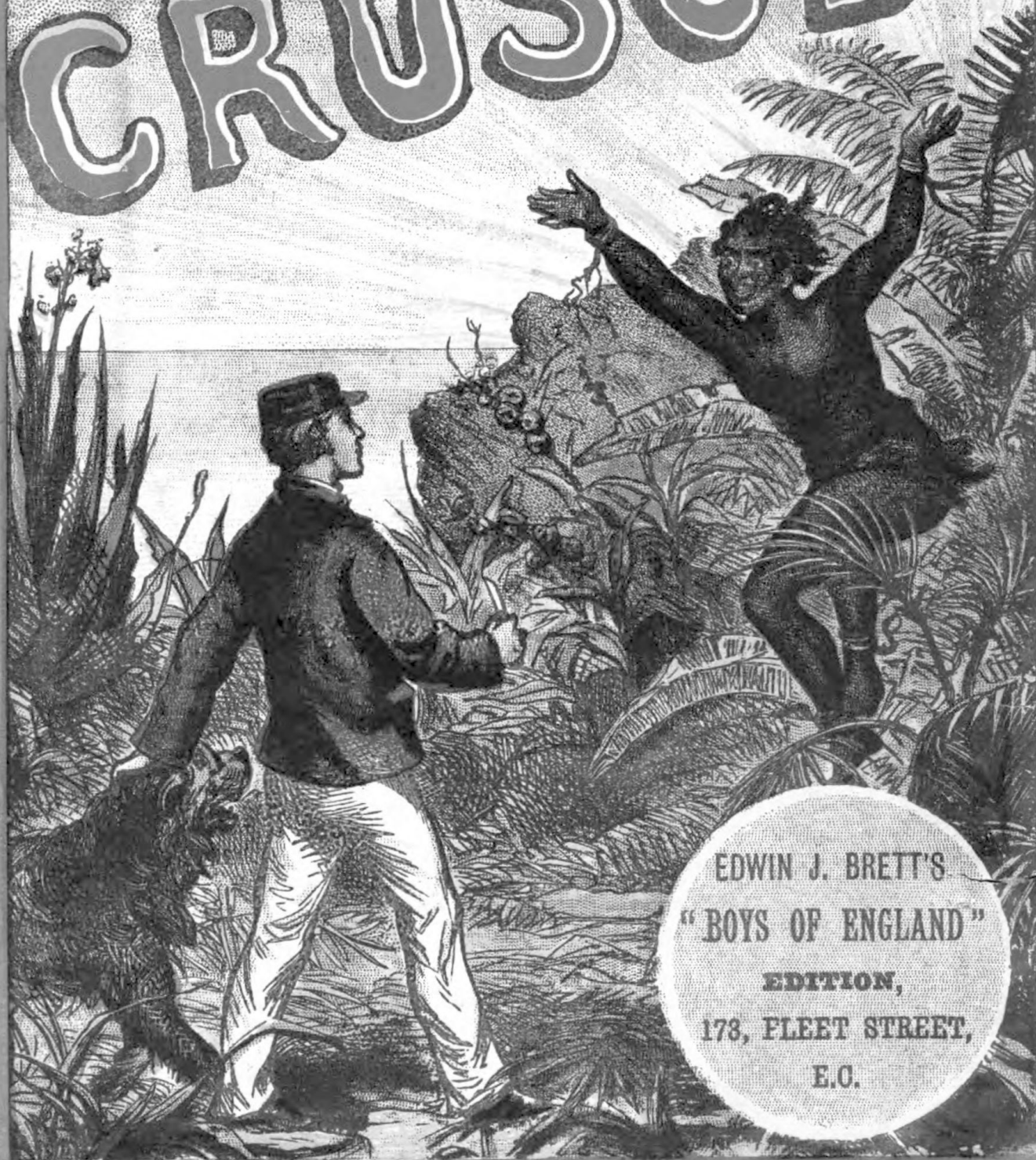
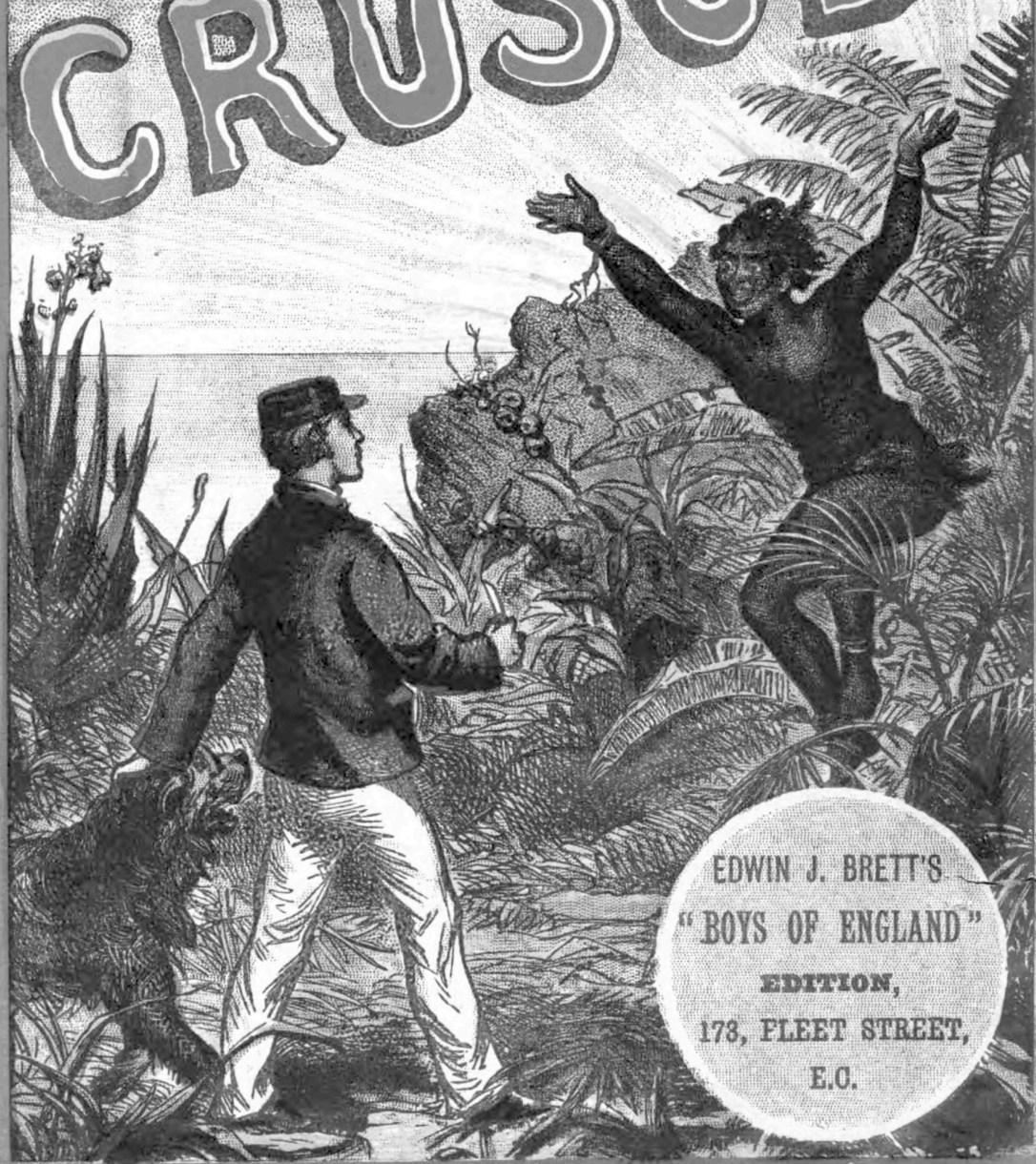


THREE BOY CRUSOES



EDWIN J. BRETT'S
"BOYS OF ENGLAND"
EDITION,
178, FLEET STREET,
E.C.

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**Three
Boy Crusoes;**

or,

Perseverance & Indolence.

by

Percy B. St. John

BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED.

COMPLETE.

LONDON:

HARKAWAY HOUSE, 6, WEST HARDING STREET,
FETTER LANE, FLEET STREET, E.C.,
AND ALL BOOKSELLERS.

CHAPTER I.

GEORGE MERRIDEW LEAVES HIS NATIVE VILLAGE— THE ›VIXEN.‹



Well nurse, I've come to say good-bye. The waggon's almost ready.«

The speaker was a youth of fifteen, with a bright, handsome, English face, and gentlemanly bearing, and whistling to a splendid retriever which trotted at his heels, he approached the rose-clustered porch, where a clean tidy old woman had stood for the last ten minutes watching for him, her eyes shaded by her withered hand.

»Lor', Lor', Master George, we're really to lose you, then?«

»Yes, nurse, for a time; I'm off to sea to make my fortune.«

»Heaven grant you may, Master George; it makes my heart ache, it do, to think that your dear dead father, one of the richest gentlemen about here, should have left you, my boy, so poor.«

»It was not dear father's fault, nurse, but those thieving bank directors. They fled with their ill-gotten gains, you know, but he—he remained and paid his creditors every penny, Heaven bless him! It's better to be poor and honest than rich and dishonest.«

»It does my heart good to hear you say that, Master George. Lor', but your mother must have found it hard to part with you. Her only son; and she left alone.«

»Don't say that, nurse,« said the boy, with trembling lips as he dashed his hand across his eyes, »I can't bear it. It's for her sake I go. I want to make a fortune for her, and,« resolutely stamping his foot, I will.«

»That's right, Master George, when a young man speaks like that, he succeeds. It's only them as is all shivery shaky with doubt as don't. But be careful my boy there's many black sheep in the world with bright outsides. Don't 'ee be led by 'em, child. Think always o' the prayers you've said at your mother's knee.«

»I will, nurse. If I forget, this, her last and most valued present,« replied the lad, showing a small testament, »shall remind me.«

»Eh, eh, dear; let that book be your guide and you'll never go wrong,«

»They are the very words my mother said, nurse; don't fear I'll forget them. You'll go up often when I'm gone and comfort her«

»That will I. And sure are you going to take the dog to sea, too.«

»That I am. We two could not be parted, eh, Faith, old fellow?«

The dog springing up put his paws on his young master and showed by his bright Intelligent eyes that he understood every word.

»The waggin be ready, Master George,« broke in the voice of the waggoner.

»And so am I,« answered the lad. »Goodbye, nurse. Don't forget mother; she shall read you all my letters, and I'll bring you home a parrot from Brazil.«

For response the old woman threw her arms round the handsome boy, and kissed him heartily.

Then he broke away and ran to the waggon, the good dog, Faith, barking at his heels.

»Good-bye, Mr. Clapshaw,« he said extending his hand to a respectable man standing by.

»Good-bye and God bless you, Master George, for a noble-hearted boy! I only hope you may make a fortune quick enough for me to be your steward, as I was to your father.«

The youth laughed gaily as he sprang with Faith into the waggon.

The waggoner cracked his whip,

Hands were waved.

»Good-bye, good-bye!« cried the young sailor.

Then the stout horse started off down the dusty road, and George Merridew had commenced life in earnest.

George and Dick, the old waggoner, were old friends, so the four hours the waggon took to reach the large town where the young sailor was to take rail for London, passed cheerfully enough.

The lad told of all the wonders he expected to see both on land and ocean, to which Dick and Faith listened, the man with open mouth, the

dog with a self-satisfied wag of his silky tail, as if he were condescendingly remarking —

»And I'm going to see all these wonders, too—the whales, the dolphins, the coral caves, the monkeys, the parrots, and the birds without wings, only I can't speak about it.«

As they neared the large manufacturing town, over which the factorics' smoke hung in a black cloud, a gentleman rode by.

As he did so he cast a dark scowl at the boy and Dick.

»There goes, Master Garge,« remarked the waggoner, viciously cracking his whip, »the greatest rogue unhung, and your worst enemy. That is my opinion.«

»Mine? Who is he, Dick?«

»Mr. Harmon, the managing man of him as has got 6ir John Randall's property, which ought to have been yours.«

»How's that, Dick?«

»What ain't they ever told you, Master Garge?«

»I heard that my father hoped that Sir John would leave him some money, but he didn't.«

»That's it. Bir John liked your father a'most as a son, but because your father mistrusted that there Harmon of not dealing honest, sir John had a big quarrel with Mr. Merridew and for long they didn't speak, you see.«

»Yes I've heard that. Well?«

»Well, when the bank went to smash, and your father ruined himself to pay his creditors the barrenit vowed he was a brave and honest man. and he'd leave him everythink.«

»Yes, Dick, but Sir John died without a will.«

»So they said, Master Garge, but I don't believe it. It's my idea that Mr. Harmon knows more nor people think about it. If your father had been believed, that thieving chap 'ud have got the sack, now he rules as master.«

»Oh Dick, we've no right to judge anyone unjustly, But to whom did Sir John's property go?«

Before the waggoner could answer a carriage came at a quick pace down the road, and he had to run to his horse's head.

Soon after they entered the town, the streets of which were full of factory hands.

Dick put up his waggon at the inn, and shouldering »Master George's« luggage, went with him to the railway station.

They were only just in time, for the engine was already getting up its steam.

The waggoner surrendered the luggage to the porter, then saw the young middy into a carriage which chanced to be empty.

The train began to vibrate.

The whistle shrieked.

There was a final hand shake.

»Take my love, dear old Dick, to all at Amblemere,« said the lad, with a break in his voice.

»That wool I. Heaven bless you, Master Garge, and bring you safe back,« cried the waggoner, and his eyes were dim as the train sped from him.

Ah Dick, if you had only known what »Master Garge« would go through before you looked on his bonnie face again, your cheek would have paled and your honest heart stood still with terror.

As the train whirled away, and this last familiar face passed from him, a temporary sense of depression and loneliness seized the lad.

He thought of his mother at home.

Of dear, pretty Amblemere, where with rod and gun he had spent so many happy days.

Then he thought of the vast big world before him.

He felt lonely and covered his face.

He was aroused by a tap on his shoulder.

It was Faith.

His front paws on the seat, his large brown eyes were fixed on his master with grave reproach.

»Dear Faith,« cried George throwing his arm round him, »you are right, I'm not alone while I have you.«

The dog, dropping on his four legs, frisked about in approval.

Then sitting down before a wicker basket, emitted a series of short barks,

»Right again,« laughed George; »I, too, think it high time for dinner.«

And opening the basket, packed with a fond mother's care, the two friends were soon making a hearty meal.

It was near evening when the train reached London, which city George Merridew thought remarkably dark and dirty, a circumstance that may be accounted for by his being landed at the East India Docks.

Procuring a man to take his luggage, he proceeded at once on board.

The ›Vixen‹ was a finely built merchantman of many tons and quite seaworthy.

George, who had climbed on deck, was wondering, as he looked at her graceful masts, tapering into the evening sky, however he should get to know the names of all the ropes, when a gruff voice fell on his ear.

»Now, youngster, if you don't want to break that fine nose of your'n over that there coil o' rope, you'd better leave off star gazing.«

»P'raps he's looking for the man in the moon,« said a more youthful voice.

George brought his eyes to the deck, and saw a short, thick set, bearded sailor before him.

»Isn't this the ›Vixen‹?« asked George quietly,

»It be, and a ›Vixen‹ she proves when frontin' a squall, I can tell you.«

»I have come to join her. Is the captain on board?« said George, civilly, but with dignity.

»We shall, I am sure, be proud of your honour's company,« remarked the tar, with a scrape, and pull at his forelock, though his features were on the broad grin. »No, the cap'en ain't on board; however if he'd only knowed your honour was coming, he'd 'ave put off the most partik'ler engagement to have met you. But there's the first mate, if yon'd condescend to speak to him.«

George knew the tar was quizzing him, without the burst of laughter from aft.

But he merely advanced to the first mate, thinking if he didn't get into worse difficulties than a joke or two at his expense, he should be lucky.

»Well, boy, who are you?« asked the mate, who was standing near the wheel,

»George Merridew, Sir.«

»Oh, I remember; you've come on board-and but just in time, We heave anchor at midnight, with the tide. Well,better late than never. What's that creature?«

»My dog, sir. Captain Atkins said, as there were no animals on board, I might bring it.«

»Hum! I don't see the necessity of other animals than sheep or bullocks; but if the captain said so, it's all right. Milward, just see this lad below, and show him his hammock.«

The sailor who had accosted George at first, advanced, and with mock respect, when out of the mate's sight, led the middy below.

Our hero felt very strange and uncomfortable.

The smell, as he went down the ladder, was close and oppressive, for the night was warm; while on entering the middies' berth he wondered how anyone could exist there.

»This way, if you please, your honour,« said the tar, continuing in the same strain; »this is where you'll take your meals, and this is where you'll sling yer hammock., The cap'en couldn't conviently give you his cabin, else he would.«

»Enough's as good as a feast, Mr. Milward,« interrupted George, pleasantly. »Don't you fancy you've carried this joke too far? If I said anything to amuse you, I don't intend, if I can help it, to do so again, for I'd sooner you like me than dislike me. If I'm stupid in my new life, I shall feel grateful if you'll help to make me wise.«

Jack Mililward stared into the frank, clear eyes of the lad in open-mouthed astonishment, then, bringing his tarry hand down on his thigh, he ejaculated—

»Shiver my timbers, but you're a lad of the right sort. You know how to take a joke -«

»And give one.«

»I don't doubt it. I like your spirit, and though you're a middy, and I only an A. B. if ever you want a friend, Mr. Merridew, reckon upon Jack Milward as one.«

»I will,« said George, as he grasped the horny palm of the man,

The sailor had now to return on deck, leaving George alone after instructing him how to sling his hammock.

Five minutes however had scarcely elapsed when he heard two persons coming down the companion ladder.

They were laughing and he recognised one as the same he had heard aft.

Soon they entered and proved to be two young lads, one a year older, the other nearly three years younger than himself.

The elder was a tall, lanky boy, with a dark face that would have been handsome but for its expression, which was crafty, proud and sneering.

The younger was a fair-haired, effeminate featured lad, with large blue eyes and a small irresolute mouth.

»Well,« demanded the first, who was Ned Conyers, George's fellow mid, »have you found out the man in the moon yet?«

The fair lad, Arthur Myers, an apprentice, burst out laughing.

»Not yet,« answered George, gravely; »he's too busy at present sowing thistles for donkeys to come my way. P'raps you'll take a little message to him 7«

Arthur Myers laughed again, but stopped abruptly, seeing a red flush rise to his patron's face.

»Oh, I see you are a jester,« he sneered.

»No,« said George, »I prefer leaving the cap and bells, with the long ears, to you.«

Ned Conyers was scarlet.

He bit his lip, but there was that about George's eye and breadth of shoulder that held him quiet.

He burst out laughing but the mirth had an evil heart,

»Ah I« he exclaimed, »I see Milward was right. You know how to take a joke. I only did it to test you. Now, what's your name? Mine's Edward Conyers.«

George saw no reason to bear enmity, therefore, though resolved not to be put upon, accepted this offer of friendship.

There was however something about Ned Conyers that he did not like.

They continued talking till the order came to turn in, which George found no easy matter, the turn in being followed by a far quicker turn out.

The hammock would slip away from under him and it is doubtful if he would not have given up the attempt as hopeless if Ned Conyers, to his surprise, had not bidden Artie Myers to help him.

When at last safely ensconced, George Merridew found sleep impossible.

All was so strange.

Besides, he was thinking of Amblemere and his fond mother,

When he said his prayers he thought how she on her knees far away was praying perhaps at the same time for her dear boy.

Far away from him, but not from Heaven, which is near us all.

»Deserve Heaven's love, my dear boy,« had said Mrs. Merridew, »and you will never lose mine.«

»And I will deserve it, that I will,« thought the lad, when he stopped abruptly, and listened.

He was sure someone was moving near his hammock.

He guessed at once what was up, but waited, apparently asleep.

No sooner however did he feel the ropes of his hammock vibrate, than he bounded out so rapidly as for a wonder to alight on his feet, when he instantly seized the practical joker.

»Look here, youngster,« he said, in a loud voice, »I don't intend to give you a thrashing, for I know who has put you up to cutting my hammock ropes; but if mine are cut to-night, his will be cut to-morrow.«

»P'raps you'll tell the master,« sneered Ned, from his hammock.

»Oh, no, I need not be a sneak. I can take such matters very well in my own hands, I can repay as well as take a joke. Now, youngster, assist me

to get in again.«

Artie Myers, too surprised to resist, obeyed.

Then he crept back to his own hammock while our hero, confident he had stopped the practical joke, at least for that night, soon fell asleep as did the others, with whom our story has equally to do.

So sound indeed was their slumber, that neither was aware when the anchor was weighed, and the ›Vixen‹, her sails all spread and glistening in the beams of the rising moon, sailed majestically down the Thames.

CHAPTER II.

GEORGE AMND FAITH MAKE MANY FRIENDS, AND AN ENEMY.

It would be lost time to recount what has been so frequently recounted, the agonies of the first days of a first voyage at sea.

George was not exempt.

He was saved however from any annoyance or persecution from Conyers by the sailor Milward, who had taken a liking to our hero.

During this period the latter often recalled his native village and the pretty parlour at home where his mother used to sit, and his young heart craved for a glimpse of her gentle face.

But before they had sighted Ushant, he had got his »sea legs,« and invigorated by the fresh breezes rushing through the rigging, and the dancing waves of the Bay of Biscay, he felt no more home sickness, but a strong energy to win that fortune he resolved to cut out for himself.

»Rome was not built in a day,« he reflected one afternoon, as he was on the look-out aloft, »but it was built at last. A fortune cannot be made in a day, but it may be made at last, and I'll work hard to give my dear mother the comforts she once had.«

With such feelings, and actuated ever by a desire to please, it is no wonder George soon became a favourite with the officers and men.

To his superiors he was always respectful, to his inferiors ever pleasant and kind.

As to Faith, he was the spoiled pet of everybody, if a dog son oble as the retriever could be spoiled.

He could pull a rope taut as well as anyone on board, and according to Jack Milward, kept his watch as grave as a judge.

»And take my word for it,«' exclaimed the old sailor, as the seamen were seated between decks, »that dog could box the compass as true as any on us, if he'd only confess it.«

»Lor' love yer,« joined in the coxswain, »them dogs are the knowingest critters goin'. My brother had a Newfoun'lan' once who was

bitten by another as they were having a bit of a fight together, Now, it 'appened that that t'other dog was mad, so what do you think that there Newfoun'lan' did?«

»I can't tell for one,« smiled George.

»Why, he trotted home as fast as hever he could, went into the kitchen and takin' one of the flat-irons as was down before the fire in his mouth, clapped it hot to the bite to 'criticise' it. I'm blest if he didn't!«

A shout of laughter followed this anecdote, while Faith expressed his amusement by two or three sharp barks,

»If you tell such stories as that, cox'en,« broke in Ned Conyers, with a sneer, »you'll shock Merridew. He says his prayers every night you must know.«

»And what is there to 'be ashamed of in that?« exclaimed George, boldly, his handsome countenance aglow; »I trust that no British sailor who ever trod a British ship would blush to own the same!«

»Brayvo youngster,« cried Milward, »spoken like a true English lad. It would be a precious good thing, Master Conyers, if some middies said their prayers oftener and swore less. No man was ever the worse but a sight better for saying his prayers. Wait until you are in a hurrycan, and so you may think, As to falsehoods, why, there are two kinds, one honly fo amusement, in a sailor's yarn, which does no harm; and one as does a lot, and is meant to do.«

As the sailor spoke, bis eyes had a meaning in them which all understood, for Ned Conyers' untruthfulness was already proverbial.

His face turned white with passion.

He bit his lip, and darted an angry look at George.

