my letter I had told the ladies to be of good cheer; there would be a glimmer of moonlight in a week's time, and that then we should attempt their rescue; anyhow they were to be prepared.

"Three whole days elapsed, and yet no Lord Augustus appeared, but on the night of the fourth, when we had given him up for lost, he swam off to the ship. Poor boy, he had hardly eaten food, save fruit, since he had left, and his adventure had been a thrilling one. Yet he was laughing all over just the same.

"Yes, he had managed to give the note, and had brought back a message. The ladies had not, strange to say, been subjected to either insult or injury by the king. They were well fed on fruit and milk and cooked fowls, but were guarded day and night by priests.

"The most startling portion of the message, however, was this: in a fortnight's time a great feast and sacrifice were to take place, and during that they knew not what might occur. They begged that the boy might be sent again, and with him a sleeping-powder, which they might administer to the priests on the night of the attempted rescue. I confess my heart beat high with anxiety when the boy told us all this, for not one word of his message had he forgotten.

"I consulted now with James and Smithson. Would it not be as well, I advanced, to attempt to rescue the ladies by force?

"This was at once vetoed. Both James and the captain of the yacht knew more of savage nature than I did, and they most strongly affirmed that any show of force would assuredly result in the putting to death of the two unhappy ladies we had come to rescue.

"So it was finally agreed that stratagem, not force, must be resorted to, in the first place, at all events. So a night was chosen, and on the previous evening faithful Lord Fitzmantle was dispatched once more, taking with him a powder for the medicine-men, or priests.

“To our great joy and relief, the messenger returned before daylight with the news that all would be ready, and that they, the ladies, would be found at midnight in a cave by the banks of the lake, if they were successful in escaping in a canoe from the island.

“‘And you know this cave, Fitz?’ I asked.

“Fitz’s eyes snapped and twinkled right merrily.

“‘I done know him, him foh true, sah!’ he said, which signified that he had a perfect knowledge of the position of the cave.

“As I speak to you even now, gentlemen, a portion of the anxiety I felt on that terrible night when, with muffled oars, our boat left the ship, comes stealing over my senses. I could not tell then why my feelings should be worked up to so high a pitch, for I’d been in many a danger and difficulty before. But so it was.

“The king had dined with us, and we sent home with him a supply of fire-water, which has worked such ruin among many savage races. But surely on this occasion we were partially justified in doing so. We knew, therefore, that the king and some of his principal officers were safe enough for one night.

“The largest boat was cautiously lowered about an hour before midnight, when everything was still as the grave on the island; a long and plaintive howl, however, being borne on the gentle breeze towards us every now and then, telling us that sentries were here and there in the woods.

“We were fifteen men in all, including James and myself, and excluding our little black guide, Lord Fitzmantle. During the nights of terror he had spent in hill and forest he had surveyed the country well, and so we could safely trust to him.

“We rowed with muffled oars to the beach near the haunted forest, and drew up our boat under some banana-trees; then, silent as the red men of the North American forests, we made our way towards the bridge.

“The moon was about five days old, and served to give us all the light we desired. We took advantage of every bush and thicket, and finally, when within seventy yards of the river—the hustling and roaring of which we could distinctly hear—we dispatched little Fitz to reconnoitre.

“He returned in a few minutes and reported all safe, and no one on watch upon the bridge.

“We marched now in Indian file, taking care not even to snap a twig, lest we should arouse the slumbering foe. I do not know how long we took to reach the cave. To me, in my terror and anxiety, it seemed a year. They were there, and safe.

“We waited not a moment to speak. I lifted the young lady in my arms. How light she was! James escorted the elder, sometimes carrying her, sometimes permitting her to walk.

“Then the journey back was commenced.

“But in the open a glimmer of moonlight fell on the face of the beautiful burden I bore. She had fainted. That I could see at a glance.

“But something more I saw, and, seeing, tottered and nearly fell; for hers was the same lovely and childlike face I had seen that evening, which now appeared so long ago, in the Liverpool theatre.

“I felt now as if walking in the air. But I cannot describe or express my feelings, being only a sailor, and so must not attempt to.

“We might have still been a hundred yards from the bridge and river, when suddenly there rang out behind and on each side of us the most awful yells I had ever listened to, while the beating of tom-toms, or war-drums, sounded all over the eastern part of the island.

“‘On, men, on to the bridge!’ shouted brave James. No need for concealment now.

“It was a short but fearful race, but now we are on it, on the bridge!

“On and over!

“All but James!

“Where is he? The moon escapes from behind a cloud and shines full upon his sturdy form, still on the other side, and at the same time we can hear the sharp ring of his revolver. Then, oh! we see him tearing up the planks of the bridge, and dropping them one by one into the gulf beneath. We pour in a volley to keep the savages back.

“‘Fly for your lives!’ shouts brave James. ‘Save the ladies; I’ll swim.’

“Next minute he dives into the chasm! For one brief moment we see his face and form in the pale moonlight. Then he disappears. He is gone.

“‘O my friend, my brother!’ I cry, stretching out my arms as if I would plunge madly into the pool that lies far beneath yonder, part in shade and part in shine.

“But they dragged me away by main force. They led me to the boat. The savages could not follow. But I seemed to see nothing now, to know nothing, to feel nothing, except that I had lost the dearest friend on earth. He had sacrificed himself to save us!”

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Seven.

"I Think You're Going on a Wild-Goose Chase."

Halcott paused, and gazed seawards over the great stretch of wet beach.

So wet was it that the sun's parting rays lit it up in great stripes of crimson chequered with gold.

And yonder are the children coming slowly home across these painted sands.

A strange group, most certainly, but united in one bond of union—oh, would that all the world were so!—the bond of love.

The brother's arm is placed gently around his sister's waist; the Admiral is stepping drolly by Ransey's side, with his head and neck thrust through the lad's arm.

Something seems to tell the bird that fate, which took away his master before, might take him once again.

Bob brings up the rear. His head is low towards the sands, but he feels very happy and satisfied with his afternoon's outing.

Halcott once more lit his pipe.

The two others were silent, and Mr Tandy nodded when Halcott smiled and looked towards him.

"Yes," he said, "there is a little more of my story yet untold; there is a portion of it still in the future, I trust. With this, however, destiny alone has to do. Suffice it to say, that as far as Doris and myself—my simple sailor-self—are concerned, we shall be married when I return from my next cruise, if all goes well, and, like two vessels leaving the harbour on just such a beautiful night as this, sail away to begin our voyage of life on just such a beautiful sea.

“You must both know Doris before I start. But where, think you, do I mean to sail to next? No, do not answer till I tell you one thing. Neither Doris nor her mother received, while in that little lake island, the slightest injury or insult.”

“Then there is some good in the breast of even the wildest savage,” put in Weathereye. “I always thought so; bother me if I didn’t. Ahem!”

“Ah, wait, Captain Weathereye, wait! I fear my experience is different from yours. Those fiendish savages on that Isle of Misfortune were reserving my dear Doris and her mother for a fate far more terrible than anything ever described in books of imagination.

“We rescued them, by God’s mercy, just in time. They were then under the protection of the awful priests, or medicine-men, and were being fed on fruits and on the petals of rare and beautiful flowers. Their hut itself was composed of flowers and foliage.

“The king, no, not even he, could come near them, until the medicine-men had propitiated the demons that live, according to their belief, in every wood and in every ravine and gully in the island.

“Then, at the full of the moon, on that tiny islet I have marked on the map, the king and his warriors would assemble at midnight, and the awful orgies would commence.

“I shudder even now when I think of it. I happily cannot describe to you the tortures these poor ladies would have been put to before the final, fearful act. But the king would drink ‘white blood.’ He would then be invulnerable. No foe could any more prevail against him.

“While the blood was still flowing, the stake-fires would-be lit, and—

“But I’ll say no more; a cannibal feast would have concluded the ceremonies.”

“You mean to say,” cried Weathereye, bringing his fist, and a good-sized one it was, down with a bang on the sill of the open window by which he sat—“do you mean to tell me that these devils incarnate would have burned the poor dear ladies alive, then? Oh, horrible!”

“I said that they meant to; but look at this!”

He handed Weathereye a small yellow dagger.

“What a strange little knife! But why, I say, Halcott, Tandy, this knife is made of gold—solid, hammered gold!”

“Yes,” said Halcott; “and it is this dagger of hammered gold that would have saved my poor Doris and her mother from the torture and the stake.

“But,” he added, “not this dagger only, but every implement in the cave of those fearsome priests was fashioned from the purest gold.”

“This is indeed a strange story,” said Tandy.

“And now, gentlemen,” added Halcott, “can you guess to what seas my barque shall sail next?”

Tandy rose from his seat and took two or three turns up and down the floor.

He was a man who made up his mind quickly enough, and it is such men as these, and only such, who get well on in the world.

Weathereye and Halcott both kept silence. They were watching Tandy.

“Halcott,” said the latter, approaching the captain of the Sea Flower—“Halcott, have you kept your secret?”