Then, with a haughty, contemptuous laugh, he said —

»Take care you practice what you preach, Milward. Here, Myers, come with me.«

»Why don't you let the lad remain, Mr. Ned,« said the coxswain,

»Because I want him, Are you coming?«

The boy hesitated a second, but George saw Ned's influence was too powerful,

Artie got up and went,

»That there lad's got a black heart, Mr. Merridew,« whispered the old sailor, »and if that t'other lad don't take care he'll be made as bad for he's as soft as sea pie.«

»I fear you're right, Milward,« said George. I have tried to get an influence over him, but haven't succeeded much.«

»Never mind, lad, don't despair but keep tryin', and always speak up as you did jist now about sayin' your prayers. If you had been in the storms I've seen, when the billars have been rushing up to the heavens all afire with zig-zag lightnings that seemed to set the firmament aflame, and when the ship's been a—constant on her beam ends, and the masts, going by the board, and—and the trough of the sea looking like Davy Jones's locker waiting to swaller you, you'd have found it a consolation that you had sed them prayers.«

»I'll remember your words, and thank you for them, Milward,« answered George pressing the old sailor's hand.

At this moment there was a call down the companion for the seaman, who hastened on to deck.

Neither, as they separated, guessed how soon those spoken words were to be realised.

»Come, Faith, old boy,« whistled George, as he went off into the midshipmen's berth.

The oil lamp swinging from the roof but dimly lighted it, yet he was able to see Ned Conyers and Arthur Myers seated across the locker, playing cards.

Ned gathered them up quickly at the sound of the step but on perceiving who it was, pat them back with a scowl.

»Come on, fire away, younker,« he said, with a laugh; »it's only the ship's chaplain. The crib you know, was mine.«

George paid no attention to the sneer,

He was troubled by what he saw, and drawing near, watched the game.

»Look here, Merridew,« said Artie Myers, »what'll you bet that I win?«.

»I never bet,« retorted George calmly; »I'm sorry that you do, Artie.«

»Don't you know chaplains never bet!« sneered Conyers; »their mothers, I suppose, tell them not to, Perhaps your reverence objects to cards«

»Certainly, when,« and George pointed to the little pile of pence, »accompanied by gambling.«

»Oh, dear, the chaplain is going to preach us a sermon, Perhaps he'll end by splitting upon us to the cap'en!«

»No,« said George; »as I told you before Conyers, I am not either a spy or a sneak. But I give you my opinion, which is, that if you like to do evil yourself you have no right to make that boy do it. It is cowardly!«

»Cowardly I« ejaculated Conyers, his face flushing with anger as he sprang to his feet; »I'll teach you, you conceited young sneak, to address a gentleman like that.«

»As to a gentleman, there we are equals,« answered George drawing himself erect,

»Equals I« and Ned Conyers burst into an insulting laugh. »A fellow who has been taken on board out of charity by the company, who hasn't paid any premium, who can't even pay his mess money I suspect, calls himself our equal! Did you ever hear the like, Myers?«

»Don't, Conyers,« whispered the boy, noting George's flushing face and quivering lips.

»Don't! Why shouldn't I? Don't you be a sneak. I'm not to be preached at by the ship's chaplain, nor hectorred over by a fellow whose father was a bankrupt.«

George's cheek went white.

»This is a base falsehood,« he exclaimed; »my father honestly paid his debts to the last farthing. It left him a beggar it is true, but for my part I am prouder of that poverty than if for his own comfort he had defrauded others.«

»Bravo, Merridew,« began Artie Myers,

»Hold your tongue, you idiot,« exclaimed Conyers; »or if you are going to turn your coat, you little sneak, put up the cards and go to the chaplain at once. He'll teach you to preach, to say your prayers aud cry for your mammy.«

»I certainly would teach him not to tell falsehoods, to gimble or to steal, from the purser's larder, as I saw you urging him to do yesterday.«

»I'll strike you to the earth for that.«

And Conyers, scowling dark as night, made a spring at Merridew.

Then he stepped short arrested by a deep growl from Faith.

»Confound the dog!« ejaculated Conyers; »if he were not here I'd thrash you within an inch of your life,«

»Thrash me within an inch of my life would you? Faith, lie down, sir!« said George.

As the animal, obedient to his master's command, crouched passive on the deck, George crossed his arms on his chest and boldly confronted the other.

Ned Conyers shrank sullenly back.

»I'd not hesitate to do what I have said, as you will find, Mr. Chaplain,« he said, »only here's the master coming.«

A step was indeed heard on the top of the ladder.

George smiled with contempt.

»When are you youngsters going to turn in?« called a voice down the hatchway. »Look alive, Lights out.«

»All right,« said George, as he moved to his hammock. 'Are you coming, Artie?«

»No; he's going to stop here with me,« answered Conyers.

George saw that Myers again hesitated,

»Are you going to be a sneak, eh?« said Conyers.«

»No,« said the boy colouring; »yon know I'm not.«

And George went alone,

When he had turned in, and all was dark, he long heard Ned talking in earnest whispers to Artie Myers.

Scarcely would he have lain so quietly had he known that the mid was planning no less than the destruction of poor Faith,

»I wouldn't do it, Ned, if I were you,« replied Artie; »the dog's a favourite with the cap'en and the crew, so if ever you're found out -«

»I'll take care of that. But I'm determined to cut the comb of that young sneak Merridew, and I expect you to stand by me; if you don't I'll never speak to you again.«

»But how could you do it, Ned?«

»That's my business. Dogs, you know, drown sometimes as well as swim.«

»But now you'll —«

»There don't you begin to preach, I'm going to sleep.«

CHAPTER III.

CONYERS' PLOT—THE TORNADO—ALONE ON THE PACIFIC.

THE next morning a sharp breeze was blowing, and the ›Vixen‹ sped along, all sails set.

George Merridew, leaning over the side, was watching Artie Myers a few yards off dropping bits of wood and junk into the flashing billows which in a second, whirled them astern, when to his surprise, he beheld Faith dart out of one of the port-holes after the objects.

The ›Vixen‹ was going full speed and the waves were rough.

Instantly George recognised his friend's peril.

»The dog I« he shouted, springing erect; »my good dog Faith is overboard. Help, help?«

The cry reached officers and crew, and all who could hastened aft.

But George had reached the stern first, and bending over with agony beheld the beloved creature swept fast away to leeward.

As he passed, struggling with the billows, he turned his large, soft brown eyes sadly, fondly, as if imploring aid from his young master.

George could not resist the appeal.

Regardless of his own danger the brave boy sprang on the side and the next instant had plunged in after his friend.

At the same moment Captain Atkins shouted—

»Shorten sail! Back the ship!. Lower one of the boats; the dog must be saved.«

»And the boy, too, cap'en,« cried Milward, the first to obey the summons; »and make haste, my hearties, or they'll both be drowned.«

»What do you mean! exclaimed the captain, running to the side.

»Why, sir,« rejoined the chief mate, »young Merridew's jumped in after his friend.«

»The brave lad,« said the captain, enthusiastically; then correcting himself, he added—

»The young rascal, I mean, how dared he leave the ship without orders. Quick, lads, quick! That's right. Hurrah! pull with a will, men. How did the dog go over?«

»Young Myers was throwing pieces of wood overboard, cap'en, and the dog seemed to jump from one of the port-holes after them. Look! captain. Good Heavens, I think boy and dog are sinking!«

»Look, look! do you see Gibson?« said the captain, leaning anxiously forward; Merridew appears supporting the dog, instead of the dog the boy.«

»That's true, sir, and a-reversing of the order of things. I'm glad Milward's in that boat, he'll make the men pull.«

Earnestly, breathlessly, all in the ship watched the result.

Little Myers with a pallid face, and every limb trembling.

With difficulty could the boy restrain his tears of remorse, or prevent falling on his knees and confessing the truth.

But Ned Conyers seeing the commotion was now himself frightened at what he had done, and shaking with terror of discovery, kept guard over his dupe.

Meanwhile they could see the boy and dog borne farther leeward and their struggles grow less and less.



Sometimes the two seemed to disappear altogether.

But after a space they would reappear helplessly on the crest of a wave and officers and crew drew a long breath of relief.

Suddenly they saw Milward rise up in the boat and peer around.

Did he see them?

Had they sunk never to rise?

No!

They perceived the old sailor fling up his arms with a hurrah, and direct the rowers.

Then they beheld him throw himself forward and lean far over the bows.

Had he got them!

Yes, both clasped together.

The tears ran down the hardy seaman's bronzed face as gently he laid Merridew in the bottom of the boat.

»But my stars!« he ejaculated, »what's this 'ere about the dog? Why, it's string. How could the hanimal have got it round him like this 'ere?«

It did seem strange.

Several yards of string were entangled about the dog's body and paws in such a way as quite to explain his inability to swim.

»He must a' caught it in his paws when he jumped,« answered a sailor, »and the waves and his struggles twisted it wuss.«

»Tell ye what, mates,« said Milward; »it twisted it so as to have carried him to Davy Jones if it hadn't been for this 'ere true 'earted, brave young lad. He's the sort of stuff to make an admiral of. Now, lads, make way with a will, for the boy has fainted.«

CHAPTER IV.

DRIFTING AWAY.

THE rescue of George and his dog Faith from the waves of the mighty ocean gave delight to all on board, save one—Ned Conyers.

Milward carried George himself to his hammock, and tended him as gently as a woman.

He was not much hurt and presently he opened his eyes and glancing round, asked, faintly —

»Where's my dog Faith, Milward?«

»Let the cretur' answer for himself, Master Merridew,« replied the sailor, pushing a chest near.

In a second a black face was looking in George's, a black paw affectionately tapping him, and a soft tongue gratefully licking his hand.

»Dear Faith,« cried his master, throwing his arms about his neck, »what should I have done if I had lost you!«

»Ah, Master Merridew, never you lose faith,« smiled Milward,

»I never will, Milward. I felt it in my heart when just now I was battling for life, even before I saw the boat with your kind face in the bows.«

The brave old sailor looked at the boy with a smiling and happy countenance, though in his breast there was a suspicion of something wrong.

How Faith could possibly have got the string about him, or how he could have been near the port-hole, was a mystery, but the old salt had a shrewd idea in his mind that secret treachery was at work, and he determined to be on the watch.

It was a week after the above when the weather began to change.

Hardly had the ›Vixen‹ entered lat. 30 S., long. 120 W. when the wind abruptly veered from S. E. to N. W., then settled into N. E., blowing a perfect hurricane.

As the night fell its fierceness increased.

Every stitch of canvas was taken in, and the ship flew through the stormy sea under bare poles.

Soon the inky blackness of the skies was broken by lurid flashes of lightning rending it from east to west, and illumining the towering billows which seemed toppling down to overwhelm the doomed ship.

It was an awful, yet majestic scene.

While George Merridew clung to anything he could grasp, his heart was faint with fear, but his soul felt bowed down with awe and reverence before the grandeur of the Creator.

»Oh Merridew, isn't this awful I« whispered a voice by his side, Turning, he saw Artie Myers.

His fair face was deathly pale, and he trembled so violently as scarcely to be able to keep his hold.

George threw his arm round him.

»Don't fear, Myers,« he said encouragingly, »the ›Vixen's‹ a capital ship and may weather the storm. If not, let us die like English lads, and remember Heaven is above us.«

The words cheered the boy, who clung to his companion with renewed confidence,

But the hurricane increased.

The thunder and the roar of the billows drowned all other sounds.

Each wave swept the deck fore and aft.

The man had been unlashd from the wheel for the ship no longer answered her helm, and Heaven alone knew how many unhappy beings had already been washed to a watery grave.

The Captain gave no orders, for none could be obey

The ›Vixen‹ had long drifted out of her course, and now was helpless in the clutch of the tornado.

Suddenly the whole firmament appeared aflame.

The electric fluid darted about the ship in twenty places.

For a moment everything was light as day and then came a terrific crash.

The ship heeled over, the mainmast went by the board, and then came one fearful, blended cry of terror from the throats of the men.

The ›Vixen‹ made one wild bound forward and recoiled with a quivering shock.

Then the brave ship rose no more, but rolled and wallowed heavily in the stormy sea. She was sinking.

The reefs that had flung her back had torn and gored her sides, and she was filling fast.

»To the boats I« George heard the captain shout. Quick, lads, we are on the breakers! We are going down! To the boats! Quick!«

»Oh Merridew,« said little Artie, clinging to him, »we are to die. Oh my poor mother, my little sister; I shall never see them again!«

»Don't say that, Artie, answered George, cheerfully, though his heart was faint within him; just have faith, lad. Come, come, they are getting ready the boats.«

With a strong lanyard Merridew lashed the boy to him, then holding to whatever he could, reached the place where with difficulty the men had lowered the boat.

Seeing them, the brave old Englishman, Milward, exclaimed —

»Poor children! Here mates, the boys first.«

Lifting them in his strong arms he lowered them into the boat.

»Now bo'sen, you next,« he said.

But before response could be made a terrific wave surged down.

In a second the boat, to which the boys instinctively clung, was washed away from the ship.

Merridew indeed thought their hour had come, and imploringly he turned his eyes to Heaven.

At that moment a vivid flash lightened the whole sea.

There was the ›Vixen‹ to leeward, a long white, foaming band between the boat and her.

He saw her plainly for one moment.

Then she had gone.

Had she sunk?

Eagerly the boy watched for the next flash and when it came the ›Vixen‹ was still nowhere to be seen.

George dropped down with a sad cry by the side of his little companion.

His heart was sick with misery—despair.

As he flung himself on to the bottom of the boat a hard substance in his breast-pocket pressed his arm.

Hope sprang into the boy's breast at its touch, and new strength appeared to come to every limb.

It was the Testament in his breast-pocket—the last gift of his mother, and struggling to his knees he, with clasped hands turned his grateful gaze to Heaven.

Then his position recalled him to action.

The waves he now noticed for the first time to be less violent, and suddenly he beheld a dark object battling with the billows, rising and falling with them.

Was it a piece of the wreck?

George Merridew leaned forward, and after a moment he gave vent to a great shout of joy.

»It was is Faith; dear, dear old Faith. Rise up Artie. Look!«

It was indeed the noble dog.

He had sprung into the boiling sea after his young master; but he was not alone, for George saw in his mouth the collar of the midshipman's jacket.

With difficulty the two boys pulled into the boat the apparently lifeless body that owned it, Faith following of his own accord, and found to their surprise, it was no other than Ned Conyers.

Artie, as he saw whom the beautiful dog had saved, hung his head abashed.

»Is he dead?« he whispered.

»No, his heart beats,« answered George, »and I am sure the storm is abating. I can't tell where we are going, but let us be grateful for our lives, Myers, and wait patiently for the dawn.«

So the three lads—Ned yet unconscious, and the dog cowering at the bottom of the boat—went drifting through the raging sea under the inky sky.

Alone on the mighty Pacific!

CHAPTER V.

CAST ASHORE—GEORGE CHEERS HIS COMPANIONS —THEY GO IN SEARCH OF FOOD—ARTIE'S MISHAP.

Eagerly did the two lads, drifting they knew not whither, look out for dawn.

As yet it seemed far off, while the black wrack scudding overhead prevented either George or Artie judging by the stars had they even been able.

Ned Conyers might have done so; but he still lay, breathing heavily, at the bottom of the boat.

»Oh Merridew,« exclaimed Artie Myers, »I don't believe the light will ever come. What will happen to us?«

»Don't lose heart, Artie,« answered Merridew; »a few hours back we should have felt safer in the«Vixen' than in this cockle-shell, Yet here we are alive, while the captain, the crew—oh, what has become of them?«

»They must have gone down, Merridew.«

»I fear so. Heaven receive their souls,« said George, reverently. »Poor Jack Milward,« he added, dashing his hand across his eyes;»Artie it is to him we owe being alive now. Do not let us be ungrateful, but patiently wait Heaven's will, I really think the storm is lulling.«

Certainly the waves were less high, while the wind still held in the same quarter, and the boat sped on before it.

It was a perilous position for so youthful a crew.

Alone in that vast solitude of tumbling waters, with the black sky, riven occasionally by lightning, above, and only the frail boat between them and the almost fathomless depths of ocean.

Arthur Myers trembled in every limb as he cowered, apparently for protection, close to his companion.

George, too, had a sad sinking of the heart as he looked around.

Even should the storm abate, to-morrow there would be the blazing sun and the horrors of hunger and thirst to encounter until they could

cross the track of some ship, if they ever did, before death had seized them.

It was a reflection calculated to make the stoutest sailor quail, and how much more terrible was it for a young midgy on his first voyage?

He had however two consolations—the little Testament in his pocket and Faith.

Whenever the lad was most depressed, Faith seemed conscious of it, and by a low whine, or pat of his paw, would appear to say, in his dumb language —

»Dear Master, don't be cast down; there is no fear while you have me, I will aid you in worse straits even than this.«

»Merridew,« whispered Myers, »do you remember what Jack said about praying? I think he was right.«

»I am sure he was, Artie; and if death has taken the dear kind fellow, it has been a comfort to him to-night. Don't ever forget this lesson, and I hope Ned will not.«

»I will not forget it,« cried Artie. »But look, Merridew, he's moving, He has revived!«

Conyers had indeed turned on his side, and soon after he set up, rubbing his eyes.

»It isn't time to turn out yet,« he grumbled, »How terrible queer I feel, What's the matter? Where am I?«

The next moment he recollected everything.

Scarcely listening to how he had been miraculously saved by Faith, he fell on his knees and shrieked aloud with terror,

»O Lord, save us! What shall we do? We shall all go down; we shall all be drowned. Oh dear, oh dear. Help! Merridew, why don't you pray? You were always doing it when there was no necessity.«

»When there is not a necessity« said George, with gravity. »If we only pray when we are really in danger, I don't think, Ned, we deserve to be heard. Don't make that noise,«—for Ned was howling for fright—! be calm and hopeful and trust in Heaven, which has saved us so far.«

»Look, Merridew I« cried Artie; »isn't that yonder the first streak of dawn.«

George had scarcely turned in the direction indicated when the boat came with so violent a bump against some substance that it threw all the lads down.

Ned roared louder than ever.

But George, as soon as he could, leaped to his feet, and leaned over the bows.

His suspicion was correct, the boat had run aground.

»Land, land!« he ejaculated, exultingly, »See, Heaven has heard us. Come, Arthur. Stop that noise, Conyers, and do your best to help.«

The lads, roused by the thought of safety, obeyed.

»How help?« demanded Ned, »Where's the land?«

»The water has washed the boat off again, but soon it will send it again on the beach; then we must jump over and prevent its being carried back.«

»Who's going to jump out? I'm not such an idiot,« retorted Ned. »Suppose it's a reef?«

»I'm sure it's a beach,« said George, resolutely. »But stay where you are if you disbelieve me. I and Faith will take the risk.«

There was a rope yet attached to the bows.

Taking the end, George put it in his dog's mouth and waited. Only a second.

The next billow ran the boat again on the strand.

»Forward, Faith, forward I« cried George, pointing ahead.

Almost simultaneously he leaped over into the dark waters, and the dog followed like a flash.

Merridew uttered a cry of delight, for his feet had touched firm land.

»Hurrah!« he shouted, as, catching the gunwale, he and his brave four-legged companion fought their way forward, pulling the boat after them.

It was a difficult task, but Artie Myers, after a moment's hesitation, jumped over to lend his aid; and Ned Conyers, assured there was no danger followed his example.

The ground proved smooth but slightly shelving.

Thus, directly they had got beyond the force of the waves, the work became easier, and with another «Hurrah!» the boys, with the dog, giving »a strong pull, and a long pull, and a pull altogether,« dragged the boat well up on the dry sand.

Who can describe the ecstasy of those so suddenly saved from shipwreck.

Artie Myers laughed and cried by turns.

Faith barked and frisked like a thoughtless puppy.

Even Ned was moved; and when George, dropping on his knees, exclaimed, with upraised hands—« Oh, let us be thankful to Heaven, who has saved us,« he knelt also, with Artie, while the dog crouched quiet at its master's side.

As if in recognition of the boys' gratitude, the glorious sun at this instant lifted itself above the horizon, inundating the ocean and the land with golden light, Why was the better feeling then in Ned Conyers' heart so brief?

On rising, the lads took off their upper clothes to lay them on the shore to dry.

Then they looked around to see on what kind of land they had been cast,

Where they were was a species of bay, formed by high rocks, covered with splendid verdure and gorgeous with bright hued flowers, swaying in the wind as if mocking the ocean that rolled and dashed at their base.

The sand was hard and firm, while seaward, more than a mile off, extended a long white line of tumbling foam broken here and there by sharp, small masses of rock,

»We are on a coral island, I think,« said George, »for that's a coral reef yonder, and it was that which wrecked the poor«Vixen« and our shipmates.«

»After all,« grumbled Ned Conyers, »I don't see how we shall be better off than they. They've forgotten everything by this time, while we seem to be prisoners in this bay; those rocks don't look easy to climb.

»Let's be thankful if we only find them difficult,« retorted George, with energy.

»The worst I see,« broke in Artie, gloomily, »is what we're to eat? I'm very hungry.«

»Then perhaps you'll have to die of it,« grumbled Ned.

»Yes,« if he likes to sit down with his hands before him and wait,« laughed George, »For my part, I see some cocoa-nut trees above, and shall make my breakfast of them.«

»Yes,« proceeded Ned, »and tumble into the jaws of some tiger or lion as you go.«

»I shouldn't think there are any lions or tigers in these islands. Robinson Crusoe never met any.«

»But he did savages, and cannibals, too.«

»True, but he didn't sit down and despair. He tried, though he was quite alone, to be as happy as he could until a ship came and took him off. I'm going to be like Robinson Crusoe.«

»So will I,« exclaimed Artie. »Oh Merridew, do let us get to those cocoa-nuts!«

»Stop. Before we go on an exploring expedition we must secure our boat so that the tide shall not wash it to sea, and mark the bay that we shall know it again.«

The good humour of the two made Ned somewhat ashamed.

Besides, there was an idea of fun in turning Robinson Crusoe, after all,

The only thing that rankled in his jealous mind was the idea of George Merridew taking the lead.

At present, however he knew that he was in no position to resist, and so he lent a hand to haul the boat high beyond the reach of the sea and secure it.

Then George, drawing out his clasp-knife, scratched deep on the rock's surface —

»Wrecked on Tuesday, 29th August, 187—

EDWARD CONYERS, ARTHUR MYERS,

GEORGE MERRIDEW,

Midshipmen of the ship ›VIXEN.‹«

This done, the lads began to examine the cliffs to discover the most advantageous part to climb.

Bushes of luxuriant growth grew down to their very base.

Broad-leaved plants hung low their leaves while higher the cocoa-nut palms reared their gorgeous heads.

The vegetation, while it offered hold for the climbers, was yet just such as might hide snakes and other unpleasant customers.

»We must risk it, though,« said George; »we can't starve here, can we?«

Artie Myers declared strenuously in the negative as his eyes looked up greedily at the cocoa-nuts.

At this moment Ned Conyers, who had preferred to search alone, gave a loud shout.

George and his companion were soon at his side. What had he found?

He was holding aside a large tree fern, disclosing a small opening which evidently extended between the rocks.

»This is the way,« exclaimed Ned, superciliously; »follow me.«

»I don't care which is the way,« laughed Artie, »as long as I get something to eat.«

»Then come on.«

All three began to press aside the bushes to form a pathway, but soon they had no need for such exertion.

The opening between the high rocks abruptly widened out into a splendid valley, formed of tree ferns, orange-trees, *tacca pinnatifida* *morus papyrifera*, and bread-fruit trees.