“Secret?”

“Yes. I mean, do many save yourself know of the existence of gold on that island of blood?”

“None save me. No one has even seen the knife but myself and you.”

“Good. You love the Sea Flower?”

“I love the Sea Flower as every sailor loves, or ought to love, his ship. I wish I could afford to buy her out and out.”

“The other shares are in the market then?”

Tandy was seated now cross-legged on a chair, and leaning over the back of it, bending towards Halcott with an earnest light, in his eyes, such as few had ever seen therein.

“The other shares are for sale,” said Halcott.

It was just at this moment that Ransey Tansey and little Nelda came, or rather burst into the room. Both were breathless, both were rosy; and Bob, who came in behind them, was panting, with half a yard of tongue—well, perhaps, not quite so much—hanging red over his alabaster teeth.

“O daddy,” cried Babs, as father still called her, “we’ve had such fun! And the ’Ral,” (a pet name that the crane had somehow obtained possession of) “dug up plenty of pretty things for us, and he wanted Bob to eat a big white worm, only Bob wouldn’t.”

One of his children stood on each side of him, and he had placed one arm round each.

Thus Tandy faced Halcott once more, smiling, perhaps, a little sadly now.

“I can buy those shares, Halcott. Do not think me ambitious. A money-grabber I never was. But, you see these little tots. Ransey here can make his way in the world.—Can’t you, Ransey?”

“Rather, father,” said Ransey.

“But, Halcott, though I am not in the flower of my youth, I’m in the prime of my manhood, and I’d do everything I know to build up a shelter for my little Babs against the cold winds of adversity before I—But I must not speak of anything sad before the child.”

“You have a long life before you, I trust,” said Weathereye.

Tandy seemed to hear him not.

“I’d go as your mate.”

The two sailors shook hands.

“You’ll go as my friend, and keep watch if you choose.”

“Agreed!”

“Bravo!” cried Weathereye. “Shiver my jib, as sailors say in books, if I wouldn’t like to go along with both of you!”

“Why not, Captain Weathereye?”

The staff-commander laughed. “Not this cruise, lads, though I’m not afraid for my life, or the little that may be left of it, and you must take care of yours. I think myself you are going on a kind of wild-goose chase, and that the goose—that is, the gold—will have the best of it, by keeping out of your way. Well, anyhow, I’ll come and see you both over the bar. Where do you sail from?”

“Southampton.”

“Good! and the last person you’ll see as you drop out to sea will be old Weathereye in a boat waving his red bandana to wish you luck. Good-night!

“Good-night, little Babs! How provokingly pretty she is, Tandy! better leave her at Scragley Hall, and the crane too. She’ll be well looked after, you may figure upon that. Come and give the old man a kiss, dear.”

But Nelda hung her head.

“Not if you say that, Captain Weathereye. Wherever ever daddy goes, I go with him. I’m not going to let my brother run away to sea and leave me again.”

“And you won’t give me Bob?” said Weathereye.

“Oh, no!”

“Nor the Admiral?”

Nelda looked up in the old captain’s face now.

“I’m just real sorry for you,” she said; “but the Hal’s going and all—you may figure on that.”

Weathereye laughed heartily.

Then he drew the child gently towards him and kissed her little sun-browned hand.

“May God be with you, darling, where’er on earth you roam! And with you all. Good-night again.”

And away went honest Captain Weathereye.

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Eight.

At Sea—Mermaids and Mermen.

So long as the wind blew free, even though it did not always blow fair, there was joy, and jollity, too, in every heart that beat on board the saucy Sea Flower, fore as well as aft.

She looked a bonnie barque now, in every sense of the word.

Tandy and Halcott had spared neither expense nor pains in rigging her well out. Had not her timbers been stanch and sound they certainly would not have done so.

She had new sails, a new jibboom, and several new spars; and before she got clear and away out of the English Channel the crew of many a homeward-bound ship manned their riggings and gave her a hearty cheer.

Halcott had left the whole rig-out of the Sea Flower to Mr Tandy, and had not come near her for six long weeks.

He was better employed, perhaps, and more happy on shore. But pleased enough he was on his return.

“Why, Tandy, my dear fellow, this isn’t a ship any more; it’s a yacht?”

“A pot of paint and a bucket of tar go a long way,” Tandy replied smiling.

“Ah! there’s a good deal more than tar here; but how you’ve managed to get her decks and spars so white and beautiful, bother me if I can tell. And her ebony is ebony no longer, it is polished jet, while her brass work is gold.”

Down below the two had now gone together.

Tandy could not have made the cabin a bit bigger if he had tried, but he had removed every morsel of her lumbering old lockers and tables, and refurnished it with all he could think of that was graceful and beautiful.

Mirrors, too, were everywhere along the bulk-heads, and these made the saloon look larger. The only wonder is that, in a lit of absent-mindedness, some one did not walk right through a mirror.

Hanging tables, beautiful crystal, brackets, and artificial flowers gave a look that was both lightsome and gay.

On the port side, when you touched a knob, a mirrored door opened into the captain's cabin—small but pretty, and lighted by an airy port that could be carried open in good weather, and all along in the trades.

The other state-room was larger. This Halcott had insisted upon Tandy taking; and it contained not only his own bunk, but a lower one for Nelda, and was better decorated and furnished than even the captain's.

"Oh, gaily goes the ship when the wind blows free."

And right gaily she had gone too, as yet.

Halcott was a splendid sailor and navigator. It might have been thought, however, that Tandy, from his long residence on shore, had turned a little rusty in his seamanship.

If he had, the rust had not taken long to rub off; and as he trod the ivory-white quarterdeck in his duck trousers, neat cap, and jacket of navy blue, he really looked ten years younger than in the days when he sailed the Merry Maiden up and down the canal.

The crew were well-dressed, and looked happy and jolly enough for anything.

I need hardly say that Nelda was the pet of the Sea Flower, fore and aft. There was no keeping the child to any one part of the ship. In fine weather—and, with the exception of a "howther" in the Bay, it had up till now been mostly fine—she was here, there, and everywhere: in the men's quarters; down below in the forecastle; at the forecastle-head itself, when the men leaned over the bows there, smoking, yarning, and laughing; and in the cook's galley, helping to make the soup. But she ventured even further than this, and more than once her father started to find her in the foretop, and standing beside her that tall, imperturbable Admiral.

The bird was pet number two; but Bob made an equal second.

At first the ’Ral was inclined to mope. Perhaps he was sea-sick. It is a well-known fact that if a Cape pigeon, as a certain gull is called, is taken on board, it can fly no more, but walks slowly and stupidly round the deck.

Sea-sickness had not troubled Bob in the slightest. When he saw the ’Ral standing in the lee-scuppers, with his neck hitched right round till the head lay right on the top of his tail, Bob looked at him comically with his head cocked funnily to one side.

Then he seemed to laugh right away down both sides, so to speak. Bob was a droll dog.

“My eyes, Admiral,” he said, “what a ridiculous figure you do cut, to be sure! Why, at first I couldn’t tell which was the one end of you and which was the other.”

“I don’t care what becomes of me,” the Admiral replied, talking over his tail. “It is a very ordinary world. I’ll never dance again.”

But, nevertheless, in three days’ time the Hal did dance, and so droll and comical were his capers on the heaving deck that the crew lay aft in a body and laughed till they nearly burst their belts. The Admiral took kindly to his meal-worms after that, and didn’t despise potted salmon and morsels of mutton.

Now it must not be supposed that the Sea Flower was going out in ballast, on the mere chance of filling up with gold. They might never see the Isle of Misfortune, and all their dreams of gold might yet turn out as dreams so often do.

Halcott and Tandy were good sailors, and but little likely to trust overmuch to blind chance. They took out with them, therefore, a good-paying cargo of knick-knacks and notions to barter with the natives along the coast of Africa. Having made a good voyage—and they knew they should—and having filled up with copal, nutmegs, arrowroot, spices, ivory, and perhaps even gold-dust and ostrich feathers from the far interior, they would stretch away out and over the broad Atlantic, and rounding the Horn, make search for the Isle of Misfortune, which they hoped to find an island of gold.

If unsuccessful, they should then bear up for the northern Pacific Islands, taking their chance of doing something with pearls or mother-of-pearl, and so on and away to San Francisco, where they were sure of a market, even if they wished to sell the Sea Flower herself.

But the best of sailors get disheartened far sooner in calms than even in tempests.

In the latter, one has all the excitement of a battle with the elements; in the former, one can but wait and think and long for the winds to blow.

"The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow followed free."

Yes; but although in the region of calms some ships seem to have luck, the Sea Flower had none.

"Down dropt the breeze, the sails dropt down,
'Twas sad as sad could be;
And they did speak only to break
The silence of the sea."

A week, a fortnight, nearly three weary weeks went past like this.