»Oh, this is delightful I« cried George, »If we can only manage to build a house or hut, we may be very jolly.«

»If the Indians don't come down upon us,« said Ned.

»If we can only get something to eat,« chimed in Artie.

»The cocoa-nuts and these,« said George, pointing to the bread-fruit, will serve us for a time. Besides we must fish. Ned is right, though, about the Indians. I hope this island is like Crusoe's, uninhabited, if it isn't with white people. We must keep a sharp look-out.«

The heat began to be excessive, but the lads, covering their heads with broad green leaves, hastened along the valley, which rose by a ravier steep incline.

Half-an-hour and they, or rather George and Ned, reached the summit.

Both the boys uttered a cry of admiration at the scene they beheld.

The sun danced on the distant waters of the ocean, on the horizon of which were numerous little dark spots they knew to be islands.

Nearer, on their own island, great mountains rose up in lofty peaks and crags, down which flashed a torrent of fresh water, while around was a vast extent of rich tropical verdure.

»Look here,« said George eagerly. »We must rig a mast on one of those peaks, Ned, so that we may run up the bunting for any passing ship to see.«

»First, I think we'd better rig up something to sleep on,« retorted Ned, who never was ready to agree in anything he did not himself propose.

»Of course that's first to be thought of. But this is the best place for our look out. Good Gracious I what's that?«

Cries of alarm and terror filled the air.

The boys stood astounded, but speedily they recognised the agonised voice of Artie, who had lingered behind.

What had happened?

Had Artie fallen into the deadly claws of some beast of prey, or was he pursued by human enemies?

»Come Ned, come,« cried George, as he dashed back down the valley.

Conyers followed a few feet behind, and presently both abruptly halted, staring a moment in amazement.

Then the beautiful tropical leaves vibrated with a peal of hearty English laughter.

Artie's position was too ridiculous, and George and Ned, forgetting all about Indians and beasts of prey, shouted with merriment.

And indeed they had good cause for laughter.



Poor Artie was suspended in mid air by the waistband, his legs and arms dangling down.

He was awfully pale, and shouting with all his might while a wild hog was now poking its snout among the herbage, now glancing up at the lad.

At the appearance of the others, the hog, which was small, gave a grunt and trotted away in the bushes.

»Oh Ned, oh Merridew,« pleaded poor Artie, »do help me down.«

»Why, however did you get there!« asked George.

»I saw that cocoa-nut tree,« answered the boy, pointing, »and was so hungry I wanted to climb up it, when that grunting beast ran out, so startling me that I dropped with terror, and these awful thorns caught my clothes. Oh, do—do help me!«

The tree that had made him prisoner was a species of the hook-thorn or grapple plant of Africa.

Its thorns are like, and almost as strong as a lion's claws, and when once they get a grip on your clothes, are difficult to be extricated.

The more you struggle, the tighter they hold you.

Poor Artie was indeed helpless; and piteously he pleaded.

When George had got over his laughter, he drew out his knife, and, having read in a book of travels when at home in pretty Amblemere,

about the grapple thorn, or uncaria procumbens, began carefully, with Ned's assistance, to cut away the thorns.

»Whenever you come across that plant,« laughed George, when the other was released, »beware of it.«

»Trust me,« said Artie, picking the thorns from his clothes. »Buthaven't you found any cocoa-nuts«.

»No; but we are going to.«

In a short time they had reached the trees, and climbing the straight stems, a task not difficult to sailors, knocked off enough for the whole day.

Then sitting down, they made a hearty meal, and securing the rest of their prizes, determined to return to the bay, for at present they knew that they must make their boat their shelter and larder,

CHAPTER VI.

THE WRECK—THE SAILOR'S GRAVE—A VISIT FROM INDIANS.

The three lads bent their steps at once down the valley, Artie giving the grapple thorn a wide berth.

When they pushed back the splendid ferns and stepped on to the shore, they found it changed somewhat.

The tide was coming in rapidly, and the firm yellow sand was littered over with portions of wreck, while others yet dotted the sea.

The sight at first caused the lads much sadness, for it recalled the unhappy fate of their less fortunate companions.

They knew however, that no sorrow could help the dead, and ran down eagerly to the water's edge.

Very soon all three were hard at work, for they knew how valuable the wreck would be to them.

Collecting the spars and fragments of wood, they stored them beyond the reach of the sea.

They found also a sea chest, two casks, and several cases.

On the sea chest was a name, and as George read it, the tears burst from his eyes.

It was Jack Milward's, the first friend he had formed on the ›VIXEN.‹

But he was aroused by Artie calling him to where he and Ned stood at the edge of the water trying to secure portions of the wreck.

There was one dark object they could not make out, and which the billows washed tantalisingly within some twenty yards, and then dragged back again.

George shaded his eyes from the sun but could distinguish nothing but a shapeless mass.

Yet there was something about it that made it different to the other wreckage.

Suddenly an idea occurred to George.

»Faith, Faith,« he called.

In a second the dog was at his side.

Pointing the object out to the sagacious animal, he said —

»Fetch it, Faith; fetch it old boy.«

Instantly the noble dog took the water.

Eagerly the boy watched him.

They saw him clutch the object, turn, and come slowly back, helped now by the tide.

When near enough the lads ran in to help.

But all recoiled.

It was a drowned man lashed to the mast.

Slowly Faith came on, and the boys, overcoming their horror, aided him.

When they had laid the body on the sand, they looked upon the face still in death.

It was that of the first mate, Gibson.

An awe fell upon the boys, and they stood around, a chill shuddering passing through their bodies.

Even Faith crawled near, whining softly.

At last, George spoke.

»Ned, Artie,« he said, »we must bury him. It would not be kind to leave him so.«

»Yes; but how?«

»We must scoop a hole in the sands. There—under those ferns, Nothing, not even the sea, will disturb his rest.«

They readily but silently set to work.

With fragments of wood they dug a deep hole in the sands.

Then they laid the body of the mate gently in, and George, kneeling, repeated some of the beautiful prayers in the burial service.

Even Ned Conyers could not scoff.

He coloured a little, but knelt too, and listened reverently as Artie repeated them after our hero.

It was a solemn, an impressive sight—those three shipwrecked youths, desolate, alone, kneeling with wet eyes by the sailor's grave, and only

the clear, boyish tones breaking the tropical stillness.

When it was over, they filled in the sand.

»We must place a headstone,« said George; »and let us put stones over it, because they say hogs will scratch up sand to find a body. But we've plenty of time yet. It is not much past noon, I fancy, so first let us secure the rest of the wreck.«

For three hours they were so employed, until, indeed, the tide turned, when they knew they must abandon work.

Among their treasure was an oar, for which George was exceedingly glad, as it would show them how to make another, so as to row round the island—for island they knew it must be—and see its size.

By this time they felt fatigued from want of rest, as they had not slept for thirty-four hours.

Our hero however would not lie down until he had attended to poor Gibson's grave and Artie helped him, though Ned grumbled, saying surely the next morning would be quite soon enough.

They first collected and piled the stones.

Then George cut roughly on a square piece of board, and also on a tree close by——

»Here lies Mark Gibson, first mate of the«Vixen;« wrecked on the reefs.«

On this being concluded, they ate some of the cocoa-nuts, and then got into the boat.

George however first knelt to pray for Heaven's care and protection,

He asked Artie to join him; but the lad, catching Ned Conyers' eye, coloured nervously and said he would say his prayer lying down.

»Then,« answered our hero, »I will pray for us all, I am not ashamed to thank Heaven who has saved me from the fate of poor Mr. Gibson, Artie, recollect what Jack Milward said.«

Artie rose up, and to George's delight, stepped back on to the sands, and knelt by his side.

Better than this, Ned did not jeer at him,

He only pretended to snore, as if he saw nothing of it.

»I have done some good,« thought the lad, »even in these solitudes, Jack Milward told me not to despair,«

After this the two boys got into the boat, and curled themselves at the bottom, Faith nestling close to his master's arms, and soon all, save the trusty dog, were slumbering, forgetful of dangers,

The moon was just beginning to rise, when Faith, lifting his head pricked up his ears.

There was a sound—the prolonged whish, whish of oars.

Whether it is instinct or reason possessed by the canine race, who shall say

It seemed certainly very like the latter in the dog at the present moment.

At Amblemere he would have torn at his chain, barking furiously.

Now in silence he leaned his nose on the gunwale, his bright eyes on the alert.

There was a grating on the sand.

Then some twenty dark forms proceeded noiselessly in Indian file, across the shore, disappearing up the path Ned had found.

After this all was still.

But Faith did not again sleep.

Half-an-hour had scarcely elapsed when the air was filled with a hollow, rolling sound, like thunder, while the earth began to tremble as if in fear.

The lads were instantly awakened and sat up, confused, alarmed.

»Whatever's that?« gasped Ned. »Why, the shore's shaking like a blanc mange.«

»I think it must be an earthquake,« replied George. »Look at the sky.«

A veil of impenetrable blackness had swept over it, and a strange, indescribable hush had fallen upon everything.

Only that peculiar hollow roll sounded through the air; only the terrible shaking of the earth proclaimed something to come.

The boys and the dog cowered together in terror.

CHAPTER VII.

THE INDIANS—A CHANGE OF DOMICILE—GEORGE VISITS THE LOOK-OUT—AN UNPLEASANT ENCOUNTER.

Suddenly, as the terrified boys waited for what was to come, yells and an unearthly jabbering arose, as if all pandemonium had broken loose.

The sounds were evidently approaching the shore.

Before our heroes could comment upon them, they were struck dumb by the sight of some twenty dark, naked figures, tattooed and adorned with war-paint and feathers, who, howling and yelling, came tumbling, running, and scrambling through the bushes on to the shore.

Alarmed by this new danger, George instinctively caught Faith's muzzle, lest by barking he should disclose their presence.

But the dog perfectly well knew what he was about, while, owing to the boat and the wreckage being drawn up and collected at the far side of the bay in the shadow, they ran no danger of being observed.

Indeed the Indians seemed too frightened to observe anything.

Yelling and hustling each other, they ran down to their canoes, leaped in, and to the boys' relief, paddled away as for dear life.

Why had they come?

Why gone?

These were questions the future alone can answer.

Meanwhile, as if the island's wrath had been kindled by their presence, the roll and shaking began now gradually to subside, and in a little time wholly ceased.

The darkness swept away; the moon shone out brightly, and by its light could be seen two canoes, filled with Indians, disappearing in the distance.

The feelings of the lads may easily be imagined.

The question in their minds was, had the Indians only visited the island, or would they soon be returning, when, the night being over, it could no longer offer concealment for them?

Faith, had he been gifted with speech, might have told the boys what he knew.

As it was, possessed by an exceeding fear, they waited in the boat until dawn, keeping watch on the bushes and the ocean,

Nothing, however, occurred, and finally day arrived, bringing consolation and courage.

Having refreshed themselves with a bath, and breakfasted on the cocoa-nuts, George said-

»I've been thinking about those Indians.«

»They've never been out of my mind,« remarked Artie.

»Didn't they look awful? Do you fancy, Merridew, they'll come back

»That's just it. If they've been once, why shouldn't they return? Besides, we can't tell but they live in the Island and were frightened away by the earthquake.«

»That's not likely,« interrupted Ned; »for didn't we see their canoes waiting for them?«

»Of course; I'd forgotten that, Ned. Then it's pretty certain they only came on a visit, in which case, if they come again, no doubt they'll land in this bay near the path.«

»Well, what then?«

»Then I think we ought to find out a smaller one where we may not be found—at least, by Indians.«

»Ah, but how will you do it?«

»The boat; the sea's very calm. If we float her, we might, with the single oar, stern-paddle her round the shore.«

If Ned Conyers could have proposed a better plan he would have done so; but as he couldn't, he agreed.

So, their meal over, they ran the boat into the sea, and Faith, sitting on the prow, paddled by turns round the headland, one of them with a piece of wreck keeping them from running aground.

Hardly had they accomplished this than they came upon one of the loveliest little bays or creeks imaginable.

Save for one broad strip of fine, dazzlingly-golden sand, beautiful tropical plants grew down almost to the water's edge, while a cluster of

short tree-palms seemed of themselves, with their large pinnated leaves, to form a natural roof for their future home.

All three gave an involuntary shout of delight.

Faith barked and bounded in unison so vehemently that he tumbled head over heels into the water.

But, like a wise animal, he instantly turned his accident to account.

Seizing the rope yet hanging to the bows in his strong white teeth, he began towing the boat to shore.

The young adventurers found the creek, on examination, the very place to suit them.

The overhanging foliage seemed to form natural compartments for the stowage of goods and an excellent spot to erect their hut—at least, until they knew more of the island.

They agreed at once to remove the wreckage hither from their old habitation.

It would be a work of time; but they dreaded leaving any trace by sunset, for fear the Indians should return in the evening,

They instantly set about the task, but it needed the journey to be made quite ten times before all could be removed to the creek.

The hardest part was to get Jack Milward's chest in and out of the boat.

But they knew it might contain things which would prove valuable to them, while they did not like to lose time by unpacking it.

When they were about to make their last journey they were attracted by Faith.

He was moaning, and sniffing, and scratching violently at one of the small casks.

»Whatever is the matter?« cried Artie, »What can he want?«

Faith answered for himself.

Sitting up on his haunches he began to move his front paws violently, whining at the same time.

»He's hungry« exclaimed George. »Poor dog! of course, he cannot eat cocoa-nut. what does he mean?«

»Ah!« he added, »I know, I know; the cask must contain provisions.«

Seizing pieces of rock, the boys managed at last to beat out one of the staves.

Faith sat by, approvingly wagging his tail; then he gave a great bound and bark as a lot of ship biscuits fell out on to the sand.

Throwing him one, the lads carried the welcome provision down to the boat, and started on their last journey,

As they paddled to the creek a great calm had fallen on the ocean.

The sun fell slantingly, and every object was reflected clear and distinct in the water.

»Look, look!« exclaimed George, who had been using the piece of wreck wood to propel the boat, bending forward, »Why, it's like a scene in fairyland.«

Ned and Artie, leaning over the side, gazed down into the sea.

Of a splendid blue, it was as clear as crystal, so that they could see right to the bottom, from which rose up beautiful branches of coral of all hues, dark brown, green, purple, pink, blue, peach colour, and dazzling white.

These, interlacing, formed forests and cathedral arches, through which strange fishes of gorgeous colours darted in and out, in the limpid water.

After watching them for some time, they pulled the boat ashore and dragged it up to the spot under the large drooping leaves of the ferns, which they had arranged was to be their boathouse.

»Now,« said George, »I propose that, while one of us, with Artie, stows away the wreck, the other, with Faith, goes up to the look-out to see if any ship is in sight. We have forgotten all about that.«

»Very well,« answered Ned; »but I shall stop here. The dog wouldn't follow me.«

Conyers was glad he had the latter excuse, as he did not at all relish the idea of going alone into the interior of the island, where Indians might still be lurking.

Merridew, however, was not the lad to propose any plan for another to perform, which he did not like to do himself.

Besides, he did not know that kind of fear to which Ned Conyers often was a prey—the fear which comes of selfishness and want of hope.

»All right,« he answered, cheerfully, »Come along, Faith.«

Whistling to the dog, therefore, George set out.

To reach the heights, here, at the bay, he had to traverse a valley, much resembling the other, only smaller.

As our hero proceeded, he discovered to his joy, a tiny limpid stream, flowing through the bushes, and losing itself apparently in the earth before reaching the shore.

George went cautiously, for he, too, recollected the Indians, and that, although some had gone, others might still be on the island.

Strange birds rose up from the bushes, disturbed by his tread, but they speedily settled down again without apparent fear.

Once a hog came grunting across his path.

»Ah, my fine fellow,« thought our hero; »if we could only set a trap for you, we'd have pork with our biscuit, wouldn't we, Faith?«

Nothing else of any consequence occurred, and in less than half-an-hour George stood on a small tract of table land.

The jagged peaks reared up before him, the centre one having the appearance of the top having been snapped off.

The boy, however, gave them no attention.

Shading his eyes with his hand, he eagerly scanned the horizon.

The sun, on the decline, fell on it with golden radiance; but, save the dark spots, which he knew now to be islands, nothing broke the glassy expanse.

He sighed as he recollected that the »Vixen,« had, no doubt, been driven far out of her course during the hurricane, and consequently the island would probably be out of the track of ships.

With the hungry anxiety of hopeless hope, George yet stood, loth to leave the look-out, when his attention was attracted to the dog.

Faith had been rummaging among the bushes on a private exploring expedition of his own, and now, his hindquarters raised, his fore paws planted firmly on the ground, was barking furiously at an acacia bush.

Our hero at once ran forward to learn what was amiss.

As, however, he drew nearer he halted, then sprang back with a cry of alarm, for from among the green leaves was protruded the dark, tattooed face of an Indian.

CHAPTER VIII.

GEORGE PERFORMS A GENEROUS ACTION, AND MEETS WITH A REWARD—TAI MAKES TEA—THE VOLCANO.

The sight of the Indian's face, tattooed from forehead to chin, held our hero paralysed.

He was unable to move hand or foot, but stood staring at the dark brown countenance, while the savage in turn stared at him.

Faith no longer barked, but, well on guard, glanced from one to the other, as much as to say —

»Master, what strange thing is this? I never saw anything like it before.«

How long matters might have remained thus it is impossible to say, had not the Indian, uttering some unintelligible gibberish, suddenly rolled out from among the leaves.

So abrupt was the movement that even Faith leaped back,

The next moment, however, he sprang forward and would certainly have fastened his teeth in the native, had not our hero's voice arrested him; for to his surprise he perceived that the Indian was securely bound hand and foot.

His astonishment was still more increased when the man, wriggling his body, sat up and said, imploringly—

»You Inglis. Tahi starved—hungry. Set Tahi free. Tahi grateful to Inglis boy. Good Inglis. Inglis very good.«

The poor fellow looked so piteous that our hero's heart yearned to perform his request, but prudence caused him to hesitate.

»Who tied you like this?« he asked.

»Tahi's enemies, the Indians. Bad Indians, the Niuans.«

»Were they those who came here yesterday inquired our hero.

»Yes,« said the Indian, »Tahi brought prisoner with them.«

»What for?«

»Kill Tahi; roast him, eat him. Tahi their enemy.«

George shuddered.

The Indians then were cannibals.

»Why did they not?« he proceeded, beginning to lose fear of the other as he noted his eager, piteous expression.

»Big earth-thunder, make 'em all run,« relied the fellow. »They run to canoe, leaving Tahi to the big thunder, and to die of hunger.«

»Look here,« said George, placing his hand on the native's shoulder, »you shall not die of hunger nor of the big thunder if you are our friend, but how do we know you will not be our enemy?«

The poor fellow, throwing himself on the ground, tried to embrace our hero's feet.

»Tahi friend, no enemy of the Inglis,« he exclaimed; »Tahi been on big Inglis ship, and Inglis kind to Tahi. Tahi grateful to kind Inglis.«

There was no mistrusting the poor fellow, for truth was in both his voice and features.

His eagerness to make George believe him was so earnest that he rolled like a dog at his feet,

»Does Tahi know this island?« he asked.

The Indian shook his head,

»Where is Tahi's home?«

Sitting up with a longing gaze the poor fellow looked towards the horizon.

»Can Tahi see it?« continued our hero.

The Indian sadly shook his head.

»Tahi's home long way off; very big.

Why, the boy could not have told but he asked—

»Could Tahi find it in a canoe?«

Again the Indian sadly shook his head.

»Too big way off for Tahi,« he remarked; »Tahi meet Niuans. Niuans this time kill Tahi.«

From this George knew the island of the enemy must lie between the one he was on and the Indians.

He paused, reflecting, while Tahi watched him anxiously with his dark eyes.

Our hero put one further question.

»Does Tahi know if there are Indians on the sland?«

An absolute look of terror swept over theattooed countenance,

»Tahi think not,« he rejoined, glancing round; »island too small.«

George paused no more, but resolved, at all risks, to release the poor fellow.

With his knife he severed the bonds which had been tied so cruelly tight as to have cut into the skin.



No sooner had he done so than he began to repent, for the Indian, finding himself free, leaped up with a wild shout, and began as wild a dance.

Abruptly, however, he flung himself on the ground, and with tears on his tattooed cheeks embraced our hero's knees, and in his rude fashion expressed his gratitude for his liberty.

In his broken English sentences, blended with that of his native tongue, George learned that nothing had passed the poor fellow's lips in the shape of food or drink for over forty-eight hours or more.

Indeed, never since he had been made a prisoner by the Niuans.

»Poor fellow,« said our hero, compassionately; »come with me, and though shipwrecked ourselves, we can find you something both to eat and drink.«

But here Tahi proved his superiority to the young speaker.

Running to some trees as large as English apple trees, he began gathering the fruit, some of which were yellow and of large size. [Artocarpus or bread-fruit tree.]

Eagerly he devoured them, and then loaded himself with several that were yet green.

»What are they, Tahi?« asked George, after a moment,

Tahi gave the native name, grinning from ear to ear, which didn't make our hero much the wiser, until the Indian added—

»Good-good, eat, Bake.«

»Well, come on, Tahi,« said George. »I'm not alone here; I have two companions.«

»Inglis?« queried the Indian, doubtfully.

»Yes, English; as I am.«

»Good,« responded the other, at once striding forward; »Tahi like Inglis; Inglis good to Tahi.«

On their way our hero told his companion how the »Vixen™ had been wrecked, and only they three boys saved.

»Ah,« said Tahi, »big storm; Great Spirit angry; lightning, big noise! Ship on reef.«

»That's it,« remarked George. »Now stay here, Tahi, while I go on and tell my companions you are coming.«

During our hero's absence, Ned, glad to be master, with no one to thwart his will, for he regarded Artie as nobody, had really been hard at work.

The casks had been put in the place which the three had decided should be their larder, and the broken wreckage stored in their carpenter's shop.

He and Artie, too, had broken open poor Jack Milward's chest and examined its contents.

Here to their delight they found a bag of strong nails, though, unfortunately, a hammer was lacking.

With these and Artie's help, Ned had nailed several planks on to the branches of two trees, cutting away all the under leaves, so that really it already began to show some appearance of a hut.

»There,« said Ned, sneeringly, contemplating his work with satisfaction, »your wonderful favourite Merridew couldn't have done it better himself. P'r'aps, though, you are sneak enough to think he could.«

»I'm no sneak, Ned,« retorted the boy.

»Yes, you are. You do everything he tells you; you haven't the spirit of a mouse. A pretty boy you'll grow up to be; a namby-pamby, preachifying coward.«

»I don't think Merridew preaches.«

»Don't you? I do. Wait a while, and see if he won't try to ride cock-of-the-school over both of us, But I've more spirit than to be his servant.«

»So have I.«

»I don't believe it.«

»But I have, Ned.«

»If you mean it, we'll be as good friends as ever,« and Ned grandly held out his hand. »Artie, if you trust to me, I will make a man of you—not such a maudlin, milk-and-water chap as Merridew, who's been brought up tied to his mammy's apron-string. I wonder she didn't keep him at home to hem and sew. We'll make Miss Georgiana a doll, eh?«

Ned laughed boisterously, and Artie, easily led, laughed too, though he secretly doubted if ever Ned, big as he was, would have the courage to Present the doll, if made, to »Miss Georgiana.«

This thought was confirmed by the quick cessation of Ned's mirth, as Faith bounded out from the bushes, and was speedily followed by our hero.

»Capital,« exclaimed the latter, as he gazed around. »What progress you have made. Ned, you are a regular carpenter. We begin to look like Crusoe indeed, now.«

»Did you imagine no one was able to do anything but yourself!« retorted Conyers, sneeringly. »Pray what have you done? You've been

long enough gone.«

»Did you see a ship?« demanded Artie.