There was no singing now forward among the men. Even little Fitz the nigger, who generally was trolling a song, at times high over the roar of the wind, was silent now. So, too, was Ransey Tansey. He and Nelda had been before the life of the good ship. It seemed as if they should never be so again. Bob took to lying beside the man at the wheel. As far as the latter was concerned, there might just as well have been no man there at all. The sea all round was a sea of heaving oil. The waves were houses high—not long rollers, but a series of hills and valleys, in which the Sea Flower wallowed and tumbled; while the fierce heat of the sun caused the pitch to melt and bubble where the decks were not protected by an awning.

The motion of the good ship was far indeed from agreeable. Any seaman can walk easily even when half a gale of wind is roaring through the rigging. There is a method in the motion of a ship in such a sea-way. There is no method in the motion of a vessel in the doldrums; and when one puts one's foot down on the quarterdeck, or, rather, where it seemed to be a second before, it finds but empty space. The body lurches forward, and the deck swings up to receive it. A grasp at a stay or sheet alone can avert a fall.

In such a sea-way there is no longer any leeward or windward. The sails go flapping to and fro, however: they are making wind for themselves as the vessel rolls and tumbles; and if this wind carries her forward a few yards one minute, it hurls her back again the next.

No wonder Nelda often asked her father if the wind would never, never blow again, or whether it would be always, always like this.

No birds either, save now and then a migrant gull that floated lazily on a wave to rest, or perched on the fin of a basking shark.

So day after day passed wearily on, and you could not have told one day from the other. But when, at six o'clock, the sun hurriedly capped the great heaving waves with crimson, leaving the hollows in deepest purple shade, and soon after sank, then, in the gloaming that for a brief spell hung over the ocean, the stars came out; and very brightly did they shine, so that night was even more pleasant than day.

Banks of clouds sometimes lay along the horizon. By day they appeared like far-off, snow-capped, serrated mountains; at night they were dark, but lit up every few moments by flashes of lightning, which spread out behind them and revealed their form and shape.

No thunder ever followed this lightning; it brought no wind; nor did the clouds ever rise or bring a drop of rain.

Phantom lightning; phantom clouds!

There were times on nights like these when Ransey took his sister on deck to look at the sky, and wonder at the lightning and that strange mountain-range of clouds.

She was not afraid when Ransey was with her. But she would not have gone "upstairs," as she called it, with even the stewardess herself.

Ransey, I may mention, lived in the saloon with his father and the captain, the second and third mates having comfortable quarters in the midship decks.

A stewardess only was carried on the Sea Flower, and she acted in another capacity—that of maid to Nelda. A black girl she was, but clean, smart, and tidy and trim, full of merriment and good-nature. Her assistant was Fitz, and with him alone she deemed it her duty to be a little harsh now and then. Because Fitz wouldn't keep his place, so she said.

Poor Janeira, she always forgot she was a nigger herself, seeing so many white faces all around her. But when she looked into the little mirror that hung in her pantry, she used to go into fits of laughter at her face therein displayed. She was a funny girl.

Ransey used to take Nelda up on these nights, and hoist her on to the grating abaft the quarterdeck, and she would cling to his arm, while he held on to the bulwark.

Thus they would stand, silent and awed, for long minutes at a time.

Was there nothing to break the dread stillness? There was occasionally the flap of a sail, or a footstep forward; but no song from the men, no loud talking—they hardly cared to speak above a whisper. But more than once a plash was heard, and a great dark head would appear from the side of a billow, seen distinctly enough in the gleam of the starlight, then sink and disappear.

"Oh, the awful beast, 'Ansey! Can it climb up and swallow us?"

"No, dear silly, no."

But older people than Nelda have been frightened by such dread spectres appearing close to a ship at night while in the doldrums, and wiser heads than hers have been puzzled to account for them.

Are they sharks? No, no. Five times as large are they as any shark ever seen. Whales? No, again. A whale lives not under the water but on it.

In the ocean wild and wide, reader, we sailors find many a strange mystery, see many a fearsome sight at night we can neither describe nor explain. And if we talk of these when we come on shore, you landsmen look incredulous.

But after a time the child became accustomed to scenes like these. Indeed the sea by night appeared to have a kind of fascination for her.

In beholding it, she appeared to be looking through it into some strange land, the abode of the fairies and elves and mermaids with which her imagination had peopled it.

"Deep, deep down among the rocks," she would say to Ransey, "who lives there? Tell us, tell us."

Ransey had therefore to become the story-teller whether he would or not.

He spoke to her then of mermaid-land deep down below the dark, heaving ocean.

"Deep, deep, deep down, 'Ansey?"

“Very, very deep. You see only a glimmer of light below you as you sink and sink; and this light is greenish and clear, and the farther down you get the brighter and more beautiful does it become.”

“And you’re not drowned?”

“No! oh, no! not if you’re good. Well, then you come to—oh, ever so beautiful a country! The trees are all of sea-weed, and underneath them is the yellow, yellow sand; but here and there are beautiful rockeries, and beds of such bright and lovely flowers that they would dazzle your eyes to look upon. And the strange thing about these flowers is this, Babs, they are all alive.”

“All alive? My! and can they talk to you?”

“Yes, and sing too. A sailor man who had been there told me. And he said their voices were so low and sweet that you had to put your ear quite close down before you could hear and understand; for at a little distance, he said, it was just like the tinkling of tiny silver bells. The danger is in stopping too long, and being enchanted or slain.”

“Enchanted? Whatever is that, ’Ansey?”

“Oh, you stay so long listening that you feel like in a dream, and before you know what has happened you are a flower yourself; and then, though you can see and hear everything that goes on around you, you cannot move away from the rock you are growing on, and you never get back again out of the water.”

“Never, never, ’Ansey?”

“Never, never, Babs.”

“But in the deep, dark, beautiful woods that you come to and enter there is many a terrible monster living—horned, shelly, warty monsters. And they are all waiting to catch you.”

“Terrible, ’Ansey!”

“Are you afraid, dear?”

“Oh, no, ’Ansey! Be terrible some more.”

“Well, there is danger all around you now, for some of these monsters are quite hidden among the sand, with only one eye protruding, and this looks like a flower because it grows on a stalk. But when you go to look at it, suddenly the sandy ground gives way under you. You are caught and killed, and know no more.

“Some of these monsters, Nelda, live in caves, and if you go too near the entrance a great, long, skinny arm is thrust out, and you are dragged into the dark and devoured.”

“But I would turn quickly away out of that terrible wood, ’Ansey,” said Nelda.

“Yes, that is just what the sailor did.”

“And then he was saved?”

“Not yet. He came to a lovely wide patch of clear, hard sand, and he was looking down to admire it. He had taken up some to examine, and was pouring it from one hand into the other—for the sand was pure gold mixed with pearls and rubies—when all at once it began to get dark, and looking up he saw a creature that was nearly all one horrible, cruel, grinning head, with eight long arms round it. It stopped high up, just hovering, Nelda, like a hawk over a field. The sailor man was spell-bound. He could only stare up at it with starting eyes and utter a long, low, frightened moan. But from the creature above a tent was lowered, just like a huge bell, and he knew it would soon fall over him and he would be sucked up to the sea-demon’s body and slowly eaten alive.

“But at that very moment, sissie, the creature uttered a terribly wild and mournful cry, and darted off through the water, which was all just like ink now.”

“And the sailor was dead?”

“No; a voice that sounded like the sweetest music ever he had heard in his life was heard, and a hand grasped his.

“‘Quick, quick,’ she cried, for it was a mermaid, ‘I will lead you into safety. Stay but another moment here and you are doomed.’

“‘I’ll follow you to the end of the world, miss,’ said the gallant sailor.

“It did seem queer to call a mermaid miss, but Jack Reid couldn’t help it.

“‘You won’t have to follow so far,’ she said, with a sweet smile that put Jack’s heart all in a flutter.

“And in five minutes’ time they were out of danger, and there was Jack with his hat in his hand, which he had taken off for politeness’ sake, being led along by the most charming young lady he had ever clapped eyes on.

“‘Her beauty,’ he said to me, ‘was radiant, and her long yellow hair floated behind her in the water till I was ravished; on’y the wust of it was, that all below the waist wasn’t lady at all, but ling or some other kind of fish.’

“But Jack wouldn’t look at the ling part at all, only just at the mermaid’s face and hair and hands.

“However dark it might have been, you could have seen to read by the light of the diamonds around her brow and neck.

“They soon came to a rock of quartz and porphyry, and next minute Jack found himself in a hall of such dazzling delight that he had to rub his eyes and pinch himself hard to make sure he was not in a dream. This was the mermaids’ and sea-fairies’ great ballroom.

“Tier upon tier of galleries rose up towards the beautiful, star-studded ceiling, and every gallery was filled with beautiful ladies. Jack knew that they all ended in ling, but the tails could not be seen.

“There was light and loveliness everywhere, and flowers everywhere—”

“Go on, ’Ansey. Your story is better than the Revelations, better even than ‘Jack the Giant Killer.’”

“I must stop, siss, because even I don’t know much more, only that the music was so ravishing that Jack himself danced till he couldn’t dance a bit more.”