»No, but I've had an adventure. I found an Indian, or rather Faith did.«

»Confound that dog!« ejaculated Ned, changing colour; »he'll get us all murdered.«

»Confound him?« repeated George, flushing up at the attack on his favourite; »you forget, Conyers, that he saved your life.«

Ned made no answer, but half swung away on his heel.

Artie, however, caused him to pause, by asking—

»But the Indian, Merridew; what of him?«

»George immediately entered into explanations.

»What!« cried Ned, »you've brought him here? What an idiot you are. How do you know that this isn't a trick of the Indians he calls his enemies to get our scalps!«

»Because,« retorted our hero, boldly, »twenty Indians would scarcely take all that trouble to overcome such lads as we. As to being an idiot, the future shall prove whether you or I most deserve the title. This Indian knows these islands, which we do not, and may, as he is willing to be, of good service to us.«

»Then you'd trust him?«

»Why not? Cannot a face be honest and express gratitude because it's black? Did not God make him as well as us?«

»There you go preaching,« said Ned, contemptuously, »Well, I shall have no hand in it.«

And he walked sullenly off.

»I can't send the poor fellow away now,« said George. »Besides, Artie, he will be of service I know, Already he has shown me a tree, the fruit of which is good to eat; and he has brought some to eat.«

»Has he? Then he can't be an enemy.«

»How can you tell they're not poison?« put in Ned, who had lounged back, not liking to be alone.

»For the best reason, he ate them himself. I'll fetch him.«

Before further demur could be made, he darted off and speedily returned with Tahi.

At sight of him, both Ned and Artie felt inclined to take to their heels, but restrained the impulse, seeing our hero did not show the least fear.

Certainly Tahi scarcely presented an appearance to attract.

He wore no covering save a waistcloth, and, though tall, with well-made limbs, the disfiguring tattoo which was on many parts of his body gave him a hideous aspect.

There was nothing warlike, however, about him.

He carried no weapons, while the expression of his face, down each side of which his black hair fell long and lank, was peaceful enough.

»Inglis boys frightened,« he said to George. »No need fear Tahi, Tahi show them how to fish, hunt.«

Ned and Artie hearing this, gained confidence and drew near,

»Wigwam?« queried Tahi, pointing to the planks on the branches.

»Yes.«

Tahi shook his head.

»Too near shore,« he remarked, »Light fire, cook food,« and he pointed seaward, »Indians see and come.«

The truth of the observation struck all three.

»We never thought of that, Tahi,« said George. »There, already you have made return for my setting you free.«

»Tahi do more still,« was the answer. »Tahi help, and show how Indians build house. No Indians now,« and carefully he scanned the horizon. »Tahi make fire and cook; bread not good raw.«

»He never calls those things bread?« whispered Ned.

»They must be,« exclaimed George, recollecting the fruit of the bread-tree. »Why, Ned, we, in our ignorance, should have nearly starved, fearing to touch them.«

Meanwhile, the Indian, most attentively watched by Faith, had gathered a heap of sticks, which he ignited by striking sparks from two stones on to a piece of touchwood.

Directly the wood blazed he placed the fruit near, as we might potatoes, to bake.

Suddenly the dog, as if he were pleased by the fire, walked up to the Indian and stretched himself by his side.

Tahi started at first, but finally laid his dark hand nervously on the animal.

The latter, turning his head, licked his hand caressingly.

»Now,« exclaimed our hero to his companions, »I know Tahi is honest, for Faith trusts him. He never does that except to people he likes,«

Ned laughed sneeringly; for Faith never willingly came to him; and he hated the dog, though to it he owed his life.

While the fruit baked, Tahi expressed a desire to rig up a shelter for the night.

With the boys' knives he cut down several flexible branches.

These he planted in the sand perpendicularly, in three rows to form three sides, fastening them to others horizontally, to make a roof.

When he lashed over all, with strong fibre grass, large fern and palm leaves, until it represented a very comfortable hut, thatched on the sides as well as above.

The boys shouted with delight, and Tahi won ground even with Ned Conyers.

Tahi laughed approval at their pleasure; then, leading the way back to the fire, examined the fruit.

They were well roasted by this time, the outside being black.

This the Indian scraped off, showing the inside to be soft and white like the inside of a new-baked loaf.

Cutting them in pieces, Tahi placed them on some green leaves, near which he set several cocoa-nut shells filled with cocoa-nut milk.

Never did »tea« look more appetising.

Artie clapped his hands with joy, and the young Crusoes forgot for the moment the hundreds of miles which separated them from dear old England.

Sitting down round the fire, they made a hearty meal, during which Tahi told them a great deal about his home, where he had a wife and two children.

He said the English ships often touched there, when he used to go on board with breadfruit, by which means he had learned English,

»Why can't we get there?« asked Ned. »We've got a boat.«

But Tahi shook his head.

»Too far,« he repeated; »big, big way. Many enemies' canoes, many enemies' islands, between. Enemy fight, and eat prisoners.«

And the thought of getting to Tahi's island was, at least for the present, abandoned.

They had sat so long over their »tea« that night had fallen,

The moon had not yet risen, and the sky was veiled by an impenetrable blackness.

An oppressive heat filled the air, while the sea had a hollow moan in its sound.

Suddenly the earth, as on the previous evening, began to shake and tremble.

Then came a mighty roar like thunder, as if the end of the world had come, and the sky grew vivid with a red light.

The boys and Indian sat paralysed with terror.

The voice of the ocean grew louder, and the waves higher, and yet no wind blew.

On the contrary the air was heavy and still.

The trees only shook because of the earth's upheaving.

Was the island about to be engulfed in the ocean?

»What is this, Tahi?« asked George, in a whisper; »do you know?«

»The Big Spirit angry,« said Tahi. »He shakes the earth in his big band, and breathes fire and smoke from his great mouth.«

He pointed, as he spoke, inland.

Our hero sprang to his feet.

»Tahi,« he said, pointing inland too; »that is a fire mountain. It is on fire.«

The Indian nodded.

»Let us take to the boat,« exclaimed Ned, leaping up.

»No, no, no sea,« said Tahi.

»Ned,« said Merridew, »it would be madness. Look how high the billows are rising; we should be swamped. We are safer here.«

»Safe? A pretty safety.«

»Well, let us trust we are safer, and that God will bring us through this danger, as he has those past. Do not let us despair; there may after all be no peril to us. I, for my part, shall try and see what is taking place.«

»Oh Merridew, don't go,« said Artie.

»He'll be an idiot if he does,« broke in Ned, his lips white with dread.

»I certainly shall,« remarked our hero, quietly; »you see we may be suffering terror and fear where there may be no need. Tahí, will you come?«

The Indian rose with reluctance.

»Don't you be foolish enough. Stop here, Tahí,« exclaimed Ned; »stay where you are, Myers.«

Artie made no attempt to move, but the Indian in silence stood by George.

»Come, Tahí,« said our hero, resolutely; »you, I see, trust in your Great Spirit, as I do in mine.«

And the boy, with the Indian, plunged into the valley.

The path was lighted by the glare thrown on the sky by the volcano.

The earth trembled and heaved under their feet; while the birds screamed and flew wildly among the bushes, and the wild hogs, in alarm, ran blindly across their path.

All nature seemed in dread, and had not George's education made him too wise, he would have believed really the end of the world had arrived.

As they advanced the glare increased, as did the earth's trembling, while fragments like ashes fell about their path.

More than once our hero felt his heart sink.

But the natural pride of a stout heart forbade this, and feeling sure there was no immediate danger, he went on.

Something once or twice had touched his leg as he had proceeded.

At first he had thought it the bushes, but looking down, felt his heart bound with affection as he saw it was dear old Faith.

The animal's drooping head and tail told how awed and frightened he was by this convulsion of nature, yet had it been to death itself that they were advancing, Faith never would have quitted his master.

In about twenty minutes the three reached the table land.

As George beheld the grand scene before him, he flung up his arms with a great cry, partly of admiration, partly of terror, though the first predominated.

The vast mountain was one mighty cone of fire.

The flame shot up from the crater to the height of thirty to forty feet, carrying with it masses of rock and molten matter, accompanied by a thunderous roar.

Above hung a dense cloud of red smoke, while leaping, flowing down every side, came streams of blazing lava, that made the whole mountain appear a mighty conflagration.

Involuntarily our hero dropped on his knees, overcome by an awful admiration.

Tahi cowered low on the ground trembling with terror, and Faith, crouching by his master, moaned plaintively.

The heat was intense, and the air so dry that their eyelids seemed to be scorched.

For some time the three so remained, when our hero, who ever had his wits about him, observed that not only was the volcano further off from them than he had imagined, but that the lava which continued to roll down in a blazing flood, never came nearer them.

»Tahi,« he exclaimed, starting up, »I don't think we have any cause to fear after all, for I believe the volcano is too far off. Perhaps even it is on another island. If not, there must be some valley or precipice between it and us, or the lava would overflow this land. Supposing it goes into the sea!« he added. »Is there no way we can find out?«

Before the Indian could reply, a terrific roar burst from the volcano.

CHAPTER IX.

UNFOUNDED FEARS—THE BUILDING OF THE HOUSE —THE APPROACH OF DANGER.

A black cloud now rose from the burning mountain and in a few seconds a shower of hot ashes fell about the spectators.

Tahi uttered a howl as they dropped on his naked skin, and Faith joined chorus, while all three, as by one accord, fled back down the valley.

So intense a darkness reigned that they could hardly keep to the path.

In a little while, however, they recovered from their fright, finding the ashes had ceased to fall around them; but hardly had they stopped to draw breath, than they were startled by shouts and cries proceeding from the direction of the shore.

They knew at once that it was Ned and Artie.

What new trouble had fallen upon them?

Our hero and his companions hastened their steps, and soon came in sight of the two—rushing up the valley at full speed.

»What's the matter?« called George.

»The sea, the sea,« they cried; »it's covering the beach! It's washing away all our stores!«

»It will cover all the land,« added Artie Myers, »for it's coming after us!«

»Nonsense!« said George, seeing how scared the lad was. »There's nothing behind you. Listen.«

They did so, and the loud break of the sea, like thunder on the shore, could be distinctly heard.

After a brief consultation, it was decided to advance and reconnoitre.

Before they had gone far through the bushes, they not only heard the loud-voiced ocean, but could discern the white fringe of frothy foam on the billows which had rushed into the very bushes themselves.

A depression fell on the lads, for they believed all their property would be washed away, and they saw now the wisdom of Tahi in

pronouncing the shore a bad place to build their house.

But this had been no natural tide.

The inundation had been caused by the eruption of the volcano, and the billows began as rapidly to subside as they had arisen.

When assured the danger was past, the four went on to the shore.

A scene of devastation indeed awaited them.

The hut Tahi had erected was a wreck, and the sand was strewn with pieces of the wood the boys had so carefully stored.

But to their joy, the great weight of Jack Milward's chest, and that of the barrels, had saved them from being carried away by the sudden rise and fall of the waters.

Suddenly George, feeling himself really turn pale, cried —

»The boat, the boat! Has it gone?«

But no; this disaster at least had been saved them.

Fortunately they had fastened it too securely, and though it been severely tossed, it yet was safe.

»That's how it always is,« said our hero, reverently. »In the moment of our greatest trouble, if we look round, we shall be sure to find something for which to be grateful.«

»Well, the something's not much on this occasion,« broke in Ned Conyers. »Suppose, Merridew, instead of sermonising, we think how we're to pass the night?«

»We should never be too busy to feel gratitude,« said our hero, quietly.

Calling a council, the question was put, and Tahi answered it.

Making his way to a group of palm-trees not growing too close to the sea, he attached several saplings, horizontally to the trunks, with strips made from a pair of Jack Milward's white ducks.

Then he interlaced them with strong boughs, until he had formed a large platform like an aerial raft, capable of bearing the united weight of the five, for George would not part with Faith.

After this, having resecured the chest, barrels, and wood, and finding the sea had subsided, while the eruption now only caused a faint glow in the sky, they all, wearied in mind and body, climbed on to their high

bed, which made them safe from the disturbance of night prowlers, and soon were sound asleep.

When they awoke next morning, the sun was shining brightly.

A soft, pleasant north-west wind was playing among the canopy of thick pinnated palm-leaves, and the sea laughed, and heaved, and sparkled under the glorious light of day.

Tahi again undertook to prepare breakfast.

Having set the bread-fruit to bake. he took several empty cocoanut-shells, and went up the valley.

When he returned the nuts were filled with a milky fluid, sweet and pleasant to the taste.

»Why, where did you get that, Tahi?« exclaimed George. »It's milk.«

»You haven't any cows here, have you!« demanded Ned.

»Yes,« laughed the Indian, nodding vigorously. »Cow; good cow. Quiet; never kick. Make no noise. Never eat. Tahi's cow.«

»Where is it,« said Ned, roughly. »Come and show it. It must be a queer cow that doesn't kick, bellow, or eat.«

The Indian, seeming vastly amused, took a cocoanut-shell from the sand, then led the way.

After a few minutes they stopped before a tree with dry and leathery leaves, the branches of which appeared dead and dried.»[The palo de vaca, or cow-tres, of South America.]

No sooner, however, did Tahi pierce the trunk with a knife, than, to the boys' amazement, there flowed forth a sweet, pleasant milk.

The Indian showed signs of delight at the young lads' astonishment, and, stabbing the tree in many parts, giving them the milk to drink.

After this they returned to the shore, and during breakfast the plans were canvassed for the day.

It was arranged that Tahi and George should go on an exploring expedition, to find a suitable site for the hut they intended to build.

Meanwhile Ned and Artie were to see after the stores, which had been only heaped up hurriedly the previous evening.

»And I'll tell you what,« said Ned Conyers »I shall paddle the boat into the large bay. P'raps, after last night, more of the wreck may be washed

up.«

»That's likely,« answered George.

»Thank you for your approval,« muttered Ned, beneath his breath.

No breakfast things having to be cleared away, directly the meal was over these Modern Crusoes set to work.

It was quite noon before Tahi and our hero returned.

They had discovered a beautiful site about a mile distant, a smooth, grassy spot on the side of a valley, but not high enough to be easily seen or attract attention.

A stream ran near down to the shore, which was not two hundred paces off, while from the heights an extensive view of the island and ocean could be commanded.

They reached the beach just as the other two returned from their last journey to Gibeon Bay, as Ned had christened it.

His idea had been fruitful, for they had found several fragments of wood, another tea-chest, and a large barrel, which, though empty, might prove serviceable from the iron ban around it.

Altogether it had been a good morning's work, and the young Crusoes began to forget their terror of the previous evening.

Tahi appeared as much interested as any of them, and they began to think how best to remove the stores to their new home.

The best, and certainly the quickest, way would be to take them by the boat, which, as the sea was calm, would not be very difficult,

They instantly, therefore, began to load it, and, as it would require a relief of paddlers, it was decided our hero and Ned should work round the boat, with Faith occasionally to tow, while Tahi, with Artie, crossed the headland and directed the paddlers where to land.

When the boat was filled, as much as and the boys' strength allowed, they pushed it well off and started on their journey.

The coast was beautiful in the extreme, the shores, indented by lovely little bays, being like fairyland itself.

On any principal height or headland the boys were sure to see Tahi directing them, and thus, though the task proved arduous, the paddlers

soon reached the bay, more lovely than all the rest, where the Indian and Artie awaited them,

The boat being run ashore, it was speedily unloaded, but, as the day was far advanced, it was not deemed advisable to make a for the rest of the goods until the following morning.

So they commenced marking out the foundation of their new house.

There was something so original in the task that the lads worked without feeling fatigue, Tahi, by tacit consent, being accepted as foreman.

By means of lying fire to the roots the Indian felled several trees, hacked off the upper branches, and planted them firmly in the ground, making a hollow square, leaving an opening for the door.

The roof he formed of tender saplings, which were easily bent.

After interlacing the sides with branches—save where the windows or look-outs were to be—he finally covered them with wet clay and sand, which the sun soon baked to brick hardness, while he thatched the roof with thick layers of palm-leaves, secured by long fibrous grasses.

When it was completed the young Crusoes were enchanted, and it certainly presented a capital appearance, promising security, and shelter from the wind and rain.

After this had been accomplished, the next day was employed in furnishing and the interior.

The whole had taken nearly a week before it was finished.

When it was, no purchaser of a vast estate could have regarded it with greater pride than did the three boy-builders, who experienced something of the feeling of Romulus when he founded Rome.

By this time Tahi had come to be looked upon quite as one of themselves,

Our hero felt almost an affection for him and often, seated on their »look-out,« would listen to his accounts of his dear home.

Poor fellow! he had left all he loved there, and as he spoke of his wife and children tears stood in his eyes.

The sea-chest last washed ashore had belonged to one of the petty officers, and contained the invaluable prize of a telescope.

With this our hero would pass hours on the look-out, scanning the ocean for a sail.

These Modern Crusoes were far better off than they could have hoped, yet, when he thought of his dear, pretty mother at Amble-side, and her grief at his supposed loss in the »Vixen,« he yearned for home, and his heart felt ready to burst.

But he knew she would find consolation where he himself did, and where alone it can be found.

One evening about sunset, he was so engaged when several dark, tiny specks, just where the sun sent a blood-red band across the water, attracted his attention.

He gazed intently, then, leaping to his feet, ran down to the house,

»Tahi! Tahi!« he called, »I want you on the look-out, Come.«

»Is it a sail!«' demanded Ned.

»No. I wish it were.«

The Indian instantly went back with our hero, Ned and Artie following.

On reaching the height, George, giving the telescope to Tahi, said —

»Look! What are those?«

The Indian obeyed, and his colour changed.

In a moment he put down the glass.

»Well, Tahi,« demanded our hero, breathlessly, »what are they?«

»Indians—Niuans,« was the curt reply, »and—Misser George—they are coming here!«

CHAPTER X.

THE PRISONERS—A HORRIBLE SCENE—A CANNIBAL FEAST—GEORGE RESOLVES TO ATTEMPT A RESCUE —FLIGHT.

Tahi's words a silence fell on the little party.

Indians, Niuan's; and they were coming there.

Artie turned pale; Ned seemed hardly less agitated, while the eyes of each were fixed on the small specks advancing along the broad red sun-ray reflection, as if they took it for their course,

Swiftly the canoes approached, increasing in size:

George looked at the Indian:

His face was quivering with anger; his dark eyes flashed fiercely.

He flung his thin, long arms towards the boats.

»Tahi's enemies,« he ejaculated; »the enemies of his race. Ah! if Tahi had his spear.«

»It would be useless against so many,« remarked our hero. »There are four canoes. Why do you think they are coming here?«

Tahi shrugged his shoulders.

»Prisoners,« he said, laconically. »Feast eat!«

»What ought we to do?« queried Ned.

»Keep still few minutes. Tahi make sure. Enemy must see no light. Hate Inglis, savage, hate all. Come!«

Signing them to follow, he led the way to where the crest of the hill dropped in an opposite direction to the canoes, and at which spot a few bushes offered concealment, while they did not obscure the view.

Here, lying flat, with only their heads raised, the boys and Tahi watched.

The sun was rapidly sinking.

Soon darkness would enshroud the land.

As yet, however, there was sufficient light to distinguish the boats.

There were, as our hero had stated, four in number, and each contained about a dozen black figures.

The canoes were furnished, as is the fashion in all Polynesian craft, with outriggers and a sail.

Over the stern projected a small stage, on which one of the crew stood to steer, while the bow was turned upward a good height.

Though the gail, similar to a lateen sail, was hoisted, the Niuans used the paddle also, and in an incredibly short time reached the shore.

Not only were they out of sight, but the sun had sank, and night had closed in, and where they had landed was, of course, impossible to tell.

The little party only knew that it was not at Hope Bay, as they had christened the spot where they were.

Our hero in his anxiety wished to make for one of the headlands, and reconnoitre, but Tahi advised waiting awhile quietly where they were, whence they commanded most of the table-land.

A few minutes proved the wisdom of the Indian's advice.

From the path, not quite a mile distant, leading up from Gibson Bay, appeared a dark figure, which was speedily followed by between thirty or forty others.

They walked in single file; with two exceptions, where three proceeded abreast.

»Prisoners,« remarked Tahi, gutturally,

The Niuans advanced to the broad open plain, where they halted.

What they were about the watchers could not distinguish, but Tahi guessed.

»Make fire,« he remarked.

This proved the case, for speedily a faint glow was observable in their midst, which soon broke into a high yellow flame, brightly illuminating the scene around.

What a scene it was!

The boys' hearts stood still with terror.

Could those frightful objects be men?



“THE INDIANS WERE PERFORMING A WILD DANCE ROUND THE FIRE.”

Some forty Indians were performing a wild dance round the fire.

Sometimes they joined hands as in a circle; sometimes, separating, they performed the most grotesque antics and postures, all the while uttering a barbarous song.

Devoid of any particle of clothing, their bodies were daubed over with patches of red and green paint, making their aspect revoltingly hideous.

On their heads they wore a bush of high feathers, and in their hands flourished the terrible shark-tooth spears.

The paint and spears, Tahi told the boys, showed that the prisoners had been taken in battle.

»But where are they?« asked George, in a whisper, though a mile laid between them and the disgusting cannibals.

Tahi pointed to a thick clump of trees and bushes, at the foot of which his clear, keen sight could distinguish two dark forms lying prostrate.

»Surely, surely,« ejaculated George, in horror, »they will not treat them so barbarously! Who dare say, then, that those brave men the missionaries are not needed?«

He stopped, for the Niuan had ended their dance, and two were advancing to the clump of bushes.

A spasmodic movement passed through Tahi's frame. Low, fierce, guttural sounds escaped his lips, while his dark, glittering eyes were

fixed on the two Niuans,

The latter stopped.

When they rose one of the captives was between them, and they dragged him towards the circle.

Our hero sprang to his feet.

»I cannot stay here, Tahi!« he exclaimed, »I must get nearer. Can't we do so without danger?«

The Indian instantly stood up signifying his willingness to try, and so great was the horrible fascination that even Ned and Artie proposed to follow.

George was pale; every nerve quivered, and his bright eyes flashed with indignation and anger.

»Oh I« he exclaimed, »if Heaven would but give us the means to rescue the poor fellows!«

The Indian sadly shook his head, and pointed to the dog.

»The Niuans' bearing is keen,« he said. »If we are discovered, we shall be treated like them,« and he nodded towards the savages. »Dog must stop behind.«

»True,« acquiesced George. »Faith, old boy, Come.«

Swiftly he ran down the hill to the house.

Entering, he said to the dog, who followed, while he pointed to the door —

»Good fellow. Watch!«

In a moment the sagacious animal had crouched down, his muzzle between his beautiful paws, on guard.

Our hero knew that he would not stir until his voice bade him.

Passing forth, therefore, he speedily rejoined the others, and they set out.

Some ceremony was evidently being gone through by the Niuans, but what, they could not tell, as for safety they had to keep to the bushes.

Cautiously they advanced, following Tahi, whose gliding, snake-like movement they tried to imitate.

Soon the shouts and songs of the savages grew louder.

It sounded like jubilant triumph.

Artie paused.

»Oh Merridew,« he gasped, »don't let us go on.«

»We must. We are in no danger. The trees hide us. Only do not speak.«
said George.

A little further, Tahi, halting and signing for silence, rose erect.

A thick, tangle bush was all around them, at either side of which they could hear the loud voices of the Niuans.

Out of the bushes grew several trees of thick foliage.

»Sailor can climb,« whispered the Indian. »Safe up there.«

The hint was understood, and, as noiseless as cats, the four were speedily amid the branches of a gigantic tree.