“And did he sit down?”

“No; he thought he would like a smoke, so he floated away down to the entrance to a cave at the far, far end.

“‘That must be the smoking-room,’ he thought to himself, so he pushed aside the curtain and floated boldly in.

“But lo and behold, this inner cave was filled with little shrivelled-up old men, uglier far in the face than toads.

“These, sissie, were the mermen, and they were all sitting on rough blocks of coral, which must have hurt them dreadful, nursing their tails. These mermen sat there swaying their yellow, wrinkled bodies back and fore, to and fro, but taking not the slightest notice of Jack. The sailor stood staring at them; and well he might, for whatever motion one made the others all made the same. If one lifted a skeleton hand to rub its bald head, every hand was raised, every bald head was rubbed; whichever way one swayed all the rest swayed; sometimes every blear eye was directed to the ceiling, or lowered towards their tails, as the case might be; and when one gaped and yawned they all gaped and yawned, and Jack told me that he had never seen such a set of ugly, toothless mouths in his life before.

“But as they wouldn’t speak, Jack Reid himself—and he was a very brave sailor, sissie—did speak.

“‘Ahoy, maties!’ he cried, ‘ye don’t seem an over-lively lot here, I must say, but has e’er a one o’ ye got sich a thing as a bit o’ baccy?’

“Jack told me, Babs, that when he made this speech he got a fearful fright. Every merman stood up straight on its stool, its skinny arms and claw-like hands held straight above its head, and a yell rang through the hall that Jack says is ringing in his ears till this day.

“‘Oh!’ he cried, ‘if that’s your little game, here’s for off.’

“Jack must have been glad enough to get back to the ballroom, but this was now deserted. No one was there at all except the lovely mermaid who had saved him from being devoured by the terrible devil-fish.

“She smiled upon him as sweetly as ever.

“‘I’m going to guide you,’ she said, ‘to the nursery grotto; it is time that all sailor boys went to by-by.’

“‘Go on, missie,’ Jack said, ‘go on, yer woice is sweeter far than the song of—of a Mother Carey’s chicken. Wot a lovely lady ye’d be, miss, if ye didn’t end in ling!’

“She smiled, and combed her hair with her long white fairy fingers as she glided on.

“‘Going to by-by am I? Well, the mum did used to call it that like, miss, but we grown-up sailor lads calls it a bunk or an ’ammock. Ain’t got ne’er a bit o’ baccy about ye, has ye, miss?’

“But the fairy mermaid only smiled.

“So soft and downy was the bed that Jack fell asleep singing low to himself—

“‘All in the downs the fleet was moored.’

“And that is the end of the story, siss.”

“Oh, no! What did he see when he woke up again?”

“Well, when he awoke in the morning, much to his amazement, he found himself in his own bed in his mother’s little cottage at home.

“He rubbed his eyes twice before he spoke.

“‘What! mother?’ he cried.

“‘Yes, it is your own old mother, dearie, and I’ve been sittin’ up with you, and sich nonsense you has been a-talkin’, surely.’

“‘I’m not a merman, or anything, am I, mother? I don’t end in ling, do I, mother?’

“‘No, Jack Reid, you end in two good strong legs; but strong as they are, my boy, they weren’t strong enough to keep you from tumbling down last night. O Jack, Jack!’”

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Nine.

Wonderful Adventures of the Dancing Crane.

Hardly had Ransey finished his story ere a bright flash of lightning lit up the ship from stem to stern—a flash that seemed to strike the top of every rolling wave and hiss in the hollows between; a flash that left the barque in Cimmerian though only momentary darkness, for hardly had the thunder that followed—deep, loud, and awful—commenced, ere flash succeeded flash, and the sea all around seemed an ocean of fire.

For a time little Nelda could not be prevailed upon to go below. She was indeed a child of the wilds, and a thunderstorm was one of her chief delights.

Ah! but this was going to be somewhat more than a thunderstorm.

“Hands, shorten sail! All hands on deck!” It was Tandy’s voice sounding through the speaking trumpet—ringing through it, I might say, and yet it scarce could be heard above the incessant crashing of the thunder.

The men came tumbling up, looking scared and frightened in the blue glare of the lightning.

“Away aloft! Bear a hand, my hearties! Get her snug, and we’ll splice the main-brace. Hurrah, lads! Nimbly does it!”

Swaying high up on the top-gallant yards they looked no bigger than rooks, and with every uncertain lurch and roll the yard-ends seemed almost to touch the water.

It was at this moment that the stewardess came staggering aft.

“Don’t go, ’Ansey—don’t go,” cried Nelda.

“Duty’s duty, dear, and it’s ‘all hands’ now.”

He saw her safely down the companion-way, and next minute he was swarming up the ratlines to his station. But he had to pause every few seconds and hang on to the rigging, with his back right over the water—hang on for dear life.

The sails were reefed, and some were got in, and not till the men had got down from aloft did the rain come on. For higher and higher had the clouds on the northern horizon banked up, till they covered all the sky.

So awful was the rain, and so blinding, that it was impossible to see ten yards ahead, or even to guess from which direction the storm would actually come.

The wind was already whirling in little eddies from end to end of the deck, but hardly yet did it affect the motion of the ship, or give her way in any one direction.

The men were ordered below in batches, to get into their oilskins, for right well Tandy knew that a fearful night had to be faced.

The men received their grog now, and well did they deserve it.

Another hand was put to the wheel (two men in all), and near them stood the bold mate Tandy, ready to give orders by signal or even by touch, should they fail to hear his voice. All around the deck the men were clinging to bulwark or stay.

Waiting for the inevitable!

Ah! now it came. The rain had ceased for a time. So heavy had it been that the waves themselves were levelled, and Tandy could now see a long line of white coming steadily up astern.

He thanked the God who rules on sea as well as on dry land that the squall was coming from that direction. Had it taken the good ship suddenly aback she might have gone down stern-foremost, even with the now limited spread of canvas that was on her.

As it was, the first mountain wave that hit the good barque sent her flying through the sea as if she had been but an empty match-box. That wave burst on board, however—pooped her, in fact—and went roaring forward, a sea of solid foaming water.

The good vessel shivered from stem to stern like a creature in the throes of death. For a few minutes only. Next minute she had shaken herself free, and was dashing through the water at a pace that only a yacht could have beaten.

The thunder now went rolling down to leeward, and the rain ceased, but the gale increased in force, and in a short time she had to be eased again, and now she was scudding along almost under bare poles. It would be hours before mate Tandy could get

below; but Ransey's watch was now off deck, so he went down to ask Janeira, the stewardess, if Nelda was in bed.

She was in bed most certainly, but through the half-open doorway she could hear Ransey's voice, and shouted to him.

"I fink, sah," Janeira said, "she am just one leetle bit afraid."

There was no doubt about that, and the questions with which she plied her brother, when he took a seat by her bunk to comfort her, were peculiar, to say the least.

"Daddy won't be down for a long, long time?"—that was one.

"The poor men, though, how many is drownded?"—another.

"The ship did go to the bottom though, didn't it, 'cause I heard the water all rush down?"—a third.

"You are quite, quite sure father isn't drownded? And you are sure no awful beasts have come up with long arms? Well, tell us some stories."

Nolens volens, Ransey had to. But Babs got drowsy at last, the white eyelids drooped and drooped till they finally closed; then Ransey went quietly away and turned into his hammock.

Young though he was, the heaviest sea-way could not frighten him, nor the stormiest wind that could blow. The sound of the wind as it went roaring through the rigging could only make him drowsy, and the ship herself would rock him to sleep. The barque was snug, too, and it was happiness itself to hear his father's footsteps, as he walked the quarterdeck, pausing now and then to give an order to the men at the wheel.

"Behaved like an angel all through, Halcott!" That was what Tandy told the skipper next morning at breakfast.

"I knew she would, Tandy. I'm proud of our Sea Flower, and, my friend, I'm just as proud of you. I'd have stopped on deck to lend a hand, but that wouldn't have done any good.

"Jane," he cried. Jane was the contraction for "Janeira."

"Iss, sah; I'se not fah off."

“Is there no toast this morning?”

“No, sah; Lord Fitzmantle he done go hab one incident dis mawnin’. He blingin’ de toast along, w’en all same one big wave struckee he and down he tumble, smash de plate, and lose all de toast foh true.”

“Oh, the naughty boy!” said Nelda, who was hurrying through her breakfast to go on deck to “see the sea,” as she expressed it.

“No, leetle Meess Tandy, Lord Fitzmantle he good boy neahly all de time. It was poorly an incident, meesie, for de big sea cut his legs clean off, and down he come.”

“Well, I’m sorry for Fitz,” said Nelda with a sigh; “I suppose it was only his sea-legs though. And I’m going to have mine to-day. I asked the carpenter, and he said he would make me some soon, and it wouldn’t be a bit sore putting them on.”

With varying fortunes the good ship Sea Flower sailed south and away, till at last the Cape of Good Hope was reached and rounded.

Here they experienced very heavy weather indeed, with terrible storms of thunder and lightning, and bigger seas than Tandy himself had ever seen before.

But by this time little Nelda was quite a sailor, and a greater favourite fore and aft than ever.

Sea-legs had, figuratively speaking, been served out to all the green hands. Nelda had a capital pair, and could use them well. Fitz had to make his old ones do another time; but Bob had received two pairs from Neptune, when he came aboard that starry still night when crossing the line. As for the Hal, it must be confessed that there wasn’t a pair in Neptune’s boat long enough to fit him. However, in ordinary weather he managed to run along the deck pretty easily, his jibboom, as the sailors called his neck, held straight out in front of him, and helping himself along with his wings.

Sometimes on the quarterdeck it would suddenly occur to the ’Ral that a step or two of a Highland schottische would help to make time pass more quickly and pleasantly. The ’Ral wasn’t a bird to spoil a good intention, so, with just one or two preliminary “scray—scrays” he would start.

Bother the deck though, and bother the heaving sea, for do what he would the bird could no longer dance with ease and grace; so he would soon give it up, and go and lean his

chin wearily over the lee bulwark, and thus, with his drooping wings, he did cut rather a ridiculous figure as seen from behind. He looked for all the world like some scraggy-legged little old man, who had got up in the morning and put nothing on except a ragged swallow-tailed coat.

The men liked the ’Ral though. He made them laugh, and was better than an extra glass of rum to them. So, as the bird seemed always rather wretched in dirty weather, the carpenter was solicited to make him some sort of shelter.

The carpenter consulted the sailmaker. The carpenter and sailmaker put their heads together. Something was sure to come of that.

“He’s sich an awkward shape, ye see,” said old Canvas.

“That’s true,” said Chips; “and he won’t truss hisself, as ye might call it.”

“No; if he’d on’y jest double up his legs, Chips, and close reef that jibboom o’ his, we might manage some’ow.”

“A kind o’ sentry-box would just be the thing, old Can.”

“Humph! yes. I wonder why the skipper didn’t bring a grandfather’s clock with ’im; that would suit the ’Ral all to pieces.”

But a sort of sentry-box, with a tarpaulin in front of it, was finally rigged up for the ’Ral, and placed just abaft the main-mast, to which it was lashed.

The ’Ral didn’t take to it quite kindly at first, but after studying it fore and aft he finally thought it would fit him nicely.

It would be protection from the sun on hot days, and when it blew a bit the men would draw down the tarpaulin, and he would be snug enough.

But in sunny weather it must be confessed that, solemnly standing there in his sentry-box, the Admiral did look a droll sight.

The ’Ral was a very early riser. He always turned out in time to go splashing about while the hands were washing decks, and although they often turned the hose on him he didn’t mind it a bit.

One very hot day, the poor ’Ral was observed standing pensively up against the capstan. His head was out of sight, thrust into one of the holes.

This was unusual, but the bird did so many droll things that, for an hour or more, nobody took much notice; but Ransey came round at last, carrying Babs, who was riding on his shoulders.

“Hillo!” cried Babs, “here’s the ’Ral with his head buried in a hole.”

“Which he stowed hisself away there, missie, more’n an hour ago,” said a seaman. “Afraid o’ gettin’ sunstroke, that’s my opinion.”

“Poor Hallie,” cried Babs, sympathisingly, “does your headie ache?”

The Admiral drew out his head, and looked at the child very mournfully indeed.

“He’s got some silent sorrow hevidently, I should say,” remarked another of the crew.

There was quite a little circle now around the capstan.

“Cheer up,” cried Ransey Tansey. “Come along and have a dance, ’Rallie.”

“I don’t feel like dancing to-day,” the crane replied, or appeared to reply. “Fact is, I don’t feel like moving at all.”

No wonder, poor bird; the truth is, he was glued to the deck with melted pitch.

What a job it was getting him clear too—or “easing him off,” as Chips called it.

But with the help of putty knives the ’Ral got free at last, though it took a deal of orange-peel to clean his poor feet. Then they were found to be so red and swollen that a hammock was slung for him forthwith atween decks, and the Admiral was laid at full length in it—his head on a pillow at one end, his feet away down at the other, his body covered with the carpenter’s lightest jacket.

Very funny he did appear stretched like that, but he himself appreciated, not the joke, but the comfort. He lay there for days, only getting up a little in the cool of the evening, if there was any cool in it.

Ransey fed him, and attended to his feet twice a day, so he was soon on deck again, as right as a trivet.

But the Admiral had learned a lesson, and ever after this, on hot days, to have seen the bird coming along the deck, you would have sworn he was playing at hop-Scotch, so careful was he to hop over the seams where the pitch was soft, his long neck bent down, and one eye curiously examining the planks.

Yes, the ’Ral was a caution, as old Canvas said.

But one of the bird’s drollest adventures occurred one day when the ship was lying becalmed in the Indian Ocean, or rather in the Mozambique Channel.

The Sea Flower was within a measurable distance of land; for though none was in sight, birds of the gull species flew around the ship, tack and half-tack, or floated lazily on the smooth surface of the sea.

The ’Ral slowly left his sentry-box, stretched his wings a bit, uttered a mild scray—scray—ay or two, then did a hop-Scotch till he got abreast of the man at the wheel. This particular sailor was somewhat of a dandy, and had a morsel of red silk handkerchief peeping prettily out from his jacket pocket.

The ’Ral eyed it curiously for a moment, then cleverly plucked it out and jumped away with it. He dropped it on a portion of the quarterdeck where the pitch was oozing, kicked it about with his feet to spread it out, as a man does with a handful of straw, and stood upon it.

“Well, I do call that cheek! My best silk handkerchief, too,” cried the man at the wheel.

The crane only looked at him wonderingly with one eye.

“You’ve no idea,” he told this man, “how soft and nice it feels. I—I—yes, I verily believe I shall dance. Craik—craik—cray—ay—y!”

And dance he did, Nelda and half the crew at least clapping their hands and cheering with delight.

The ’Ral was just in the very midst of his merriment, when the man, after giving the wheel an angry turn or two to port, made a dart to recover his favourite bandana. With such a rush did he come that the ’Ral took fright, and flew to the top of the bulwark. There was some oiled canvas here, and this was so hot that the bird had to keep lifting one foot and putting down the other all the time, just like a hen on a hot griddle.

“How delightfully sweet it must be up there,” he said to himself, gazing at the gulls that were screaming with joy as they swept round and round in the blue sky. “I think I’ll have a fly myself. Scray—ay!”

And greatly to every one’s astonishment away he flew high into the air.

Alarmed at first, the gulls soon regained courage, and made a daring attack on the ’Ral. But he speedily vanquished the foe, and one or two fell bleeding into the water.

A gull was perched on the back fin of a shark. The ’Ral flew down.

“It’s nice and snug you look,” said the ’Ral. “Get off at once, the king’s come. Get off, I say, or I’ll dig both your impudent eyes out.”

And next moment the Admiral was perched there, as coolly as if he had been used to riding on sharks ever since his babyhood.

But Nelda was in tears. She would never see the ’Ral again, and the awful beast would eat him, sea-legs and all. So a boat was called away to save him.

None too soon either. For the ’Ral had commenced to investigate that fin with his long beak. No respectable basking shark could be expected to stand that, so down he dived, leaving the bird screaming and swaying and scrambling on the top of the water. “Scray—scray—craik—craik—cray!”

But for the timely aid of the boat, the Admiral would have met with a terrible fate, for his screaming and struggling brought around him three sharks at least, all eager to find out what a long-legged bird like this tasted like.

Every fine day the crane now indulged himself in the pleasure of flight, but he never evinced the slightest inclination to perch again on the back of a basking shark. It wasn’t good enough, he would have told you, had you asked him. “As regards the backs of basking sharks,” he might have said, “I’m going to be a total abstainer.”

Up the east coast of Africa went the bonnie barque Sea Flower.

Tandy knew almost every yard of the ground he was now covering, and could pilot the vessel into creeks and over sand-banks or bars with very little danger indeed.

But still the coast here is so treacherous, and the sands and bottom change so frequently, that, night and day, men had to be in the chains heaving the lead.

The natives, also, across the line in Somaliland, are as treacherous as the coral rocks that guard their clay-built towns, and more treacherous than either are the semi-white, slave-dealing Arabs.

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Ten.

A Brush with the Somalis—the Derelict.

All along the Somali coast was Tandy's "chief market ground," as he called it. Here he knew he could drive precisely the kind of bargains he wished to make; and as for the Somalis, with their shields, spears, ugly broad knives, and grinning sinister faces, this bold seaman did not care anything. Nor for the Arabs either. He soon gave both to understand that he was a man of the wide, wide world, and was not afraid of any one.

He had come to trade and barter, he told the Arabs, and not to study their slave-hunting habits; so if they would deal, they had only to trot out their wares—he was ready. And if they didn't want to deal, there was no harm done. He even took Ransey with him sometimes, and once he took Nelda as well.