Securing themselves safely on the boughs, they looked down upon the scene.

As they did so their blood curdled, and their hearts froze at the horrible spectacle they witnessed.

Near the enormous fire, with the savages partly surrounded was a clear space, in which a bamboo stake had been driven.

Te this was bound a wretched victim, who had been evidently subjected to the most diabolical torture.

The blood flowed copiously from many wounds in his body.

His hair had been burnt from his head, on which blazing fragments of the fire had been cast, while savages, howling like fiends, danced in a circle round the miserable being, waving flaming torches of resinous wood, which they constantly applied to the shrinking, quivering body

Yet not a cry escaped his lips.

»Oh, it is horrible! I cannot bear it,« whispered our hero, turning sick, and averting his face. »Tahi, can nothing be done to stop those demons?«

»What a stupid you are, Merridew!« said Ned, fiercely. »Can't you hold your tongue! Do you want us all to be stabbed and frizzled like him? I daresay, if his people had captured the Niuans, they'd have treated them the same.«

»Oh Heaven, have pity upon him and them!« prayed George, to himself,

Tahi, who appeared deeply affected, placed his hands on the boys' shoulders to warn them to be silent.

»He has suffered, and made no sound,« he whispered, proudly. »It is all over—see?«

Glancing in the direction indicated, they saw the savages had retired leaving a clear space of some twenty yards before their victim.

His head was drooped on his chest; every limb was relaxed.

Our hero thought that it was indeed over—that he was dead, when one of the Niuans, tall, and straight as an arrow, advanced from the rest.

He carried a spear, about twelve feet in length, down the sides of which, to within three feet of the butt, were set formidable rows of sharks' teeth.

Waving this, as if to attract attention, he, in his guttural tongue, evidently flung insult and scorn upon the helpless victim.

In a second the face of the latter, burnt and scarred, was lifted, the limbs drawn together, and the prisoner haughtily cast back insult and defiance.

He ended with the war-whoop of his tribe, and again his head fell on his chest.

The other, raising his spear, poised himself lightly on the earth, then hurled the deadly weapon.

The aim was unerring.

It pierced the captive's heart, and he died, as he had suffered, without a groan.

The rush that was made towards the body to prepare it for the horrible cannibal feast, prevented the cry Tahi gave from being heard.

The poor fellow was all of a tremble with agitation.

Tears of impotent fury were in his eyes.

»What is it?« asked our hero.

»He of Tahi's race,« answered the Indian, pointing towards the dead savage. »Niuans at war with Tahi's race. Ah, he was a brave; he died only as braves do.«

»Tahi,« said George, in a low voice, »over there by the bushes, alone, is another of your race, waiting a similar fate. Can't we save him?«

The Indian raised his head.

»Yes, Tahi will try,« he replied, earnestly.

»Very well,« remarked our hero, quietly; »as I never proposed a danger yet to another I would not face myself, I shall go too, Tahi.«

»Surely you would not be such a downright stupid?« ejaculated Ned. »What are those niggers to you?«

»Just God's creatures; no more,« was the calm reply from the brave, firm young lips.

»Oh, Merridew, don't go!« pleaded Artie.

»Nonsense, Artie; I'd never forgive myself if I didn't; only, if I don't come back, please,

for my sake, take care of Faith,« and our hero followed the Indian to the ground.

»Let him go,« said Ned. »If he's caught, it serves him right, for his self-conceit and trying to lord it over everyone, I shan't mind; certainly shan't try to save him, the low fellow; a gentleman would know better.«

»But how could we get on without him?«

»There you go—as if he's everybody! I can take care of yon,I you sneaking coward, as well as he, can't I? I'm glad he has gone.«

But Ned was not.

His rage, indeed, chiefly arose from dread, and from the fact that George and Tahi should have left them alone because of a »tattooed nigger.«

Meanwhile, the Indian had urged our hero to let him tgroceed alone, but, finding the youth resolute, they glided swiftly through the bushes skirting the plain, for time was precious.

Frequently they feared the light from the last bonfire, which fell brightly on the bushes, would betray them, but, apparently, the Niuans, who believed the island to be uninhabited, were too occupied in dancing, and preparing for the coming feast.

»Why do they not kill the second at once, Tahi!« whispered George.

»One 'nough to eat,« was the rejoinder. »After eat him, torture second, but take body home.«

George shuddered, and felt more resolved to save the destined victim, if possible.

Owing to the need of caution, and the wide circuit they had to make, it was fully twenty minutes before they reached the bushes, near which was the prisoner; strongly bound.

He lay as motionless as if he were dead.

This was the perilous moment.

If he uttered any cry, or rose erect, the Niuans would be upon them, and their fate, as well as his, sealed.

Tahi, taking George's knife, lay flat on the ground, and began to wriggle forward.

Though to our hero he made no sound, the prisoner heard him.

He turned his head, probably believing it to be a wild boar.

In a second Tahi's hand was on his mouth, and words of his own language in his ear,

The next his bonds were severed—he was free, and being bidden to make for the canoe.

He understood them, rolled gently round, and wriggled to the bushes.

Our hero's heart beat high.

It palpitated so as to make it difficult to breathe.

A few seconds, and all danger would be passed, that is, if the savage reached the canoe.

If he failed, and had to fly across the island, for the first time George Merridew recognised the danger of himself and friends.

Their residence there would be discovered, and they would be hunted down and captured.

Pressing his hand over his mother's testament, which he always carried with him, he prayed that his desire to save the poor prisoner might not imperil the lives of the others.

It was at this moment the savage came towards the bush.

He was within two feet of it, when, to our hero and Tahi's horror, a dark form sprang up from the shadow some twenty paces off.

It was a Niuian, who had been placed on guard.

The yell he uttered rendered concealment no longer possible.

The Niuans, at the warning cry, came rushing forward as a cloud, yelling, and brandishing their spears, while their former captive leaping erect, sprang into the bushes.

There he and Tahi, who, in the savage excitement and his own warlike temperament had forgotten apparently our hero, shouted back the war-cry of their tribe,

It was answered by a cloud of spears.

They darted, swift as death, through the branches.

One whizzed close by George's ear, who, seeing he could do nothing better, wisely fled.

Where, he thought or cared not, so that he could escape from the cruel Niuans,

Their savage yells rang in his ears, and each instant he expected to feel their fearful spears quivering in his flesh,

Once he looked round for Tahi and the others, but they were not to be seen.

He dared not stay longer, and madly he sped on, breaking his way through the trees.

His brain was in a whirl—he saw nothing before his eyes but the burnt, gashed face the miserable victim, as he shrieked his war-cry.

Did it drown that of the Niuans!

Or was theirs really growing fainter?

Before he could calm his whirling brain enough to decide, the whole earth seemed to give way beneath him.

Instinctively he threw out his arms, for he knew he had, in the dark, and in his mad speed tumbled over a precipice.

The leaves he grasped gave way beneath his weight, and he fell, fell, he knew not whither.

CHAPTER XI.

THE STALACTITE CAVE—OUR HERO GIVES HIMSELF UP AS LOST.

THE next thing that our hero remembered was that the sun was streaming into his eyes, and that he was suffering much pain.

The mental question instantly occurred, where was he, and how had he got there!

Raising his eyes, he saw that he laid at the foot of a small precipice, the side of which was thickly overgrown with bushes.

All which had ed, then flashed upon him.

He recollected the pursuit of the Niuans, his flight, and fall over the precipice in the dark.

But where had he fallen?

He strove to rise, but dropped back with a cry of pain.

Every bone seemed to have a separate ache of its own, while that of his left e was so intense, that he knew he had sprained, if not dislocated it.

The wonder was, not that he was so hurt, but that he was not more so, indeed killed.

The latter fate he saw must have been prevented by the bushes, which, though they given way under his instinctive clutch, had yet broken the violence of his fall, and dropped him on a cluster of thick ferns, from which he had slid to the grass whereon he laid.

He had escaped the Indians truly, but had he escaped death?

Looking up at the blue sky with the soft white clouds flying overhead, and knowing that above those clouds was a lovelier land than mortal eye ever beheld, or mortal mind conceived, he could not regret the effort he had made for a fellow creature.

His grief was that probably he had drawn others into trouble.

Had he only suffered himself, he would have borne it firmly.

And suffer he did—terribly.

Fully an hour elapsed before he managed to raise himself sufficiently to look around.

Though it caused him considerable pain, his senses proved that no bones were broken, and he hoped his ankle was only sprained.

He found he had fallen into a tiny valley, opening on to a tiny bay, closed in by two high, precipitous headlands.

The sands as usual were golden, and kissed by silvery wavelets.

The valley was so lovely with rare vegetation, that our hero felt as if he were gazing upon some wondrous transformation scene.

His helpless condition, however, soon occupied his entire thoughts.

Death might certainly be yet far from him, but from what quarter could he even dream of help?

His position was one, no doubt, of extreme peril.

George laid in his perilous position and reflected upon his home, dear Amble-side, and his kind, pretty mother.

Patience, however, was difficult, for his ankle began to burn with excruciating pain.

Our hero knew something ought to be done, so he sat up and examined the member.

Fortunately his boots were so worn that he could easily remove them, when he found the one ankle very red and swollen,

George had not read so many books as he had without obtaining useful information.

Gathering some succulent leaves within reach, he crushed them into a thick, cool pulp, which he applied to the sprain, securing it by a broad leaf, fastened by strong fibre grass.

This gave him instant relief, and assured long ago that Tahi was right in his statement that no noxious animals were on the island, he drew himself out of the heat of the sun, and lying down was soon fast asleep.

When he awoke the sun was setting.

One of the headlands threw a deep shadow over the little bay. Night was approaching.

At the idea, George started up, but a hot, wrenching pain in every joint warned him that, though he was better, it was beyond his power to

walk.

Was he then to stay there all night alone?

There was no help for it, though the prospect was far from agreeable,

Yet, let it be believed, our hero was more troubled as to the fate of his companions and Tahi, than about himself.

»Poor Tahi,« he thought, »but for him I might have starved here; as it is, I can ward off that peril.«

Crawling to a bread tree, he managed to gather some of the ripe fruit, which, though not so palatable as when cooked, is yet very welcome to the hungry.

After a good meal, George took out his testament, for he never felt fear, or loneliness when perusing its pages.

When the light failed, he redressed his ankle, laid down, commended himself to Heaven, and slept from very mental weariness.

The next morning our hero found that he could crawl, but that his ankle would not permit him to do more than limp for a few yards.

Having breakfasted, he resolved to explore the place and commenced by crawling to the sands, which he found strewn by beautiful shells of every hue.

Most were empty, though some yet had their owners at home, but George was ignorant whether they were edible or not.

Like the other bays, the vegetation grew to the very edge of the sands, while the sea, never even at low tide permitted a dry passage round the headlands.

During his inspection, the young Crusoe perceived that the bay possessed one of those caves they had noticed as they had paddled their little store of goods round to Hope Bay.

At first he hesitated to enter, but seeing nothing to fear, he crawled to its mouth.

There he halted, breathless, with wonder.

Again he might have believed himself in Fairy-land.

The sun, penetrating the cave for a few feet, caused the sides, the roof, the very floor to sparkle, as if encrusted by precious stones.

Festoons as of jewels hung from the to branches of the trecs which were of magical beauty.

It looked like the splendid garden which Aladdin traversed to fetch the lamp for the wicked magician,

George, however, knew that he was gazing upon one of those wonders of nature, a stalactite cave.

Absorbed with interest, he crawled farther and further, at first unconscious of the dull, booming sound which filled the cavern.

But suddenly it burst upon him with a terrific roar like thunder.

A moment our hero paused, stunned.

The whole place echoed with the terrific reverberation.

It seemed as though the entire headland was falling in upon him.

Recollecting the volcano, he turned, and half-limped, half-crawled as quickly as he was able from the cave.

Before he had reached the entrance, however, the roar had died away to the dull, booming sound.

But the pace our hero had moved had made his ankle painful, so he dragged himself back to his former resting-place, and determined to try to wait patiently, nursing his foot, until the next day, when possibly he would be strong enough to ascend the valley and reconnoitre, to see if he could discover any trace of the Niuans, for his heart was torn by anxiety for his companions.

It seemed almost the space of two days before George saw, to his delight, the sun again sink and night close in.

The rest had much benefited his ankle, and he trusted to walk next day.

Sleep, however, was not easy.

He had not had sufficient exercise, so when he did slumber it was but lightly, and the soft lap-lap of the tide seemed ever present to him; at least, he was instantly conscious when it was abruptly intermingled by another sound—

The rustle of leaves as if someone was brushing through the bushes.

Softly he rose to his elbows and looked in the direction.

What was his horror when he beheld the dim outline of an Indian coming quickly up the valley from the shore towards him?

The obscurity was too great for him to perceive more than that it was an Indian, and that in his hand he carried one of the terribly formidable shark-tooth spears,

Our hero's heart stood still.

He gave himself up for lost.

His only hope was that the savage would not perceive him where he laid.

The hope was wild, improbable, for the bushes but partly concealed him, and he was directly in the Indian's path.

He would have liked to have drawn further back, but dared not.

The slightest rustle would surely attract the attention of the acute-eared savage.

He must remain quiet and trust to Providence.

His heart now beat so loudly that he feared it would be heard.

His eyes were riveted on the advancing enemy.

There are those who say if you gaze intently on another, the power of the eye is such the person is sure to look at you.

Was it that?

Or did the Indian hear the full, swelling beat of our hero's heart?

Certain it is he stopped abruptly when he came within a few feet and threw up his head.

His glance instantly fell on the boy.

One second he paused.

Then, giving a loud, guttural cry, he leaped towards him,

CHAPTER XII.

NED'S COWARDLY BEHAVIOUR—ARTIE SEEKS FAITH, WHO IS PERPLEXED—~WHAT IS IT?

FOR a brief space we must return to the two lads who remained trembling with fear, for, secretly, Ned was equally frightened as Artie, up in the tree after our hero and Tahi had left them.

Instead of applauding the generosity and courage of the pair, Ned felt himself a most injured party, and hated Merridew worse than ever.

That mind is evil which cannot praise good in others.

No sooner were they alone than naturally they turned their attention again to the Indians.

The chief part of them were seated in a circle, jabbering in their outlandish tongue, or singing wild, guttural songs, apparently of joy and triumph, while at a little distance the rest were Preparing the human feast.

»It's very horrible, isn't it, Ned,« whispered Artie; »I'm quite sick. I do wish Merridew and Tahi would come back. Only think, if those demons should spy us out.«

»Why should they! I don't see the fear,« retorted Ned, angrily, though his voice shook with it. »As to Merridew and Tahi, they're two confounded idiots, and it would serve them right if they were caught and cooked like the nigger. I shouldn't mind.«

»Oh Ned!« ejaculated Artie,

Then added —

»Look, look!«

The Indians had evidently completed their culinary preparations, and were now putting their victim to roast.

Artie could bear no more.

»Oh I« he groaned; and, deadly faint, tumbled bang from the tree.

At the same instants the Indians sprang up with a whoop, brandishing their spears.

Ned instantly gave himself up for lost, and without one thought of his companion, slid from the branch he was on to the ground, and fled with all his might.

He ran for nearly a mile, the whoop of the Indians seeming to follow him in his terror.

Then, out of breath, coming to a large, densely foliated tree, he climbed into the branches.

Here he listened attentively.

He yet could hear the shouting of the savages.

But instead of being nearer, they were evidently much further off.

This comforted him considerably, and he hitched himself more securely on the boughs.

»That young donkey, Myers,« he muttered; »I always thought he was a chicken-hearted coward. Well, if people will be that, they've no right to risk the lives of others. If he's taken, and Merridew and Tahi, I shall be like Robinson Crusoe, indeed. I wish there weren't those disgusting savages, then it would be more than half jolly, I know what to eat, and there's water and milk to drink, and nothing to do. I shouldn't mind having Tahi, though, for he was going to catch some of those wild hogs, and teach us how to fish.«

In such selfish soliloquy, Ned Conyers passed the long hours of darkness, troubling himself no further about his companions, until dawn began to break, when, overcome by fatigue, he fell asleep.

Meanwhile, though a bush had somewhat broken Artie's fall, he had come down upon his arm, causing such exquisite pain, that he feared it must be broken.

The poor little fellow could not suppress a cry, despite his terror of the savages.

At the sound of their whoop, believing, as had Conyers, that his fall had discovered them, he sprang to his feet in terror.

»Ned, Ned!« he whispered, »Oh, do, do help me up!«

Then he uttered a piteous cry, for he beheld his cowardly companion slip to the ground and fly, leaving him alone.

»Oh Ned, Ned,« he pleaded, tears in his young voice., »Don't leave me, please don't; it's unkind. They'll catch and eat me.«

There was no response; no slackening of Ned's speed.

He was gone.

Artie strove to follow, but the effort proved that his knee was twisted.

He could only limp painfully.

In despair, he dropped at the foot of the tree Descending sobbing.

»Oh, they'll get me! They'll torture, kill, and roast me!« he wept. »I shall never see my mother, and father, nor brother Dick, and baby Nellie again. Oh Ned, I wouldn't have thought you could have been so cruel, so beastly cruel! Merridew wouldn't have left me like this.«

At that instant the attempted rescue of the prisoner was discovered, and the Niuans uttered their cry of war and fury.

As the poor little lad heard it, he shrieked aloud, making a violent effort to get up and fly.

Then, overcome by pain and fright, he sunk back upon the grass insensible.

When he came to, the moon, high up in the heavens, was shining down upon him,

Everything was still.

Not the faintest sound broke the silence save the distant break of the sea on the shore.

Mustering his courage, and finding his arm and knee much less painful, Artie rose, and after one or two efforts succeeded in climbing the tree.

He wanted to reconnoitre.

Of course his attention was directed to the plain which had been intended by the Niuans or their dining-room.

All now was deserted.

Not a human figure was to be seen.

The moon shone brightly down.

The huge bonfire was only a heap of glowing embers, from which now and again a tiny flame would flicker out and drop.

On those occasions they lighted up several large black masses lying on the ashes, which sickened the lad once more, for he divined what they were.

If any boy was utterly, hopelessly miserable, it was Artie Myers at that moment.

He recognised no pleasure in being a solitary Crusoe.

He wondered what had become of Ned.

He wondered, with a swelling heart, what had become of Merridew and Tahī, kind Tahī who had taught them so much.

He hoped they were safe.

Instinctively his young hands went together, and he prayed that they were.

Our hero's words and example had not been thrown away.

Neither had they been cast on stony soil, but had borne fruit.

Then Artie began to think what he should do.

The savages had certainly departed.

Should he go back to the house?

He might find Merridew and Tahī there.

The lad shook his head sadly.

He felt sure that had they been able to get to the house, George would have certainly come back to them.

He might find Ned there.

Somehow this idea did not cause him much pleasure, save that it would be companionship.

I shall find brave, dear old Faith there at any rate,« he reflected.

And his heart at once seemed lightened.

»I shall not feel so lonely nor frightened with him.«

Descending the tree, he cautiously made his way back to the house.

On coming down the hill he saw the door was open as he had left it.

His heart sunk.

He knew none of his companions were there.

The bright moon shone obliquely into the interior, and the first object Artie beheld as he drew near was Faith, still on guard, his muzzle on his

paws.

On hearing the lad, he raised his head and wagged his tail in recognition.

Artie, going to his side, knelt and threw his arms round his neck.

Yes; he no longer felt alone.

The dog licked his cheek caressingly, then gave vent to a low whine.

The boy knew his meaning as well as if he had spoken it.

»No, dear old Faith, your master has not come. I hope he will, but I don't know where he is. I fear, Faith, those horrible Indians have got him and Tahi.«

The animal, on his side, apparently understood the lad's meaning as if he had whined it in canine tongue, for, raising his muzzle, he gave a plaintive howl, followed at brief intervals by piteous whines,

As he would not leave his post, the little, solitary shipwrecked lad laid down beside him, and his fair head on his dark, shaggy coat, and his arms round his neck, soon asleep. But Faith did not sleep.

His beautiful head he kept erect,

His eyes, full of an eager, anxious watchfulness were directed out of the door, while ever and anon he whined sadly.

He had understood Artie, and was making up his sagacious mind what to do.

That was evident.

Whether to disobey our hero's commands to wait where he was until he came back, or to go in search of the master he loved?

Honour and obedience are two of the leading attributes of the canine race, and Faith found the dilemma he was in a grievous point to decide.

So the hours stole on.

The sun rose higher, higher, when, abruptly, Artie lifted his eyes, broad awake.

He had been aroused by a low, warning growl from Faith.

The animal's glance was bent upon a cluster of bread-fruit trees and bushes about thirty feet from the door.

Did he hear or see anything?

Yes.

The bushes were moving and faintly rustling.

Something was among them!

CHAPTER XIII.

GEORGE HAS AN AGREEABLE SURPRISE-TAHI—THE CHASM IN THE CAVE.

AS the Indian had leaped upon our hero, he had done so with uplifted spear.

George indeed believed his last hour had come.

A mist swam before his eyes.

He thought of his home, the home of the beloved parent whom he should never see again.

He was dizzy, and, commending himself to Heaven, was falling back, when he heard the spear drop with a peculiar thud close by his side.

Amazed to find himself untouched, he glanced down, to behold that the point of the weapon had severed in two a venomous scorpion, which must have been close to his hand.

More and more astonished, he lifted his eyes to the savage.

Then a great cry of joy burst from his lips, and he exclaimed—

»Tahi, is it really you, alive, safe? Oh, dear Tahi, I am so glad!«

»Tahi glad, too,« answered the friendly Indian, kneeling and expressing his delight in uncouth gestures. Artie strove to follow, but the effort proved that his knee was twisted, He could only limp painfully. In despair, he dropped at the foot of the tree Descending sobbing. »Yes, yes, Misser George's safe. Niuans not got him. Oh, Tahi feared, Tahi feared!«

And he touched his forehead to the ground, while tears actually rolled from the grateful fellow's eyes.

Our hero was laughing rather hysterically.

In his weakened state the revulsion of feeling had been a little too much for him.

»So did I fear, dear Tahi, I feared for you and I feared you yourself just now. I took you for one of the Indians, and thought I was done for. You good old fellow, whatever made you spring upon me like that?«

The Indian pointed gravely to the scorpion.

»When Tahi saw Misser George, Tahi saw that too, about to sting Misser George's hand. No moment could be lost. If Tahi pause, or Misser George move, scorpion sting Misser George, perhaps swell and die.«

In horror our hero drew away from the reptile, though now it was harmless enough.

It was about a foot long, and much resembling a lobster.

It had eight feet, two frontal claws, eight eyes, though they were not easily perceptible, and a pointed tail, at the end of which was the deadly sting.

»Tahi,« said George, with emotion, as he grasped the Indian's hand, »you may have saved my life.«

The savage shrugged his shoulders.

»Misser George saved Tahi, and tried to save Tahi's friend,« he answered.

»Tried! Then was he not saved?«

»Yes,« replied the Indian, sadly; »saved from the Niuans' torture but not from Niuans spears, Minalmi,« and he drew his head erect, »died like a brave.«

»Tell me all about it, Tahi,« entreated our hero.

The savage, who had not perceived his companion's bandaged ankle, immediately complied.

»When the Niuans shouted their war-whoop, Tahi and Minalmi answered it; but Tahi and Minalmi had no spears, nothing. They were helpless. The Niuans came in clouds, Tahi and his brother fled, fled to the canoes. They would live to revenge their tortured brother.

»They reached the path, and ran, as the bird flies fast, fast; but the Indian's spear flies faster.

»The Niuans came as a cloud. Suddenly Tahi recollect Misser George.