The savages just here were a bad, bloodthirsty lot, and he knew it, but he had with him five trusty men. Not armed—that is, not visibly so.

But on this particular day there was blood in those natives' eyes. Tall, lithe, and black-brown were they, their skins oiled and shining in the sun. But smiling. Oh, yes, these fiends will smile while they cut a white man's throat.

Every eye was fixed hungrily on the beautiful child. What a present she would be for a great chief who dwelt far away in the interior and high among the mountains!

The bartering went on as usual, but Tandy kept his weather eye lifting.

Leopards' skins, lions' skins and heads, ostrich feathers, gum-copal, ivory tusks, and gold-dust. The boat was already well filled, Nelda was on board, so was Tandy himself, and his crew, all save one man, who was just shoving her off when the rush was made. The prow of the boat was instantly seized, and the man thrown down.

Pop—pop—pop—pop—rang Tandy's revolver, and the yelling crowd grew thinner, and finally fled.

A spear or two was thrown, but these went wide of the mark.

Human blood looks ghastly on white coral sands, but was Tandy to blame?

Nelda was safe, and in his arms.

“O daddy,” she cried, kissing his weather-beaten face, “are we safe?”

“Yes, darling; but I mustn’t land here again.”

Salook was the village king here, a big, burly brute of an Arab, with a white, gilded turban and a yellow, greasy face beneath it. Tandy had known some of his tricks and manners in days gone by.

At sunset that very same evening Salook was surrounded by his warriors.

“Everything yonder,” he said in Swahili, as he pointed to the Sea Flower, “is yours. The little maiden shall be my slave. Get ready your boats, and sharpen your spears. Even were the ship a British man-of-war I’d board her.”

At sunset that evening Tandy was surrounded by his men, and pistols and cutlasses were served out to all.

“We’ll have trouble to-night, men,” he said, “as soon as the moon rises. If there was a breath of wind off-shore I’d slip. We can’t slip—but we’ll fight.”

A cheer rose from the seamen, which Tandy quickly suppressed.

“Hush! Let us make them believe we suspect no treachery. But get up steam in the donkey engine, and connect the pipes.”

This is a plan of defence that acts splendidly and effectively against all kinds and conditions of savages.

Boiling water on bare skins causes squirming, so Tandy felt safe.

The ship carried but one big gun, and this was now loaded with grape.

There wasn’t a sound of life to be heard on board the barque, when about seven bells that night a flood of moonlight, shining softly o’er the sea, revealed the dark boats of the Somalis speeding out to the attack.

But every man on board was at his station.

This was to be a fight to the very death, and all hands knew it.

Nearer and nearer they come—those demon boats. The biggest boat of all is leading, and, sword in hand, Salook stands in the prow. It is crowded with savages, their spear-heads glittering in the moonbeams. On this boat the gun is trained.

The rocks re-echo the crash five seconds after, but the echo is mingled with the yelling of the wounded and the drowning.

Ah! a right merry feast for the sharks, and Salook goes down with the bottomless boat.

The fight does not end with this advantage. Those Somalis are like fiends incarnate. Not even the rifles and revolvers can repel their attack. See, they swarm on the bulwarks round the bows, for the ship has swung head on to the shore with the out-flowing tide.

“Give it to them. The water now, boys. Warm them well!”

Oh, horror! The shrieking is too terrible to be described.

In their boats the unwounded try to reach the shore; but the rifles play on these, and they are quickly abandoned, for the Somalis can swim like eels.

“Now for loot, lads,” cries Tandy. “They began the row. Man and arm the boats.”

When the Sea Flower’s men landed on the white sands, led on by Tandy and Ransey, the conquest was easy. A few volleys secured victory, and the savages were driven to their crags and hills.

“Let us spoil the Egyptians,” said Tandy, “then we shall return and splice the main-brace.”

The loot obtained was far more valuable than the cargoes they had obtained by barter, and I need hardly say that the main-brace was spliced.

Towards morning the wind came puffing off the land. It ought to have died away at sunrise, but did not. So the Sea Flower soon made good her offing, and before long the land lay like a long blue cloud far away on the weather-beam.

The ship was reprovisioned at Zanzibar, and one or two sick hands were allowed to land to be attended to at the French hospital.

In less than a fortnight she once more set sail, and in two months' time, everything having gone well and cheerily, despite a storm or two, the Sea Flower was very far at sea indeed, steering south-west, and away towards the wild and stormy Cape Horn.

On going on deck one morning, Halcott found Tandy forward, glass in hand, steadying himself against the foremast, while he swept the sea ahead.

"Hallo! Tandy. Land, eh?"

"No, it isn't land, Halcott. A precious small island it would be. But we're a long way to the west'ard of the Tristan da Cunha, and won't see land again till we hail the Falklands. Have a squint, sir."

"What do you make of her, sir?" asked Tandy.

"Why, a ship; but she's a hulk, Tandy, a mere hulk or derelict."

"There might be some poor soul alive there notwithstanding."

"I agree with you. Suppose we overhaul her," said Halcott, "and set her on fire. She's a danger to commerce, anyhow, and I'll go myself, I think."

So the whaler was called away, and in a few minutes the boat was speeding over the water towards the dismantled ship, while the Sea Flower, with her foreyard aback, lay floating idly on the heaving sea.

It was early summer just than, in these regions—that is, December was well advanced, and the crew were looking forward to having a real good time of it when Christmas came.

Alas! little did they know what was before them, or how sad and terrible their Christmas would be.

"Pull easy for a bit, men," cried Halcott; "she is a floating horror! Easy, starboard! give way, port! We'll get the weather gauge on her, for she doesn't smell sweet."

Not a living creature was there to answer the hail given by Halcott. Abandoned she evidently had been by the survivors of her crew, for the starboard boats still hung from her davits, while the ports were gone, and at this side a rope ladder depended.

The boat-hook caught on; with strange misgivings Halcott scrambled on board followed by two men.

He staggered and almost fell against the bulwark, and no wonder, for the sight that met his eyes was indeed a fearful one.

On the lower deck was a great pile of wood, and near it stood a big can of petroleum. It was evident that the crew had intended firing the ship before leaving her, but had for some reason or other abandoned the idea.

Halcott, however, felt that he had a duty to perform, so he gave orders for the paraffin to be emptied over the pile and over the deck. As soon as this was done lighted matches were thrown down, and hardly had they time to regain the boat and push off, ere columns of dark smoke came spewing up the hatchways, followed high into the air by tongues and streams of fire.

Before noon the derelict sank spluttering into the summer sea, and only a few blackened timbers were left to mark the spot where she had gone down.

A few days after this the wind fell and fell, until it was a dead calm.

Once more the sea was like molten lead, and its surface glazed and glassy, but never a bird was to be seen, and for more than a week not a cloud was in the sky as big as a man's hand. Nor was the motion of the ship appreciable. By day the sun shone warm enough, but at night the stars far in the southern sky shone green and yellow through a strange, dry haze.

On Saturday night Tandy as usual gave orders to splice the main-brace. He, and Halcott also, loved the real old Saturday nights at sea, of the poet Dibdin's days. And hitherto, in fair weather or in foul, these had been kept up with truly British mirth and glee.

There was no rejoicing, however, on this particular evening, for two of the hands lay prostrate on deck. Halcott himself ministered to them, sailor fashion. First he got them placed in hammocks swung under a screen-berth on deck. This was for the sake of the fresh air, and herein he showed his wisdom.

Then he took a camp-stool and sat down near them to consider their symptoms. But these puzzled him; for while one complained of fierce heat, with headache, and his eyes were glazed and sparkling, the other was shivering and blue with cold. He had no pain except cramps in his legs and back, which caused him an agony so acute that he screamed aloud every time they came on.

Halcott went aft to study. He studied best when walking on his quarterdeck. Hardly knowing what he did, he picked up a bone that honest Bob had been dining off, and threw it into the sea. There was still light enough to see, and the man at the wheel looked languidly astern. When three monster sharks dived, nose on, towards the bone, he looked up into the captain's face.

"Seen them before?" said Halcott, who was himself superstitious.

"Bless ye, yes, sir. It's just four days since they began to keep watch, and there they be again. Ah, sir! it ain't ham-bones they's a-lookin' arter. They'll soon get the kind o' meat they likes best."

"What mean you, Durdley?"

"I means the chaps you 'as in the 'ammocks. Listen, sir. There's no deceivin' Jim Durdley. We've got the plague aboard! I've been shipmate with she afore to-day."

Halcott staggered as if shot.

"Heaven forbid!" he exclaimed.

No one on board cared much for this man Durdley. Nor is this to be wondered at. In his own mess he was quarrelsome to a degree. Poor little Fitz fled when he came near him, and many a brutal blow he received, which at times caused fierce fights, for every one fore and aft loved the nigger boy.

Durdley was almost always boding ill. His only friends were the foreigners of the crew, men that to make a complement of five-and-twenty Tandy had hired in a hurry.