»Tahi look. Misser George nowhere, and Tahi turned to find him. Too late!

»A spear came and struck Tahi's brother in the back. He fell.

»Tahi stoop, look, feel heart. Minalmi dead. Tahi plucked out the spear. In his fury Tahi forgot Misser George.«

With the war-whoop of his tribe he hurled back the spear.

Then Tahi shouted laughter and defiance, for he had struck down their chief,

After, Tahi fled, happy, content,
He reached the canoes.

He jumped into one and paddled off. But Tahi knew it was useless.
The Niuans were already on the shore.

Soon they would be in their canoes, Their speed would overtake Tahi.
Tahi resolved on a trick.

He rose up in the canoe and shouted his war-whoop, jeering and defiant,

As Tahi had expected, the Niuans hurled their spears.

»One pierced Tahi here.«

And the Indian pointed to his left arm, which our hero now saw was bandaged with leaves.

»Tahi laugh at wound, but Tahi make use of it. Tahi fall off canoe into water, deep, deep, deep, as if Tahi killed; then, grasping spear, swam for the shore—not Niuans' shore, Niuans fancy Tahi drowned.«

And the Indian chuckled with delight.

»How fortunate you could swim!« said our hero.

»Swim! Tahi swim like Tahi walk—fight with and kill sharks. No shark here.«

And he pointed to the sea.

»Tahi see none. Good—for Tahi no knife, no rope. Tahi land here, crawl to cave, and stop till Tahi well.«

»What!« exclaimed George; »were you in that cave? Why, I was there to-day. Tahi, what was that fearful noise?«

»Big hole—down, down deep. Sea roars, roars. But how Misser George here?«

Our hero, in a few words, told his story.

Tahi was much delighted that he had escaped, and, examining his ankle, redressed it.

The hour was too late to proceed to Hope Bay that night, for much time had been occupied in talking.

Therefore it was resolved that they should stop where they were until dawn.

At least, not where they were, for, for fear of scorpions, Tahi proposed an adjournment to the cave.

As they were about to depart a sound arrested them.

There was some animal, or some person, coming swiftly down the small valley, snuffling as they came.

»Hog!« said the savage, laconically, poising his spear.

Our hero had leaned breathlessly forward.

Suddenly he sprang up, catching his companion's arm,

»No, no, Tahi!« he cried, in terror; »don't throw it! It's no hog—it's Faith.«

No sooner did the noble dog hear his master's voice, than he gave a sharp, joyous bark, and with a bound from the bushes, was in George's arms.

Yes, literally, for, rearing himself erect, wagging his tail madly with joy, he placed his forepaws on the shoulders of our hero, who, his eyes dimmed with emotion, pressed the fond creature to him, caressing him with word and touch.

Perhaps Faith had been a little doubtful as to his reception after breaking his master's orders, for no sooner did he find himself so received than he went through such a wild succession of gambols about our hero and Tahi that, in fear, the former had to order him to be silent.

The savage had, it appeared, formed a bed in the cave, farther back than George had penetrated, where he had stayed until his wound had got better and he was assured the Niuanes were not hovering near.

To discover the latter he had often during the night, and sometimes by day, crept out of the cave to reconnoitre, so it was a wonder they never had stumbled over each other before.

Tahi now led the way to his abode, and our hero very soon, despite the dull, perpetual booming reverberation, slept soundly.

For how long he knew not, when he sprang up, crying—

»Tahi, listen; there is that awful sound.«

It seemed to echo like loudest thunder through the place.

»No danger,« answered the Indian, calmly. »Misser George shall see—sight grand.«

Rising, he hastened from the cave, our hero following in surprise.

The sun, he found, had already risen; but a brisk wind blew and the sea was rolling in in long high waves.

Selecting a dry, resinous piece of a tree, Tahi, by the aid of flints, managed to set one end in a blaze.

It burned fiercely, and with this torch they re-entered the cave.

Never had George beheld anything so beautiful,

As the yellow flame danced on the walls and roof, they seemed festooned and encrusted by jewels of every hue.

Only beyond was darkness, and even out of that, as the light caught projecting stalactites they flashed like starry gems.

Soon, however, the boy's mind was engrossed in the booming noise, which grew louder and louder each step they took.

They had passed their couch some way, when Tahi stopped, and raising the torch aloft, said—

»Look!«

They were standing in a high, roughly circular, vaulted chamber of rock, encrusted and garlanded with stalactites.

Opposite, about thirty feet before them, was the black mouth of another entrance leading yet further into the earth.

But between them and it yawned a huge chasm.

It was from this the booming sound arose.

Our hero's check turned pale, and involuntarily he sprang back, for the thought occurred to him that, had he proceeded unchecked when he had explored the cave, what might have been his fate.

»Look,« repeated the Indian, waving high the torch as he bent his head over the abyss.

Rather nervously his companion complied, and the sight made his brain spin.

The sides of the chasm were of coral formation, and descended sheer down for quite fifty feet, where it evidently became connected with an inlet from the sea, for the bottom was one seething cauldron of

whirling, dashing foam, which, as the waves rushed in, was hurled high against the sides, creating that deafening roar, while the spray was flung upwards in fountain-like showers, taking all the prismatic hues in the torch-light.

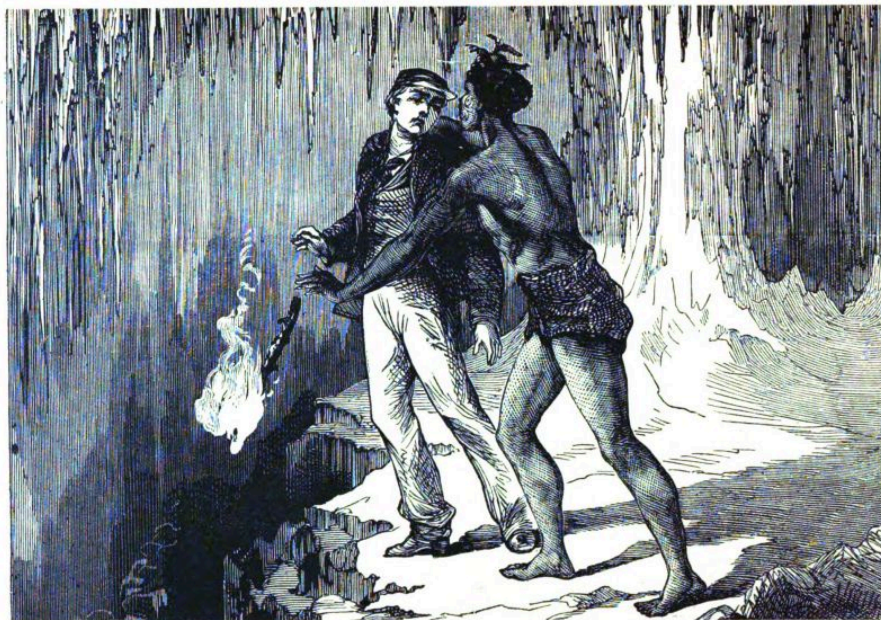
George gazed in bewildered awe at this wonder of nature, the spray from the billows reaching his face.

Then a singular sensation came upon him.

It seemed as if some water sprite were beckoning him, drawing him into the abyss.

An irresistible feeling appeared urging to fling himself over.

He had just presence of mind left to throw his head back, crying—



»Tahi, Tahi, save me, or I must go down!«

His body was inclined forward.

His feet were losing their firmness.

Another moment and it would have been too late.

Dropping the torch into the turmoil of foam the Indian, swift as light, cast his arms round the boy and bore him back insensible.

When he came to, he found the kind Tahi had carried him out of the cave and placed him on the warm sands, where the cool breeze had speedily ured his vertigo.

»Again I owe you my life, Tahī,« he said, pressing the Indian's hand, gratefully, »Had you not been there I should certainly have fallen over. I'll never visit that cave again. Now shall we have breakfast and then start for Hope Bay! I am more anxious than I can tell about Artie and Ned, though, as you saw the Niuans take to the canoes, it is not likely that our companions fell into their clutches, thank Heaven!«

Tahī readily signified acquiescence, and they ascended the valley to the plain.

CHAPTER XIV.

ARTIE DISPLAYS COURAGE, NED THE REVERSE— THE MINUTE GUN.

Poor Artie felt a cold perspiration start out over him as he gazed at the gently-moving branches.

He expected every moment to see the dark, feathered head of one of the awful savages protrude from the concealment of leaves.

The horrible scene he had witnessed the previous night recurred to him, and he vividly pictured its re-enactment, only, this time, himself taking the part of the victim.

He looked at Faith.

He knew the dog would fly at the throat of anyone who had tried to harm Merridew.

But would he protect him in that fashion?

The lad was assured not, for he had often been with Ned when the latter had slyly hit the animal.

He was sorry for it now.

He did not know the noble nature—as gentle as forgiving—of Faith.

Besides, our hero had put him there to guard the place, and he would have defended it with his life.

At present he seemed to take matters very philosophically.

He merely kept his eyes on the bushes, and now and again gave a low growl, rather, apparently, of irritation than warning.

The leaves, which for a moment had been still, began once more to quiver.

Animal or man they were certainly coming nearer.

Driven to desperation Artie, who was really no coward, determined not to lose his life without a struggle.

Making a circuit of the interior on his hands and knees he got behind the door, which he quickly pushed to, and dropped the bar our hero had constructed across it.

It recalled George to him.

How he wished he was there.

How was it that he had such courage?

Was it because he was not ashamed of being good?

The little lad felt that craving we all have when alone or in danger for companionship and sympathy, though but in idea, and dropping on his knees entreated Heaven to be with him at that moment.

Then he ran to the officers' chest which had been stowed away in one corner.

Opening it, he took out a pair of pistols.

They were loaded, but unfortunately there was no more powder when that was gone.

Because of this they had been put aside for some grave emergency.

To Artie no graver could there be than the present

Thus armed he clambered up to the window, and after a glance through, extended one of the weapons at the bushes.

Before, however, he could pull the trigger, which was stiff, a voice calling out suddenly in the greatest terror arrested him.

»Don't fire, stupid I cried a voice, »It's I. Put the pistol down.«

»What, is it you, Ned!« cried the lad, nearly letting the firearm off in his delight.

»Yes; put down the pistol and I'll come out.«

Artie instantly sprang down, restored the weapon to its place, and ran to the door.

In his joy at having his solitude broken he forgot, at the instant, all about Ned's cowardly desertion.

Ashe flung the door wide open Ned met him, his face suddenly ill-tempered.

»What an idiot you were,« he grumbled; »If you had fired you might have killed me.«

»But how did I know it was you, Ned?« was the apologetic rejoinder; »why didn't you come out?«

»Come out? That was likely. How did I know but that the place was full of those black niggers? How did you get hese?«

Artie informed him.

»Humph! When you were such a stupid as to tumble off the tree, I thought you were done for. Have you seen anything of Merridew, and Tahi?«

The answer, of course, was in the negative.

»I daresay the niggers caught 'em. Serve 'em right.«

»Oh Ned.«

»I don't care; why did they go? There's his dog,« he concluded, kicking out at Faith.

Artie threw himself between, his fair face flushed, and his hands clenched.

»Don't do that, Ned,« he cried. »The poor dog has done no harm, On the contrary, he saved your life; you're always forgetting that. I won't have him hurt. I should have been wretched enough last night but for him.«

Ned's good-looking face grew dark.

But there was something in Artie's glance, young, weakly-built as he was, that made him alter his purpose, and he burst into a short laugh.

»I'm not going to hurt the dog,« he sneered; »take care of him for your favourite.«

»He's not my favourite,« said Artie; »but I know this, Ned, he'd never have run away from a comrade, as you did last night.«

»I thought you were following, of course I did,« replied the other, reddening; »that is, I thought you'd run and that I was following you. I couldn't make it out when I couldn't overtake you. But look here; you say Merridew wouldn't have left a comrade. Now, I've been thinking over it, and my idea is that his going with Tahi, to rescue that nigger, was all a ruse. I believe they have gone. They crept down to the canoes, stole one, and they're off.«

»Do you really think so« exclaimed Artie, aghast, as he drew near.

»I feel certain.«

»That would have been cowardly. But, no, Ned, that can't be, Merridew would never have left Faith.«

»Bosh. He'd have taken the brute if he had been there; as he wasn't he went without him. Merridew's all talk and boast; I always told you so. Preach, preach, preach; and I'm glad he's gone, we shall get on jollily without him.«

Whatever the other's private opinion was, he did not express it, but Ned suggesting breakfast, instantly began to prepare it. For as Conyers had made all the smaller and weaker boys at school his fags, he made poor Artie so here.

The meal over, they stole out to the headland which commanded a distant view of Gibson Bay, and, much to their satisfaction, perceived there were no signs of the Indians' canoes.

Returning, they employed the day as best they could near the house, fearing, as yet, to go far away.

Artie took care to provide Faith with food, for the animal refused to quit his post.

He laid yet undecided, whining in a low, plaintive tone.

Despite Ned's boasting and assurance the day wore away very wearily, and both were glad when night fell and they could go to rest.

They shut the door securely, with Faith inside, and Ned having placed the pistols near his hand, the boys laid down.

But for a long time Artie remained awake, and his last wish before he fell asleep was that our hero and Tahi would return.

After breakfast the next morning Ned proposed they should go to the shore and continue the construction of the paddles the Indian had begun.

Artie agreed readily.

The previous day had been so dull that he was glad of any employment to forget it.

Busily they worked, far more busily than skilfully, until noon, when Artie, who had gone to the house to fetch something, came running swiftly back.

»Ned, Ned,« he cried, »Faith has gone.«

Ned glanced up in real vexation, for Faith was a strong guardian and protector.

Then, in his sullen tone, remarked—

»And a good riddance, too. Sticking where he did he wasn't of much use.«

»Don't say that, Ned; I'm sorry,« and the lad sat down wearily on the sands.« It seems that all are leaving us.«

»If you are going to snivel and not work, you'd better say so.«

»I can't work just yet, though I'm not snivelling. What's the use of making the paddles, we can't use them, you and I.«

»Can't we? Now you look here, youngster,« proceeded the bully, who, like all bullies, vented the anger he felt at Faith's desertion upon his weaker companion, if you don't work I'll just finish them myself, then row off to another bay, perhaps another island, and leave you by yourself.«

The threat had the desired effect.

The little fellow brushed the tears from his eyes, got up, and set to work.

But the weight of servitude began to tell heavy on him, and more and more, in secret, he longed for our hero.

Yet so great was Ned's power that he feared to avow it.

Night at length fell, but the dog, as the reader is aware, did not come back, and when the lads went to bed they felt more frightened than they had yet done, and took care to make the door and windows as secure as they could.

They tossed about wakefully for some time, when Artie sitting up, exclaimed—

»Oh Ned, what stupid we are. Here are two days passed, and we've never once been up to the look-out. Merridew would never have been so remiss. How do we know but that have passed?«

For a wonder the other made no sneer about the reference to our hero.

He merely said—

»Ships! Oh, oceans, of course, Well, we'll go up after breakfast tomorrow. I wish that dog hadn't gone; he was good for taking care of the house, if nothing else. Now do go to sleep.«

The morning meal was rather hurried over, and the lads set out for the hill.

If they should but see a ship!

The idea held them mute as they hurried on.

Suddenly, however, Ned halted, changed colour, and caught Artie's arm.

»Hark I« he whispered; »I am sure I heard voices.«

»No,« gasped the other.

»Yes. Listen, If it be, we must run for the house.«

Eagerly they bent forward, their eyes fixed on the crest of the hill.

If there had been voices they had ceased.

The two began to consider whether they should proceed, when Artie uttered a cry, then a shout, for a black head was thrust over the hill towards them.

A black head—a very black head, indeed.

»It's Faith, it's Faith!« ejaculated the boy, and forgetful of the voices, he ran forward.

»What, Artie!« cried a voice; »safe and sound? Thank Heaven!«

And our hero was soon shaking the lad's and Ned's hand, while Tahī grinned, and Faith bounded and jumped with delight.

At least for the present all animosities were forgotten.

George and Tahī were rejoiced to find the two all right, and the two also were glad that they were once more together.

They made the day a festival to commemorate their reunion, and each recounted his adventures.

Even after night had long fallen they were sitting on the sands, though there was a stiff breeze, listening to Tahī reciting stories of the Niūans and other tribes, when through the darkness and the stillness came the boom of a gun.

In a second each was on his feet.

»A ship, a ship at last!« they shouted, frantically.

Then—boom—came another.

»She is in distress,« exclaimed our hero, his tone altering; »it is a minute gun.«

»She is on the reef,« ejaculated Ned.

»That's strange, in such a slight breeze,« responded our hero, »unless she's lost her reckoning.«

Again the gan boomed forth.

»Come, come,« cried Artie.

And they all sped to the headland.

No sooner did they reach it than a cry burst from every throat.

The dark sky in one part was broken by a patch of vivid, lurid red.

»She is on fire!« cried our hero, in horror,

And a feeling of awe and compassion fell on the little party.

CHAPTER XV.

THE EXPLOSION—IS SHE DEAD?

AS far as our hero and his companions could judge, the ship which was on fire lay about two miles beyond the coral reef.

The flames must already have got a great mastery, for they seemed to curl up the masts and rigging themselves.

This, however, may have been but a deception of vision created by the great glare, for the very smoke appeared red with fire, which made the heavens, and also the waters for a considerable radius, luminous.

On the deck dark figures could be seen moving to and fro, some evidently perform in their duty, others evidently darting here and there, wild with terror.

»The flames have got too strong a hold for man to extinguish,« exclaimed our hero, excitedly, »while the fresh breezes but fan it as a bellows. Ned, Tahiti, don't you think we had better take the boat and go to their rescue? We, at least, may save some.«

»They'll have their own boats,« retorted Ned; »their difficulty, I suspect, will be in finding the inlet through the barrier reefs.«

»That's true; and the tide is so low the boats will be capsized if they attempt to cross. We'd best take the boat.«

»But confound it all,« ejaculated Ned, »how are you to row with only one oar?«

»There am the paddle,« broke in the Indian, quickly; »Tahiti use that like two.«

»Then which of us shall go?« exclaimed George; »there isn't, you know, a moment to be lost.«

He was anxious himself to accompany the Indian, but was too unselfish to try to place himself always in the lead.

He hardly need have feared.

Ned, aware how easily a boat might in the darkness be capsized by a treacherous reef, or the crowding in of a lot of excited, terrified men and women, had no desire to risk the life he valued.

80, with well acted generosity, he said—

»You may go, old fellow. And I'll tell you what; while you're gone Artie and I will make a roaring bonfire on this headland, to show the poor wretches there is land and assistance near.«

»Bravo! That's a capital thought,« cried our hero, enthusiastically. »Begin at once, Ned; Tahi and I can push off the boat alone,«

In a second all were at work.

Artie and Ned were not long in gathering an immense pile of withered leaves and branches, the dryness of which caused them easily to be ignited.

Speedily a long, spiral flame shot up into the air.

George gave a shout of delight on perceiving it as he and the Indian ran the boat into the sea, and leaped in.

»That was an excellent idea of Ned's,« he remarked; »it will comfort yonder poor sufferers.«

The boat was more unwieldy than the slim, graceful native canoes, but with its outriggers, nevertheless, to our hero's joy and surprise, the savage sent it on with marvellous rapidity.

As they drew away from the island they could see the bonfire distinctly, and that Artie and Ned were constantly replenishing it with fresh armfuls of fuel.

The glare was immense,

»I say, Tahi,« exclaimed George, suddenly, »may not that bonfire bring the Niuans back upon us?«

The Indian shook his head, smiling.

»Niuans take blaze for big mountain again; Niuans keep away.«

»Well, truly,« said our hero, »it is an ill wind that blows nobody any good.«

Their attention was now bent entirely on the burning ship.

Though they had not yet reached the opening they were seeking through the ring of coral reef which encircled the island, they could see more plainly on to the deck.

On it a sudden commotion seemed to take place.

They could see the crew and passengers had gathered in groups.

Abruptly, in one crowd they rushed to the side, while faint shrieks could be heard, borne on the wind.

»Either something has happened,« cried our hero, as with Tahi he sent the boat through the opening they at last had found, »or the sight of the bonfire has made them lose control. Good Heavens, what madness! At such moments calmness and presence of mind are their only safety. See how they tear and hustle each other, What can it mean?«

»Crew lower boats,« said Tahi, laconically.

»Yes, but if that insanely pushing, tearing crowd is not brought into obedience,« remarked our hero, »everyone will be swamped. Why, there are women there! Oh, can the crew be men? They cannot be Englishmen«

In his agitation our hero had bent his head far round over his shoulder to watch the ill-fated ship.

Just then the noise of a terrific explosion was heard.

Vast sheets of flame rushed up with a deafening roar from the vessel apparently to the skies themselves.

A tremendous vivid glare dotted by masses of blazing fragments shone all around.

Then in a moment all was darkness, and not a sign of the ship was to be seen.

Our hero dropped back on to his seat with a cry of horror.

The sudden confusion; that struggling, pushing, shrieking crowd was now explained.

There had been combustibles on board, and the fire had reached them,

For a second George and the Indian sat stunned.

Then the former cried—

»Quick, Tahi, let us pull to the place. We may be able to rescue some of the poor people. If it's only one it will reward us.«

The other instantly seized his paddle, our hero the oar, and swiftly they sent the boat towards the scene of devastation.

»Thank Heaven!« remarked George, reverently, as a soft, pale light began to shine on the horizon. »The moon is rising. That will help us.«

Reaching the spot where the unfortunate ship had foundered they found the waves strewn with charred, half-burnt masses of wood and other wreckage, but nowhere could they discern a vestige of humanity.

Nevertheless for more than half-an-hour they rowed about.

Then abandoning all hope, prepared to pull back to the island.

Just at the same instant, the moon rising sent a long silver, quivering track across their very boat.

Instinctively our hero's eyes followed it when he sprang to his feet, exclaiming—

»Look, Tahi, what is that yonder?«

He pointed to a small object in the moon's track.

It floated on the top of the waves, while a mass of something—could it be seaweed?—rose and fell with now and then a kind of glitter on the billows.

»Take oar, Misser George,« said Tahi, »We go see. It's a body.«

»A body?« repeated our hero, with a shiver, as he obeyed the Indian's suggestion.

As the tide made for the island, the object naturally moved towards them as they moved towards it.

Thus soon it was almost beneath their bows, whereupon our hero, shipping his oar, leaned eagerly over, and extended his hand to prevent it drifting by.

He drew back, however, with a startled cry, as his fingers became entangled among a quantity of long silky, golden hair.

The next instant the billows would have swept it by to the reefs had not Tahi grasped it, and raised it in his strong arms.

Our hero, again bending forward, beheld it was the graceful figure of a young girl, who, by some kind hand, had been lashed to a grating.

Her fair, sweet face rested on it as in sleep.

One small round white arm was extended.

Over her pale cheek and snowy throat meandered her long, golden tresses, saturated by the briny ocean, which made her wet garments

cling close to her slight figure.

Her lips were slightly apart.

Her eyes were closed.

The sea water hung heavily upon her silken lashes.

A sick, dizzy sensation came over our here.

»Tahi, Tahi,« he cried, eagerly stretching his hands out to help the drowned maiden into the boat, »don't say she is dead.«

»Tahi don't know, but think not,« was the response. »Where's Misser George's knife?«

Quickly, with trembling fingers, our hero producing it, opened the blade, and began cutting at the lashings.

What would a boy, especially a shipwrecked boy, do without his knif?

Soon the girl was free from the grating.

Tahi, gently lifting her in, laid her at the bottom of the boat.

How pretty and still she looked as the moon shone on her—how like death!

George's pulses ceased to palpitate out of very fear; then, raising the fair head on to his bosom he placed his hand to her heart.

»It beats, it beats, Tahi,« he cried, joyfully, »She lives. She is but insensible from wet and cold.«

»Then, Misser George, we best get back to big bonfire. It may do good to her, though do no good to no one else, All kill, all drown.«

»Indeed, I fear so,« sighed the lad.

Pulling off his jacket, which by the way, like the rest of his attire, was getting very worn and ragged, he folded and placed it as a pillow for the young girl's head, then seizing the oar, they proceeded through the now moonlit sea to tge island.

CHAPTER XVI.

STELLA LARIVIÉRE'S STORY.

THE blowing up of the ship had been witnessed by Ned and Artie, with even more concern than the two in the boat; for, at first, they imagined our hero and Tahi might have been swamped by fragments of the vessel, which the explosion had sent into the air.

When darkness settled over the waters, their doubts were not allayed, for the boat was too far to be distinguishable.

Finally, however, the same track of moonlight which revealed the floating child to George Merridew, disclosed his safety to his companions on shore.

They perceived by the movement of those in the boat, that they were busy about something, but what, they could not tell.

As they returned, the boys craned their necks over the headland.

»There's something lying at the bottom, Ned; I'm sure I can see it!«

»It's a body,« cried Ned; »and it's a woman, I can see long fair hair. Come along to the beach.«

»First let's put some more branches on the fire,« remarked Artie. »They always try to make drowned people as warm as they can don't they?«

»Yes, you're right,« said Ned.

This done, answering the shout of our hero, they sped down to the shore.

As they reached it, Tahi had just run the boat aground, and springing out into the water, was dragging it high up.

»What have you got?! Have you saved anyone, Tahi?« demanded Artie, breathlessly.

»Tahi 'spect girl, not drowned. Sleep—no speak.«

»Lend a hand here, Ned,« called our hero, following the Indian's example.

All seizing the gunwale, they soon brought the boat high and dry on the sand.

»Why,« cried the two lads, Artie and Ned, as they leaned over the bows, »it's a girl!«

»How pretty. What lovely hair,« continued Artie, admiringly. »Oh Merridew, is she dead!«

»I hope not,« said George; I pray she will not die. It is all we could save; the rest are now in a better and happier world than this, We must take her to the fire at once.«

Tahi indeed had already raised the graceful form of the girl in his strong arms, and, her head on his shoulders, her long golden hair falling over his dark skin, was striding swiftly to the bonfire on the headland.

Here placing his burden within the full radius of its heat, he and the boys gathered intently around.

The object of their solicitude was apparently between fourteen and fifteen.

Her figure was slight and graceful, her complexion as clear and fair as alabaster while her features were beautiful, and marked with much refinement.

Her attire, was simple, but around her neck was a gold chain, and a gem locket of great value.

Many thoughts passed through our hero's mind as he watched her whom he had rescued from the grave.

What misery might await her when she recovered?

The knowledge that perhaps the fire, and the waves had robbed her of fond parents, leaving her alone—desolate.

As he pondered, he felt his heart yearn to the poor girl with a brother's devoted love.

Just then the ivory lids quivered.

A second later they arose, revealing a pair of large clear blue eyes beneath, which gazed wildly round, as one awakening from a fearful dream.



Then with a scream the girl sat quickly up, and covering her face, as if to shut out some terrible vision, cried—

»Oh, the fire—the fire! Save me, Mariett, save me!«

»Do not be frightened,« said our hero, soothingly, kneeling by her;
»are safe, now. Nothing can harm you.«

She lifted her eyes to his,

There was that in George Merridew's frank, honest, English countenance that won instant confidence.

The girl caught his hand in hers, and exclaimed—

»Safe, safe! Am I?! Where am I? Who are you!«

»You are on Hope Island,« said our hero, with a smile; »and I, with my companions, have been wrecked like you.«

»You were not on the »Nevada!« she ejaculate.

»No. We were on the »Vixen,« which was wrecked on the reefs some weeks ago. We saw your ship on fire, and went to see if we could help you, when it blew up.«

At the mention, the girl shivered, and again burst into tears.

»Do not weep—do not be frightened,« said George, gravely; »rather be grateful to Heaven, that you are saved. For not another soul has been.«

This but apparently to the girl's grief, and she sobbed—

»Oh Mariett, Mariett! My poor, poor Mariett!«

»Who was Mariett?« ask Artie, »He couldn't be your father?«

The girl could not resist smiling through her tears.

»Mariett, my papa! No—he was my servant, Poor Mariett. It was he who lashed me to the grating when the people pushed so that we could not get to the boats. Then—then—came a fearful noise, and I remembered nothing more, Oh Mariett, dear Mariett is drowned!«

»I fear so,« said George. »But do not grieve. Is he not in Heaven! Do not cry any more. We will be very kind to you, that we will.«

The girl looked from one to the other, then said—

»But you are boys. Who is there to take care of you?«

The two laughed heartily at this.

»Why, we've just to take care of ourselves,« answered Ned; »if we didn't we'd starve, you see, like the children in the wood, and the hogs would eat us instead of the robins covering us with leaves.«

»But,« and the girl seemed to cower and shiver, »are you really all alone on—on—this island?«

»No, we have Tahi.«

She turned.

As her eyes rested on the Indian she uttered a scream of terror, and threw herself, as for protection, on our hero.

»Of what are you frightened?« exclaimed George. Then in a whisper, »Tahi is good and kind, you must not treat him so. He helped to save your life.«

The girl evidently divined our hero's meaning, and also how unjust was her terror.

Turning at once, with a sweet smile, she said, extending her hand to the Indian—

»Forgive me. You helped to save me. Thank you very much.«

»Tahi glad,« he answered, gently; »young Inglis girl need not fear Tahi.«

»We did at first, didn't we!« laughed Ned, who began to be jealous of our hero's monopolising the young girl's attention.

The Indian grinned, amused.

»But he brought us some food,« put in Artie; »then we didn't.«

»We couldn't get on without Tahiti,« said our hero. »But,« he added, noting how pale the girl looked, »you want rest; I'm sure you are tired.«

»Tired, yes,« she exclaimed; »yet I couldn't sleep. When I close my eyes I see the fire again, Oh!« and she shivered convulsively, »it is horrible; I shall never forget it. Don't leave me, pray don't;« and her little, soft hand rested on our hero's, and her large eyes looked imploringly at the little group. »I should be so afraid to be alone.«

»We won't leave you,« put in Ned, protect-ingly. »We'll all sit up round the fire; it's a jolly blaze, and you, if you're not too tired, can tell us how the ship caught. What is your name?«

»Stella Larivière,« she answered.

»Stella. That means a star,« remarked Artie.

»And Larivière's French. Are you French!« asked George.

»No, no,« broke in the girl, shaking her head with a smile; »papa's grandpapa was a French gentleman, but I am English.«

»I'm glad of that, because you're so pretty,« said Artie, ingenuously. »Your hair is just the colour of my sister's. I wonder if I shall ever see her again?«

»There, none of that, young Doleful Dumps,« said Ned, pushing him aside, and edging himself nearer; »Miss Larivière's going to tell us about herself.«

Stella looked a little scared at Ned's roughness, but in a moment tried to commence.

Her lips, however, trembled.

»It is so difficult to about it,« she said, timidly, »when all the rest, Mariett, the good captain, and all the others who were so kind to me, are no more.«

»Don't, then, if it pains you,« remarked our hero.

»I'll try,« she murmured, as she cast a shrinking glance at the dark groups of trees and solitudes of the island.

Perhaps she thought it would be a means of keeping her hearers 'with her, for she began at once.

»My father, my only parent—for my dear mother died before I can remember—is a rich Californian merchant.

»He has no other child but me; and because of this, and my mother's death, he never would let me be out of his sight.

»A few weeks ago, however, he found he had accumulated so much wealth that he resolved to return to Europe and settle there on a large estate he had purchased.

»As he, owing to business which he had to arrange, would have to go overland, he determined to send me, with my maid, and under the protection of dear Mariett, by sea, round to New York.

»Oh!«—and Stella wrung her hands piteously—»how I prayed him not to let us be For the first time he refused a wish of mine. Kissing me, he said he loved his little girl too well to risk her to the dangers of crossing the Bocky Mountains and the prairies. Ah, they would have been safer than the sea. Oh, if papa could see me now!«

For a space she could not proceed, tears ran down her pale cheeks, and her bosom heaved with sobs.

Her listeners' eyes were dim from sympathy.

»Papa took the best cabin for me,« finally continued Stella, »and fitted it up as if it were my own sitting-room at home. Everybody was very kind and good, and I had begun to feel happy, when to-night, a little while after I had left the dinner-table, and was in my cabin with my maid, I heard a great confusion on deck.

»I heard the crew running overhead. I heard the captain shouting some orders, and then came a great cry mingled with a woman's scream.

»I sprang to my feet.

»At the same moment the cabin door flew open, and Mariett rushed in.

»I saw he was agitated, though he tried to be composed, even to smile.

»What is the matter!' I cried, running to him.

»Nothing, nothing, mademoiselle, but what will soon be put right,' he answered; 'do not be frightened, that's all, and trust in me.'

»'Oh, but what is it!' I exclaimed.

»Before he could reply, the voices on deck told me all

»'Fire! fire!' they cried, 'the ship's on fire!'

»Uttering a scream, Annette, my maid, darted out of the cabin, regardless of anyone but herself.

»A sickness came over me.

»I felt dizzy with horror.

»Clasping Mariett's arm I exclaimed—

»'Oh Mariett! you will not leave me?'

»'Never, while I live, mademoiselle!' he ejaculated. 'Fear not, Le bon Dieu will give Mariett strength. He will save you.'

»I remembered no more for some little while.

»I must have fainted.

»When I came to I felt Mariett's kisses on my forehead, his tears on my cheek.

»Oh, the poor mademoiselle,' I heard him say; 'ah, my brave master, could he but behold his child now. But I will save her!«

»I drew myself up, and kissing his cheek, ejaculated—

»My good Mariett, if you keep by me, I fear nothing.'

»But the next moment my heart stopped with terror.

»Mariett had brought me on deck, and now, looking around, I saw that the fore part of the ship was one vast sheet of flame,

»With a cry I hid my eyes on Mariett's breast.

»But I could not shut out the terrible shrieks of the women, as they ran about the deck.

»Oh, it was horrible!

»I felt I wanted to shriek too, for the fire seemed scorching me.

»But Mariett kept saying—

»Keep calm, mademoiselle, keep calm,« and I obeyed him.

»Suddenly another cry arose—

»The gunpowder! the gunpowder!'

»The shrieks which followed this were awful,

»I looked up.

»Everybody was pushing to the sides, while everyone cried together

—

»'The boats! the boats! lower the boats!'

»Mariett also sprang up, and clasping me in his arms, dashed forward.

»The women and children first,' he shouted, trying to force his way through. 'Back cowards, back! You are not men. Think of the women and the children.'

»But they would not heed, but pushed on, thrusting us away.

»'Idiots I' he shouted, 'go—bah, you are suicides—suicides and homicides.'

»Yet holding me, he forced himself out of the mass. A moment after I felt myself laid on the grating, and being secured to it.

»Fear not, mademoiselle, he said; 'they are destroying themselves. You will live. There is an island yonder. There are people on it for they've made a signal. You will only float a little while. They will rescue you.'

»But you, Mariett, my only friend,' I gasped, for Annette had never once come near me.

»Will be with mademoiselle,' he answered.

»But just then I heard a fearful roar, and a vivid blaze surrounded me.

»The ship seemed to rise, then fall, and I felt myself sinking, sinking.

»Water was all about me, and I remembered no more until I found myself here.«

Stella's voice had broken much towards the conclusion of her recital.

She was so affected that some of her words were hardly audible, and now with a sob she dropped back fainting on the grass.

The refinement of her voice and manner, and her forlorn position had already aroused the feeling of chivalry in her hearers, that is ever present in a true English lad's heart, and eagerly they strove to restore the poor girl, as if she had been a beloved sister.

As to Mariett, one and all pronounced him to be a brave, dear old fellow

When at last Stella came to, she was so exhausted and weary that she could not sit up,

Therefore, the boys, each armed with a flaming torch, conducted her to their house.

Her surprise at beholding it, amused them immensely.

»Why,« she cried, »you are like Robinson Crusoe.«

»Only we haven't got a parrot yet,« said Artie.

»But we have a dog,« remarked our hero. »Miss Larivière, let me introduce Faith to you, You will find him a true friend.«

Faith, wagging his tail, glanced up earnestly, as much as to say

»You may really, miss, take my master's word for that.«

»I believe it,« smiled Stella, putting her arms round his neck and patting his glossy head. »I love dogs.«

»Ashe will love you. To-night he will guard our door, and you need have no fear while he is on guard.«

»But you?« said the girl; »where will you sleep?«

»Don't trouble about that,« laughed our hero; »we shall do very well to-night, and to-morrow we must add a wing to our house, to accommodate our new guest.«

So saying, before she could demur, they stuck the torch in the earth, to give her light, and withdrew.

By this time Tahi, who had been left to scatter the bonfire, had arrived with several flaming brands.

With these they ignited another heap of dry wood, in a spot where it could not be seen from the sea. Then, laying down with their feet to it, as soldiers do when bivouacking, they thought of Stella Larivière until they fell asleep.

Faith stretched before the door of the wood house, dozing with one eye open.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE QUEEN OF THE ISLAND—THE MYSTERIOUS LIGHT.

It may be imagined that, though the Modern Crusoes slept soundly after the excitement of the night, they were up early.

They remembered they had a guest, and that the duties of hosts devolving upon them, they ought to make the island put on its best appearance.

As if nature approved of their gallantry, the sun rose in a cloudless blue sky, while the air was soft and balmy.

On the smooth green sward they spread a square piece of sail, blanched white by the sun, as a tablecloth, upon which they placed some half cocoa-nut-shells, full of milk, with some bread fruit, and other kinds of food, which Tahi had prepared and gathered, disposed on large green leaves.

Hardly had they completed this really pretty looking breakfast, when the door of the log house opened slowly, and with some timidity Stella Larivière came forth.

If the boys had thought her beautiful when wet and weary the night before, they now thought she looked—as Artie whispered—like an angel.

Her dress was nicely arranged, her countenance had been brightened and freshened by sleep, while her golden hair fell in a soft rippling cloud about her shoulders.

»Oh, how pretty,« she exclaimed in admiration, as she looked at the breakfast; »this doesn't look like a desert island.«

»No,« laughed our hero, for despite Stella's efforts, he saw she was sad, and rather nervous at her position, and wished to put her at her ease. »It can't be deserted, for we are getting quite a colony, and here we invite your majesty,« bowing low in serio-comic deference, »to our morning banquet.«

»Yes, yes,« cried Artie, with delight, capering about; »she shall be our queen—she shall be our queen!«

His merriment aroused that of Faith. He began madly to caper also, barking at the same time, until he nearly tumbled over the breakfast, and only by a quick spring clearing the whole affair, avoided upsetting the cups.

»If you two puppies want to play, go further off,« remarked Ned, aiming out a kick. »Here come Queen Stella and her prime minister. I shall be your prime minister, eh?« he added, as he ranged up by the girl's side.

»I—I don't know what a prime minister does,« murmured Stella, losing her colour somewhat at the boy's roughness.

But Ned had drawn her arm firmly through his as he said—

»Oh, he tells the queen what to do, and if she likes it, she does it.«

»And doesn't the queen tell him anything to do?« asked Stella, a little slily.

»Oh, of course!«

»Then I tell you, please, that you mustn't kick that little boy, who's smaller than you, and you mustn't hurt that dear dog—Faith, as you call him.«

Ned turned crimson, then, as all, even Tahi, burst out laughing, savagely bit his lip to keep down his passion, while Faith, hearing his name, jumped over the breakfast again, and pushed his black muzzle into the girl's hand.

George saw the fury in his comrade's eyes, and, eager to avoid a quarrel that might frighten Stella, took no notice of Ned's behaviour, but said, gaily—

»Do, pray, let us sit down to breakfast, or the bread will get heavy, the milk sour, and we shall starve our queen.«

Upon this they took their places on the grass, and Ned's eyes darted a jealous, baneful glance at our hero, as he perceived that Stella drew nearer to him than to himself.

He hated all at the moment, save the girl—for laughing at him, but he hated George Merridew most.

»And what do you do here the whole day long I« asked Stella, pausing in her meal.

»Well,« said our hero, whom she addressed, »there are plenty of things. To-day Tahiti intends to finish a spear he is making, with which he is going to try to get some pork for her majesty's dinner. As to ourselves, we shall prepare the wood for Tahiti to build a wing to our mansion.«

»And,« broke in Artie, »one or two of us, I suppose, shall go in the boat and a--«

»Show her majesty our submarine coral forests,« interrupted George quickly, trying to give the lad a private kick.

But Ned was too keen-eyed.

»Ah!« he cried, with malicious glee, »who is kicking a boy smaller than himself now?«

»He didn't mean to hurt me,« cried Artie, as red as fire; »I—I deserved it. He didn't mean it for a kick.«

Ned glared at him venomously.

He knew as well as Artie that our hero had intended simply a warning.

The young boy had been about to say that they were going to pick up some of the wreck, which they had seen dotting the golden, dancing sea within the coral reef, forgetful of the painful memories it might bring back to Stella.

Ned knew this, yet could not refrain from triumphing over him he considered his rival.

Stella Larivière looked timidly from one to the other.

Tears were in her eyes.

Her lips quivered.

Instinctively she placed her little hand on Faith's neck.

»If we go on like this,« cried our hero, perceiving it, »we shall frighten our queen from our company, There, Artie,« and frankly he held out his hand, »forgive me; I didn't mean to hurt you.«

»You didn't, I know,« said the lad.

Stella clapped her hands joyously.

»That is good and brave,« she cried. »That is what I like, But if you are all going to be busy, I will not be an idle queen bee. What shall I do?«

»Cook our dinners, take care of the house, and so on, as ladies do at home,« laughed Artie.

»Well, I propose,« exclaimed Ned, springing up, »that we first show her majesty her domains, and not lose all the morning over breakfast.«

This suggestion met with universal approval, and as there were no breakfast things to clear, they all set off, except Tahi, who, making an excuse to stay behind, took the boat and employed the morning in towing in the wreck.

The sweet freshness of the air, the newness of the scene, and the originality, served to raise Stella's spirits, and cause her, for a time, to forget the events of the yesterday.

The laughed immensely over the recital of Artie's being caught by the grapple thorn, and was glad to hear so few were in the island.

»And,« she laughed, »I'm glad it's deserted, save for us, because, if others were here, they would be Indians, and I don't like Indians.«

The boys exchanged furtive glances.

One sense of chivalry they had in common—to protect this young girl from danger, and to hide all that might frighten and make her miserable, so, though her words recalled the visits of the Indians and the horrible purpose that brought them, they, in the exchange of glances, said, quietly—

»Let no syllable of this reach our queen, Stella.«

»Of course I don't mean Tahi,« she proceeded, not 'noticing her companion's expressions. »He is nice and kind. However did you find him!«

»Oh, Tahi is different,« remarked our hero, hiding his confusion. »He has been used to going into English ships, and can speak English, How did we find him?« added George, uneasily, while Ned slunk off, leaving him, unassisted, to face the difficulty of explaining.

»Yes,« said Stella, busy in making a wreath from some blue flowers Artie had picked for her, »isn't it strange he should be here alone«

»Yes—that is, no—not when you hear. His tribe, which lives in a distant island, was at war with another tribe.«

»Yes.«

»Well—and,« stammered poor George, »one day Tahi was caught by them.«

»Caught?«

»Yes, but he got to this island somehow, and escaped them, but, as he lost his canoe, he couldn't go away any more than we can.'

Our hero, ending, drew a long breath of relief, for he felt he had avoided telling a falsehood, which would have made him miserable, though it were for Stella's sake.

»And now, are we near that beautiful cave you spoke about?« asked the girl.

»Yes, close,« for they were descending the little valley. ¢ Only, Stella, you will promise not to go near the chasm?«

»I! I should not have the courage. You are brave; I think you are the bravest person I know—except dear papa,« she corrected.

Ned Conyers went white with secret passion.

Stella was always prising George; she never praised him.

She always gave the preference to his rival; she always kept by him.

»He'd better have a care,« he reflected, fiercely. »I'm not the fellow to put up with his arrogance. Trying to be head in everything; he, a low bankrupt's son, who couldn't pay his debts. Stella doesn't know that, but she shall! I—I wish something would happen to him; we might be all jolly here then!«

By this time they had reached the cave, and, kindling the torches they had brought, entered.

The effect was magnificent, and Stella and Artie openly expressed their admiration.

»And now where's this wonderful chasm?« sneered Ned. »I suspect you dreamed of it, Merridew.«

»If so, go on and you'll discover for yourself. But I advise you not, Conyers, said George, coldly. »If you get a vertigo as I did, no one can save you.«

»Bah! I'm not afraid,« and he took a step forward.

»Oh, come back! Don't let him go!« cried Stella, alarmed.

»He would not heed me, he might you,« whispered our hero. »Besides, if his head can stand the whirl there is no danger.«

But the girl had darted forward and caught Ned's arm.

»Oh, don't go; please don't,« she exclaimed.

Her terror amused and flattered him, and he resolved to show her he could be as brave as Merridew.

»I'm not a coward, Miss Larivière,« he said, scornfully. »Come with me and see this wonderful chasm. I'll take care of you!«

»No,« and she drew back.

»Then I'll go alone if the others are too chicken-hearted to come with me.«

Artie, during this, had regarded Ned in the light of a hero.

Now desiring to show off his bravery, too, before Stella, he ran forward, saying—

»I'll go with you, Ned.«

»Bravo!«

»No, no,« pleaded Stella.

»Artie, you shall not,« exclaimed our hero.

»Shall not!« echoed Ned, fiercely. »Pray who made you his master? Let the boy do as he likes.«

George drew back, for he saw he could not interfere without a quarrel.

Ned and Artie went on.

»Oh, how foolish, how wicked,« almost sobbed Stella.

»There is not much danger, perhaps, after all,« said our hero. »It's only that they can have no idea of the reverberation.«

The lights of the two had now disappeared, and a silence fell on George and Stella.

Suddenly was heard a whispering sound through the cave.

Louder and louder it grew.

»There, there,« cried George, »the tide is in the chasm. It comes; don't be frightened, Stella.«

But with a cry of alarm, she clung in terror to her companion.

Now, with startling abruptness, the place was echoing with sounds louder than loudest thunder.

»Oh, those boys,« she sobbed, »I wish we had not come.«

George, in his effort to support his companion had let his torch fall.

But they were near enough the entrance to see dimly.

»Let us go, Stella,« he said.

»No, not without them.«

At that moment they heard a rush of feet accompanied by cries, and Ned and Artie speedily rushed past them, their faces pallid with fear, and calling, »Help, help!« with all their lungs.

For the life of him, our hero could not refrain from bursting out laughing.

Ned's bravery had come to so rapid a termination,

»Now we may go, Stella,« he said, »for they have taken the lead.«



When they reached the entrance, they found the two stretched panting on the sands.

Ned was sullen because he was ashamed, and he backed up Artie's declaration that there was a gigantic animal in the cave, such as they had never seen in any picture.

»And you saw it?«

»No; we only saw its shadow,« said Artie, »which came right over us, and—and the noise came too, so—«

»You thought discretion the better part of valour, and ran away,« laughed George, who knew perfectly well that they had been terrified by

their own shadows.