Mostly Finns they were, and bad at that, and if there was ever any grumbling to be done on board the Sea Flower these were the fellows to begin it.

Halcott recovered himself quickly, gave just one glance at Durdley's dark, forbidding countenance—the man was really ugly enough to stop a church clock—and went below.

He met Tandy at the saloon door, and told him his worst fears.

Alas! these fears were fated to be realised all too soon.

The men now stricken down were those who had boarded the derelict with Halcott. One died next evening, and was lashed in his hammock and dropped over the bows a few hours afterwards.

No doubt, seeing his fellow taken away, the other, who was one of the best of the crew, lost heart.

“I’m dying, sir,” he told Halcott. “No use swallowing physic, the others’ll want it soon.”

By-and-by he began to rave. He was on board ship no longer, but walking through the meadows and fields far away in England with his sister by his side.

“I’ll help you over the old-fashioned stile,” Fitz, who was nursing him, heard him say—“yes, the old-fashioned stile, Lizzie. Oh, don’t I love it! And we’ll walk up and away through the corn-field, by the little, winding path, to the churchyard where mother sleeps. Look, look at the crimson poppies, dear siss. How bonnie they are among the green. Ah-h!”

That was a scream which frightened poor Fitz.

“Go not there, sister. See, see, the monster has killed her! Ah, me!”

Fitz rushed aft to seek for assistance, for the captain had told him to call him if Corrie got worse.

Alas! when the two returned together, Corrie’s hammock was empty.

No one had heard even a plash, so gently had he lowered himself over the side, and sunk to rise no more.

The Island of Gold Volume II by William Gordon Stables

Chapter Eleven.

Mutiny on Board—Far to the South'ard.

"Nothing certain at sea except the unexpected." The truth of this was sadly exemplified by the terrible calamity which had befallen the Sea Flower—and befallen her so suddenly, too!

Only one week ago she was sailing over a rippling sea on the wings of a favouring breeze, every wavelet dancing joyously in the sunlight. On board, whether fore or aft, there was nothing but hope, happiness, and contentment. Till—

"The angel of death spread his wings on the blast."

Now all is terror and gloom—a gloom and a terror that have struck deep into the heart of every one who knows what death and sorrow mean.

A breeze has sprung up at last, and both Halcott and Tandy have reluctantly come to the conclusion that it will be better to steer for colder weather. So southward the Sea Flower flies, under every stitch of canvas, with studding-sails low and aloft. Shall the plague be stayed? Heaven alone can tell!

As it is, the depression hangs like a dark, foreboding cloud over the ship.

No one cares to talk much by day or by night. The men sit silently at their meals, with lowered brows and frightened looks. They eye each other askance; they know not who may be the next. They even avoid each other as much as possible while walking the decks. Hardly will a man volunteer to nurse the sick. The hammocks containing these hang on the lee side, and the crew keep far away indeed.

But they smoke from morn till night.

Halcott himself and little Fitz are the only nurses, and both are worn out for want of rest. With their own hands they sew up the hammock of the dead, unhook it, lift the gruesome burden on to the top of the bulwark, and, while the captain with uncovered

head raises his eyes to heaven and utters a prayer, the body is committed to the deep, to be torn in pieces next minute by the tigers of the sea.

Poor little Nelda! She is as merry as ever, playing with Bob or the ’Ral on the quarterdeck, and it is strange, in this ship of death, to hear her musical voice raised in song or laughter in the midst of silence and gloom!

No wonder that, hearing this, the delirious or the dying fancy themselves back once more in their village homes in England.

Nelda wonders why the captain, who used to romp and play with her, tries all he can now to avoid her; and why little Fitz, the curious, round-faced, laughing, black boy, with the two rows of alabaster teeth, never comes aft.

Halcott himself never goes below either. He insists upon taking his meals on deck. Nor will he permit Tandy or Ransey to come forward. If he can, he means to confine the awful plague to the fore part of the ship.

They say that in a case of this kind it is always the good who go first. In this instance the adage spoke truly.

Terrible to say, in less than a fortnight no less than thirteen fell victims to the scourge. But still more, more awful, the crew now became mutinous.

Luckily, all arms, and ammunition as well, were safely stored aft.

Durdley was chief mutineer—chief scoundrel! Out of the fourteen men left alive, only four were true to the captain, the others were ready to follow Durdley.

This fellow became a demon now—a demon in command of demons; for they had found some grog which had been in charge of the second mate—who was dead—and excited themselves into fury with it.

Durdley, the dark and ugly man, rushed to the screen-berth where Halcott was trying to ease the sufferings of a poor dying man.

He was as white as a ghost; even his lips were pale.

Beware of men, reader, who get white when angry. They are dangerous!

“Here, Halcott,” cried Durdley, “drop your confounded mummery, and listen to me. Lay aft here, my merry men, lay aft.”

Nine men, chiefly Finns and other foreigners, armed with ugly knives and iron marlinespikes, quickly stationed themselves behind him.

“Now, Halcott, your game’s up. You brought this plague into the ship yourself. By rights you should die. But I depose you. I am captain now, and my brave boys will obey me, and me alone.

“You hear?” he shouted, for Halcott stood a few paces from him, calmly looking him in the face.

“I hear.”

“Then, cusses on you, why don’t ye speak? You’ll be allowed to live, I say, both you and Tandy, on one condition.”

“And that is—?”

“That you alter your course, and steer straight away to the nearest land—the Falkland Isles—at once.”

“I refuse. Back, you mutinous dog! back! I say. Would you dare to stab your captain? Your blood be,”—here the captain’s revolver rang sharp and clear, and Durdley fell to the deck—“on your own cowardly head.”

There was a wild yell and a rush now, and though the captain fired again and again, he was speedily overpowered.

The revolver was snatched from his hand, and he was borne down by force of numbers.

But assistance was at hand.

“Now, lads, give it to them! Hurrah!”

It was Tandy himself, with the four good men and true, who had run aft between decks to inform the mate of the mutiny.

All were armed with rifles, but these they only clubbed. So fiercely did they fight, that the mutineers speedily dropped their knives and iron marline-spikes, and were driven below, yelling for mercy like the cowards they were.

The captain, though bruised, was otherwise intact. Nor was Durdley dead, though he had lost much blood from a wound—the revolver bullet having crashed through the arm above the elbow, and through the outside of the chest as well. But two Finns lay stark and stiff beside the winch.

Even to tragedy there is always a ridiculous side or aspect, and on the present occasion this was afforded by the strange behaviour of Bob and the Admiral during the terrible mêlée. It is not to be supposed that Bob would be far away from his master when danger threatened him.

Seeing Ransey Tansey, rifle in hand, follow his father to join in repelling the mutineers, it occurred to him at once that two might be of some assistance. It did not take the faithful tyke a moment to make up his mind, but he thought he might be of more use behind the mutineers than in front of them. So he outflanked the whole fighting party, and the attack he made upon the rear of Durdley's following was very effective.

The 'Ral could not fight, it is true, but his excitement during the battle was extreme. Round and round the deck he ran or flew, with his head and neck straight out in front of him, and his screams of terror and anger added considerably to the clamour and din going on forward. The poor bird really seemed to know that men were being killed, and seeing his master engaged, he would fain have helped him had he been able.

Of the ten men then who had mutinied three were wounded, including the ringleader, two were dead, and the remaining five were now taken on deck and roped securely alongside the winch to await their sentence. The deck was quickly cleared of the dead, and all evidences of the recent struggle were removed.

Durdley resembled nothing more nearly than a captured bird of prey. He was stern, silent, grim, and vindictive. Had he not been utterly prostrate and powerless, he would have sprung like a catamount at the throats of the very men who were dressing his wounds, and these were Tandy and Halcott himself.

Yet it was evident that he was not receiving the treatment he had expected, nor that which he would have dealt out to Halcott had he fallen into his hands.

“Why don’t you throw me overboard?” he growled at last, with a fearful oath. “Sharks are the best surgeons; their work is soon over. I’d have served you so, if my lily-livered scoundrels had only fought a trifle better, hang them!

“Ay, and you too, Mr Tandy, with your solemn face, if you hadn’t consented to take us straight to land!”

“Keep your mind easy,” said Halcott, quietly. “I’ll get rid of you as soon as possible, you may be well sure.”

“Do your worst—I defy you. But if that worst isn’t death, I’ll bide my time. I’d rather die three times over than lie here like a half-stuck pig.”

During the fight little Nelda was in terrible distress, and, but for Janeira, she would doubtless have rushed forward, as she wanted to do, in order to “help daddy and ’Ansey.”

Bob was the first to bring her tidings of the victory.

He came aft at full gallop, almost threw himself down the companion-way, and next moment was licking the child’s tear-bedewed cheeks.

She could see joy in the poor dog’s face. He was full of it, and trying as much as ever dog did try to talk. Perhaps he never fully realised till now how awkward it is for a doggie to want a tail. But he did what he could, nevertheless, with the morsel of fag-end he had.

“Don’t cry, little mistress,” he was trying hard to say, “don’t cry. It’s all right now. And it was such fun to see them fighting, and I fought too. Oh, didn’t I bite and tear the rascals just.”

Even the ’Ral seemed to know that the danger was past and gone for a time, and nothing would suffice to allay his feelings save executing a kind of wild jig right on the top of the skylight—a thing he had never done before.

But although quieted now, Nelda was not quite content, till down rushed Ransey Tansey himself. With a joyful cry she flew to his arms, and he did all he could to reassure her; so successfully, too, that presently she was her happy little self once more, playing with Bob on the quarterdeck, as if nothing had happened. Blissful childhood.

The condition of affairs, after the ship had penetrated into the regions of ice and snow, was not an enviable one, although there was now a rent in the dark cloud that hovered over the Sea Flower—a lull in the terrible storm.

Durdley was progressing favourably, and making so rapid a recovery that, in case he might cause more mischief, he was put in irons. But the other wounded men, probably owing to their weak condition, had died.

The five others were allowed to go on duty. Halcott refused to accept their offered promise to behave leal and true. What is a promise, even on oath, from such bloodthirsty villains as these?

“I do not wish either promise or apology,” he told them plainly. “Your conduct from this date will in some measure determine what your future punishment may be. Remember this, we do not trust you. The four good Englishmen, who fought for myself and mate, are all armed, and have orders to shoot you down without one moment’s grace if they observe a suspicious movement on your part, or hear one single mutinous word. There! go.”

The ship’s course was altered now, and all sail made to round Cape Horn.

No doubt the cold had been the means of eradicating the dreadful plague. Yet Halcott was a man whom no half-measures would satisfy.

There was plenty of clothing on board, so a new suit was served out to every seaman, the old being thrown overboard. Then the bedding and hammocks were scoured, and when dry fumigated. Sulphur was burned between decks, and hatches battened down for a whole day. Every portion of the woodwork was afterwards scrubbed, and even the masts were scraped. This work was given to the mutineers, and a cold job it was. The men sat each one in the bight of a rope, and were lowered up or down when they gave the signal.

Halcott was very far indeed from being vindictive, but long experience had taught him that mutinous intentions are seldom carried out if active occupation be found for body and mind.

“I breathe more freely now,” said the captain, as Tandy and he walked briskly up and down the quarterdeck.

“Heigho!” said Tandy, “we no doubt have sinned—we certainly have suffered. But,” he added, “I thank God, Halcott, from my inmost soul, first that you are spared, and

secondly, that my little innocent child here and my brave boy Ransey Tansey are still alive and happy."

"Amen! And now, Tandy, we've got to pray for fine weather. We are rather underhanded—those wretched Finns may break out again at any moment. They will, too, if not carefully watched."

"You have a kinder heart than I have, Halcott, else you'd have made that scoundrel Durdley walk the plank, and hanged the rest at the yardarm, one by one."

"The worst use you can put a man to is to hang him," said Halcott, laughing.

"But will you care to land on the island we are in search of, with these fellows?" asked Tandy. "Mind," he added, before Halcott could answer, "I take no small blame to myself for having engaged such scoundrels. Want of time was no excuse for me. Better to have sacrificed a month than sail as shipmates with such demons as these."

"Keep your mind easy, my dear friend; I'll get rid of them, by hook or by crook, before we reach our island."

"It relieves me to hear you say so, but indeed, Halcott, 'twixt hook and crook, if I had my way, I should choose the crook. I'd give the beggars a bag of biscuit and a barrel of pork, and maroon them on the first desert island we come in sight of."

I do not know that Halcott paid much attention to the latter part of Tandy's speech. He was at this moment looking uneasily at a bank of dark, rock-like clouds that was rising slowly up to the north and east.

"Have you noticed the glass lately, Tandy?" he said quietly.

"I'll jump down and see it now."

"Why," he said, on returning, "it is going tumbling down. I'll shorten sail at once. We're going to have it out of that quarter."

There was little time to lose, for the wind was already blowing over the cold, dark sea in little uncertain puffs and squalls. Between each there was a lull; yet each, when it did come, lasted longer and blew stronger than those that had preceded it.

The barque was snug at last. Very little sail indeed was left on her; only just enough to steer by and a bit over, lest a sail or two should be carried away.

Of the four trustworthy men, one was Chips the carpenter, the other old Canvas the sailmaker. The latter kept a watch, the former had been placed in Tandy's.

It was hard times now with all. Watch and watch is bad enough in temperate zones, but here, with the temperature far below freezing-point, and dropping lower and lower every hour, with darkness and storm coming down upon them, and the dangers of the ice to be encountered, it was doubly, trebly hard.

It takes a deal to damp the courage of a true British sailor, however, and strange as it may seem, that very courage seems to rise to the occasion, be that occasion what it may. But now, to quote the wondrous words of Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner—"

... "The storm-blast came, and he
Was tyrannous and strong;
He struck with his o'ertaking wings,
And chased us south along.

"With sloping masts and dipping prow.
As who pursued with yell and blow
Still treads the shadow of his foe,
And forward bends his head.
The ship drove fast, loud roared the blast,
And southward ay we fled.

"And now there came both mist and snow,
And it grew wondrous cold;
And ice, mast-high, came floating by,
As green as emerald.

"And through the drifts the snowy clifts
Did send a dismal sheen:
* * * * *.

"The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a swound!"

Yes, the good barque Sea Flower was driven far, far to the southward, far, far from her course; but happily, before they reached the icy barrier, the wind had gone down, so that the terrible noises in the main pack which the poet so graphically describes had few terrors for them.

The wind fell, and went veering round, till it blew fair from the east. A very gentle wind, however, and hardly did the barque make five knots an hour on her backward track.

Others might be impatient, but there was no such thing as impatience about Nelda, and little about Ransey Tansey either. Everything they saw or passed was as fresh and new to them as if they were sailing through a sea of enchantment.

The cold affected neither. They were dressed to withstand it. The keen, frosty air was bracing rather than otherwise, and warm blood circulated more quickly through every vein as they trod the decks together. How strange, how weird-like at times were the snow-clad icebergs they often saw, their sides glittering and gleaming in the sunshine with every colour of the rainbow, and how black was the sea that lay between!

The smaller pieces through which the ship had often to steer were of every shape and size, all white, and some of them acting as rafts for seals asleep thereon—seals that were drifting, drifting away they knew not, cared not whither.

Sometimes a great sea-elephant would raise his noble head and gaze curiously at the passing barque, then dive and be seen no more. Shoals of whales of a small species afforded our little seafarers great delight to watch. But these went slowly on their way, dipping and ploughing, and looking neither to the right hand nor to the left. The porpoises were still more interesting, for they seemed to live but to romp and play and chase each other, sometimes jumping right out of the water, so that it is no wonder Nelda imagined they were playing at leap-frog. Nelda, when told that these were schools of porpoises, said,—

"Oh, well, and school is just let out, I suppose; no wonder they are happy. And the big whales are their mothers! They are not happy because they are all going to church, quiet and 'spectable like."

The myriads of birds seen everywhere it would be impossible here to describe. Suffice it to say that they afforded Nelda great delight.

Bob was as merry as ever; but when one day the 'Ral walked solemnly aft wearing a pair of canvas stockings right up as far as his thighs, both Tandy and Halcott joined with the youngsters in a roar of hearty laughter. There was no more dance in that droll bird, and

wouldn't be for many a long day. "A sail in sight, sah! A steamer, sah!" It was little Fritz who reported it from the mast-head one morning, some time after the Sea Flower had regained her course, had doubled the Cape, and was steering north-west by west.

The stranger lay to on observing a flag of distress hoisted, and soon a boat was seen coming rapidly on towards the Sea Flower.

The steamer was the Dun Avon, homeward-bound from San Francisco, with passengers and cargo.

The captain himself boarded her with one of his men, and to him was related the whole sad story as we know it. "We have a clean bill of health now though," added Halcott; "but we are short-handed—one man in irons, and five more that we cannot trust."

"Well," said the steamer captain, "I cannot relieve you of your black hats, but I'll tell you what I can do: I shall let you have four good hands if they'll volunteer, and if you'll pay them well. And I should advise you to set your mutineers on shore at the entrance to the Strait of Magellan, and let them take their chance. You're not compelled to voyage with mutineers, and risk the safety of yourselves and your ship. Now write your letters home, for my time is rather short."

The four new hands were four hearties, as hard as a mainstay, as brown as bricks, and with merry faces that did one's heart good to behold.

Was it marooning, I wonder? Well, it doesn't matter a great deal, but just ten days after this the mutineers were landed, bag and baggage, on the north cape of Desolation Island, not far from the route through the far-famed strait. With them were left provisions for six weeks, guns, ammunition, and tools.

I never heard what became of them. If they were picked up by some passing ship, it was more than they deserved.

"At last," said Halcott, when the boat returned—"at last, friend Tandy, an incubus is lifted off my mind, and now let us make—

"All Sail for the Island of Gold."