Ned was about to retort when Stella exclaimed—

»Look, there is Tahi in the boat. What is he doing?«

Then the truth struck her, and bursting into tears, she sobbed—

»Oh! the wreck, the wreck! All those poor people, and Mariett, dear Mariett.«

Dropping on her knees, lifting her clasped hands and lovely eyes to heaven, she said—

»Oh, kind and all-merciful Father, make me grateful that my life was spared; yet forgive me if—though I know it was Thy will—I grieve for those who are gone. Heaven kindly bless good Mariett!«

She rose up, saying—

»Oh, if I could have said one prayer over him; if—if he were only buried I think I should feel happier.«

This little incident made that of the cave forgotten, and they returned home, where they prepared dinner—the hog not having yet been caught—until Tahi came back.

Gibson Bay as before had received most of the wreckage, so the Indian had landed all the rest he could find there, stowing it away in the bushes, all but some spars and fragments of wood, which he knew would be useful in enlarging their house.

Upon this they began after dinner, and worked with such a will that they had reared the three walls and the roof before dusk.

The entrance to it of course was from the larger apartment, so that when Stella went in to sleep, the four with Faith served as her guard from danger.

Artie planted some pretty creeping plants outside; while George and Ned ornamented the inside with flowers and green leaves, for the »Queen of the Island's« reception.

They made it so tasty that Stella was delighted, and began to think if »dear papa« only knew she was safe, it was rather a pleasant change of life than otherwise.

At sunset they repaired to the look out, but there was no sign of any ship.

Here they talked until the stars came out, and the Southern Cross shone brilliantly in the heavens.

It was just at this moment that George Merridew happened to turn his eyes towards the south part of the island.

Starting, he caught Tahi's arm.

Then recollecting Stella, moved to a little distance, beckoning the Indian.

»What Massa George want?« asked the latter.

»Look, Tahi,« whispered our hero; »look to the south; do you see that light? I fancied I saw it yesternight, but it disappeared so quickly that I was uncertain, But now——«

»Fire,« said Tahi, laconically.

What attracted them was a small disc of dull light far distant.

It seemed to waver, and then grow duller, then more bright, and finally, as our hero had said, it seemed to go suddenly out.

George at first had thought it was a meteor. But then it could not appear two successive nights in the same place.

»What do you think it is, Tahi?« he asked, anxiously. »Indians?«

Tahi shook his head.

»Indians make big fire; fire burn bright and long time,«

»True. Can it be a burning mountain on some other island?«

»Tahi no know, but think not.«

»What can it be, then? It is most mysterious, Certainly it's a fire, and if it's not a burning mountain or a phenomenon, who can light it?«

The Indian shook his head.

»I'll tell you what, Tahi,« proceeded George. »I fancy danger threatens; it's best that we should know it and be prepared.«

»Yes, Tahi think so, too.«

»Then let you and I, without, you know, frightening Miss Stella Larivière, start off to-morrow and reconnoitre the south of the island.«

Tahi agreed.

»What are you two plotting out there?« cried Ned, at this moment.

»Taking an astronomical observation?« laughed our hero, walking back.

But that night, after Stella had retired, George told his companions about the mysterious light, and how he and Tahi intended to explore the island further the next day.

»That's a capital idea,« explained Ned, with wonderful readiness, considering it was our hero's suggestion,

The truth was, he was glad at the thought of enjoying Stella's society, and acting as her body-guard, with no Merridew to interfere.

Besides, he wanted to let the girl know who George was, and how he, himself, was a gentleman, who one day, if ever he got off that »horrid island,« would inherit a large estate.

»Do you take Faith I asked Artie, as finally they laid down.

Faith was to be left, for fear he might bark. Then silence reigned.

But George, for long, could not sleep, because of this of the mysterious light, and who could have lit it,

CHAPTER XVIII.

GEORGE AND TAHI SET OUT—THEY ARE ALARMED BY A HIDEOUS ANIMAL.

Our hero and Tahi had intended to set out directly after breakfast, but on reflection it was decided they had better first visit Gibson Bay, to examine the wreck.

Stella expressing a wish to accompany them, they went over land, while the Indian took the boat, as he wanted to run into the bay, where the lads had first thought of building their house.

He had noticed some dark objects there, which told of more

The others reached their destination before he did.

Whether it was that the tide was coming in when the catastrophe happened, they knew not, but there was a quantity of thin,

Among them a barrel of flour, a barrel of salt pork, and two or three chests, which promised the lads a new supply of clothing, while on one, to their delight, yet remained a bearing the words—

»MISS Larivière,
»First-Class Passenger,
»New York.«

It was a portion of Stella's luggage, and contained many things she would require.

They were busily engaged in their task when Tahi's boat was heard to grate on the sand.

George, looking round, ran quickly down to him, for the Indian had made him a quick sign.

»What is it, Tahi?«

»Drowned man in next bay. Not speak loud, because of Inglis girl.«

»Quite right, Tahi, thanks. Is it a sailor?«

»No, no sailor. Come and see.«

The boy sprang into the boat—the Indian pushed off, and they were nearly rounding the headland before the others saw them.

Landing on the shore of the neighbouring bay they hastened towards the body which laid high on the sand.

It was that of a foreign-looking man, a passenger, evidently, though not a gentleman.

His limbs were composed as if in sleep, his head turned slightly aside, and one arm thrown out; yet he was dead.

No pulse was there at wrist or heart.

Our hero stood with silent emotion gazing on the placid face.

Then, an idea striking him, kneeling, he reverently examined the dead man's pockets.

There were neither letters nor papers of any kind to prove his identity, but there was a handkerchief.

George drew it forth and examined it, and as he did so, he gave a cry of satisfaction.

»It is Mariett Mariett!« he exclaimed, »oh, this will please Stella I«

Remembering her words the previous day, he resolved at once to fetch her,

When they got back to Gibeon Bay the examination of the chests was still going on.

Nervously our hero approached.

»Stella,« he said, for they had become accustomed now to call each other by their Christian names; »I want to tell you something.«

»Yes?« she remarked, fixing her eyes on him.

»We—we have found a body washed ashore in the other bay.«

The girl gave a little cry, and shuddered.

Then, noting something in the speaker's glance, she sprang forward, crying—

»Oh, it is Mariett! Dear, dear Mariett. I know it, I read it in your face.«

Clasping his arm she looked eagerly at him.

»Yes, Stella, it is,« he answered, softly; »I saw his name on his handkerchief.«

Stella's pretty head dropped on the boy's shoulder, and while sobs burst from her pretty lips, a silence fell on all.

»I—I feared this might grieve you,« murmured our hero.

»No, no,« broke in Stella, »I'm glad. Did I not wish to see him again? Please let me go.«

They all went down to where the boat had been left, and got in.

Mariett's devotion to his young mistress had won the admiration of every one of them, and none spoke, respecting Stella's grief.

Directly they landed she ran forward to the body, and falling on her knees, the tears trickling down her smooth cheek, she affectionately kissed the cold, pale brow.

»My good Mariett! Ah, perhaps you might have saved yourself had you not cared for me,« she cried.

After a while again she kissed her faithful servant; then, rising, beckoned the others.

»Yon—yon will bury dear Mariett,« she said, plaintively, »as you did the—the poor sailor?«

Of course they would.

Had it been in their power they would have done it with military honours, and fired a salvo over the last resting-place of the noble heart; but they did their best.

They chose the prettiest spot in the pretty to dig the grave.

Then having wrapped the body gently in a piece of sail-cloth, the Indian and our hero, it, conveyed it to the place, the others following, Stella, who held in her hand a few bright flowers, which Artie had gathered for her, bringing up the rear.

All kneeling, George read the prayers he had read before.

Stella's sobs and his voice alone broke the stillness, then she threw the flowers in, and turned away.

As our hero, taking her hand, led her from the spot, she said—

»You have a Testament, I see. Will you let me read It sometimes please! I used to read it every day at home.«

»I shall be delighted,« said our hero, really pleased. »It has been a great comfort to me.«

»It must be that, I think, to everyone,« responded the girl, simply.

The incident cast a temporary sadness on the little party.

So, loading the boat with all it could carry, Ned this time, with Tahi, rowed it home, while the others walked.

It was now noon, so they prepared dinner, broiling some of the pork, for they had no utensil to boil it in.

It was very hard, certainly, but it was a change, and their teeth were good.

On its conclusion George, who now again was growing impatient about the mysterious light, prepared to set out with Tahi.

»You will come home before dark?« said Stella, wistfully, as our hero said good-bye. »I shall feel frightened when you and Tahi are away.«

»Oh, yes, we shall be home,« answered the boy, cheerfully. »But if we should be late you must not be frightened. Have you not Faith to protect you—and this?«

He pressed the little Testament into her hand she thanked him by word and look.

Then he joined Tahi, who carried two spears, made with his native skill out of a hard wood, the head of which, by heat, he had rendered as sharp and hard almost as steel.

He waved his hand back to all—the Indian gave a wild whoop, and they started southward.

The point they first made for was the burning mountain.

George had a great wish to see a volcano close at hand, as he had heard of people visiting Vesuvius and looking in the crater.

He felt there could be no danger, for it was not likely another eruption would take place so soon, though a perpetual, almost imperceptible, quivering vapour was ever hanging over it,

They soon found that it was further off than they imagined, and the vegetation, as they penetrated into the interior, increased in growth and thickness.

They met no animals, save a few hogs, but birds, kinds of pigeons, and some parrots, flew about the trees, the latter screaming horribly.

The sweet notes of our beautiful British songsters were wanting.

Nevertheless our hero and the Indian, being swift of foot, reached the crest of an incline three hours after they had started.

The bed of the valley inclined right and left to the shore, so that the lava streams had evidently flowed into the sea.

On descending into the valley George found he was right, for the bed was composed of rugged masses of once molten rock now cooled.

Crossing this, they began to ascend the volcano itself.

The task was difficult, while before they had proceeded far, they found the ground to be intensely hot.

Tahi, scraping the surface away, put the end of a switch he had gathered into a crevice.

When he drew it out, not only was it charred, but red, showing it would have speedily become ignited.

»Danger here, Misser George,« he said; »if Tahi go further, he have no feet to go back with—feet burnt off!«

Our hero looked in amazement as Tahi spoke, and then regarded his own feet.

His boots, long worn and broken, were literally shrivelling up. What then must Tahi have been suffering?

They immediately decided now upon a descent.

Reaching the base they sat down to rest, while the Indian bound some cool green leaves about his scorched feet.

Then they arose, for in little more than an hour it would be dark.

Our hero thought of Stella's words.

But he didn't think they should be home until very late; for he had determined to remain if possible, and try if he could not get a closer view of the mysterious light, should it appear. Still he knew the Queen of the Island would be safe.

Proceeding round the base of the volcano, they found that the opposite side was formed like the first, as if the mountain had forced its way up the centre of a valley, or rather, George fancied, between two neighbouring islands, connecting them in time by the accumulation of its lava streams.

Climbing the other side on the top, they were met by a forest of underwood and trees, through which, with difficulty, they forced their way.

The darkness would now be soon upon them, but the two explorers had resolved not to begin retracing their steps until they had reached the other side of the island.

It was of a greater extent than they had believed, for night had closed in before the trees began to thin, enabling them to proceed more rapidly.

They did so, however, cautiously, for they felt they must be approaching the place where had appeared the mysterious light.

If it had been kindled by hostile Indians, each step they took might expose them to view and capture.

Suddenly our hero caught his companion's arm, arresting him.

The Indian turned, and then bent his eyes in the direction George was pointing.



»Look yonder, Tahi,« whispered the latter, »What's that?«

The Indian gazed in silence.

»Don't risk going forward yet,« continued our hero. »Let's reconnoitre. It's alive, for I saw it move. See, see!«

They noiselessly crouched down behind the bushes, but so that they could keep a watch on the singular object which had attracted their

attention.

It was, as well as they could judge from its position, the darkness, and the intervening bushes, a quadruped.

Its form, which was bulky, was dark and rugged.

On its head appeared layers of dull, greenish loose skin, from under which they could just see when it raised it, long masses of apparently tangled hair that extended on to its chest.

It was seemingly rooting at the foot of a large tree—probably for roots—behind the bushes.

Every now and then it emitted a sudden expulsion of breath, which made George think of the gorillas.

Suddenly, with a grunting sound like »urgh-urgh-urgh,« it turned, and appeared coming in their direction.

Tahi rose quickly, and poised his spear in readiness.

The hideous-looking bulk, however, had evidently heard the movement, and seen the enemy.

Instead of making an attack with a louder »urgh,« it turned, and dived among the bushes as if to fly.

When an enemy flies, even cowards will become pursuers.

Tahi and George were brave enough, and at once started in pursuit; the Indian casting his spear.

A roar of pain followed.

»Tahi,« whispered our hero, »did you ever hear so human a cry? It must be a gorilla, a monstrous ape. See, see!«

As he spoke they beheld the animal, seizing a branch, swing itself into one tree, from which it seemed to fly to another.

As it did so, they could just perceive that its hind legs and part of the body were covered, like its head, with loose flapping skin,

In a second, though, it disappeared.

»Tahi,« said George, »we can never follow the thing through this dense bush, and it has sought concealment in the thicket. We are but losing time.«

The Indian paused.

»Besides,« proceeded the boy, »it we drive it to desperation it may turn upon us with others, for it may only be a female gorilla, for gorilla I'm sure it is. Then what are we to do, having no weapons?«

»Misser George is right,« replied Tahi. »Let us go on. Hope monster not come back and attack us.«

Owing to this possibility, they kept a cautious look-out, but nothing occurred.

On reaching the boundary of the bush they found themselves at the end of the island, that is to say, on the sea-shore,

Deeming it best not to be seen, they did not leave the cover of the trees, but made their inspection from where they were.

The sea came within a few yards of them, while across a small channel, not more than a hundred yards broad, rose a tiny island, covered with trees, like those in rivers.

Evidently some earthquake or other convulsion of nature had separated it from the mainland, or it was a coral island in process of formation.

The hour was now, rather past that at which the mysterious light had on the two consecutive nights appeared, but there was no sign.

They waited another half hour, Tahi even venturing out on the shore to look round.

There was nothing.

»Now,« said our hero, »shall we camp out here, or make our way back, at least to the volcano, which, I hope, is a boundary line between our part of the island, and that monster.«

The Indian expressed his willingness to try to get back to Hope Bay before morning, and they therefore prepared to set out.

Just then a cloud swept over the stars, and at the same moment there was a sound like a splash in the sea.

The two leaned eagerly forward.

When, however, the cloud passed, the surface of the water disclosed no object.

Had they raised their eyes only a little higher they would have seen the strange monster at which Tahi had flung his spear, crawling out of

the sea, with much puffing and blowing, on to the tiny island, among the trees of which it speedily disappeared.

CHAPTER XIX.

STELLA'S SURPRISE—THE INDIAN CANOES.

After Tahi and George had departed, Ned's spirits rose considerably; and he did his best to appear amiable to Stella.

But his amiability took an air of self-assertion and patronage, which is ever repellant to an educated and sensitive nature.

He proposed that as those other two were skulking, that is, taking a holiday, they should me same, and go in the boat to see the coral forests.

»I don't think George and Tahi are skulking,« said Stella, with a slight erection of her head. »Is it not best to explore an island one is living on«

»Explore,« retorted Ned, with a scoffing laugh. »That's a grand word, that is, for an island one could run round in a day. But Merridew likes gtand words, Haven't you observed, Miss Larivière, that fellows who are not born gentlemen generally do.«

Ned spoke in really a most condescending tone and with a most grandiloquent air, as one quite capable of passing an opinion.

Stella lifted her eyes.

»No,« she answered. »Isn't George a gentleman?«

»A gentleman! Good gracious,no!« laughed Ned. »That is, he doesn't, you know, hold that position that would enable him to be my friend, nor your father's, in London society.«

»Dear me; that is strange,« said Stella, simply. »I've never met anyone more gentlemanly.

»Then I don't expect you've seem much society,« responded Ned, brusquely.

»Oh, yes, I have;« and again Stella's head was raised. »Papa mixes with the best; but who is George Merridew«

»The son of a banker who failed, was made a bankrupt, and couldn't pay people the money he owed them. Then, use he wouldn't take the trouble of working any more, I suppose, he died, leaving his widow so penniless that she couldn't even pay Merridew's premium and mess-money as a mid, so the company, who knew something of Mrs. Merridew, took him for nothing, out of charity.«

Ned in his triumph at the truth being out, had got rather breathless and flushed.

Stella's large eyes were full of tears.

Her small under lip quivered.

»And is this George's history?« she murmured. »Poor fellow! how sad; and he so brave and good. But, oh, this doesn't make him any less a gentleman,« she proceeded. »Papa would call him one of nature's gentlemen, and that—from all I have learned—is far more noble than the other. Who can tell; perhaps George is working to keep his mother?«

Ned bit his lips fiercely.

This was not at all the light he had expected Stella would take it in.

How incapable are the mean and narrow of mind of comprehending noble sentiments!

»Well!« he exclaimed, »if he keeps her out of his pay, she won't get much comfort out of that. But that is enough of Merridew. Will you come for a row, Stella, and see the coral forest?«

»No, thank you, I'd rather not go to-day,« answered the girl.

»Are you frightened to trust yourself to my rowing, Stella?« demanded Ned, barely able to keep down his passion. »I can row as well as that—as Merridew,« he corrected.

»I do not doubt it,« she laughed, softly. »Only I've never seen George rowing that big boat alone.«

»There's Artie.«

»I'm sure he's not strong enough. No, I don't want to go to-day, please. I'd sooner go to the look-out and watch for ships, for I've some work I want to get done before the others come home.«

»What?«

»You shall see,« she smiled, as she ran into the house.

Ned lounged outside waiting, his hands in pockets, his face like a thunder-cloud, his heels fiercely digging into the ground, while he swore a resolve that »If ever he could find a chance of separating George Merridew from Stella, whatever the chance might be, he would take advantage of it.«

Fortunately, Stella's sea-chest, beside wearing apparel, had contained her work-box, which she was carrying, with some white and coloured stuffs, when she came out of the log house, Faith at her heels; for, as if he knew by instinct his young master's desire, he never lost sight of her.

»Are we to some, too?« asked Artie.

»On second thoughts, no,« smiled Stella, gaily. »I want to be alone, as I hope to have a surprise for you English boys. Do you mind?«

»Oh, no; we don't mind,« said Ned, indifferently. »But don't you call yourself English?«

»I skould think so. I'm too proud of dear old England and all her glories, to deny that. Come, Faith.«

And fleet o8 a fawn, she sped up the hill.

»What shall we do?« asked Artie.

»Nothing. I'm not going to work while those other two chaps are taking holiday.«

So Ned lounged and lolled about, wondering what »the dance« Stella was after.

Artie, gathering a lot of beautiful shell's from the shore, to make a chain for her majesty, wondered also.

Consequently, both boys' eyes were frequently directed to the pretty, graceful figure on the look-out, busily and most earnestly at work.

More than two hours had thus elapsed, and the lads, growing terribly tired of their own society, were contemplating a fresh advance upon the look-out—they had made two already and had been imperiously waved back—when they saw Stella flying towards them down the hill. Her fair cheeks were flushed.

Her eyes sparkled with delight and fun.

Her golden hair streamed—a glorious cloud—behind her.

»What has she got?« cried Artie. »What is that she's carrying on the stick? It's—it's like bunting!«

At that instant the breeze caught the object and spread it fully out.

Both boys gave a wild shout of joy.

»It's a flag!« cried Ned.

»It's the Union Jack of old England!« almost shrieked Artie, delirious with rapture, as, waving his arms, he ran forward, »Bravo, the flag that's braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze!«

»It isn't the English standard,« laughed Stella, »but it will do equally as well. You know, when America was first discovered, the Spaniards, when they landed at any part, used to thrust their standard in the ground and cry—

»We take this land in the name of the King of Spain.«

»Now we will run up this flag and say—

»We take this island in the name of the Queen of England!'

»But, Stella,« cried Artie, »where shall we run the bunting up

»To the top of the house, of course, for it represents Government House, only we want a flag-staff.«

»I'll soon make that,« exclaimed Ned, who, under the sweet girl's influence, felt even his sullenness die out.

Heran to where they had stored the portions of wreck, and found a small block, some cord, and a piece of wood, which, with his knife, he soon converted into a tolerable flag-staff.

After attaching the »Union Jack« to the rope, with Artie's help he climbed to the roof and nailed it securely just over the entrance door.

Descending in true nautical fashion, he began to haul it to the masthead.

Stella pressed it to her lips, then, letting it go, soon beheld it floating out on the breeze.

The delight of the trio was immense.

Stella thought how astonished and pleased George would be.

»They say,« she exclaimed, »that the Union Jack protects all it waves over, May it protect us.«

»You seem very fond of England, Stella,« said Artie,

»I am, particularly of her brave sailors and soldiers. Papa was always telling me anecdotes of them.«

»Tell us some, do.«

»Oh, there are so many. How they would, even when beaten, nail the colours to the mast that they should not be hauled down. And about the

little middy.«

»What of him?«

»Did you never hear of him? He was scarcely fourteen, and served on a small war ship during the American war. One day the captain sighted a large ship three times his ship's size. But the English have never fled before an enemy yet. They cleared for action and though the American man-of-war might have crushed the English ship, the latter so disabled the other that she couldn't take possession of her prize when she had beaten.«

»And the mid?«

»Was terribly and mortally wounded by a cannon shot, As they carried him below instead of thinking of his pain, all he could do was to ask about the enemy. Then he grew restless, and tried to remove what they had thrown over his poor shattered limbs, until they showed him it was the Union Jack. Then he pressed it in his young hands, a proud smile came over his face, and without a sigh he died.«

»Poor fellow! said Artie, brushing his hand across his eyes. »Are soldiers as brave.«

»Of course they are,« said Stella, drawing her graceful figure erect. »Are they not equally Englishmen?«

»Don't you remember when that ship, the 'Birkenhead,' went down, how the noble soldiers on board, at the roll of the drum, mustered on deck as quietly as if on parade, and let (without one effort to save themselves,) all the poor women and children get into the boats.

»When they had pushed off from the side the ship's commander thoughtlessly cried—

»'All those that can swim jump overboard and make for the boats!'

»And then Captain Wright, of the 91st Highlanders—oh, I shall never, never forget his name!—exclaimed —

»'No, men; if you do, they and the women must be swamped.'

»And the men stood firm.

»Not one of those brave hearts quailed; but, as the vessel made her final plunge, carrying them to their death, as it sunk beneath the waves

with its noble freight of heroes, each soldier brought his gun to his shoulder and fired a salute.«

»Tell us some more?« asked Artie.

»No, no,« answered Stella, whose gentle voice had broken frequently; »I can't now. It makes a ball rise in my throat and the water come in my eyes. I'll come back directly, and then we'll have tea up on the look-out.«

Saying which she ran into the house.

The boys thought that the least they could do would be to take the milk, biscuits, and bread-fruit up in readiness for her majesty, Ned also carrying the telescope which, naturally, always accompanied them when there was any chance of seeing a passing ship.

As Stella had not arrived when their preparations were completed, Ned employed the time in taking an observation.

For some moments he swept the horizon, seeing nothing until he came to the part upon which the red light of the declining sun rested.

»The Indians—the Indians again!« he cried, suddenly, »I'm sure of it!«

»Oh Ned, don't say that,« cried Artie. »You don't see their canoes, do you«

»Yes, I do; I'm sure of it. They're at a long distance as yet, but I'm certain; look!«

He passed the telescope.

With trembling fingers the other took it, and applied it to his eye.

When he had got the right focus he exclaimed—

»I see what you mean—those dark spots just below the sun, that dart about so.«

»That's it; well, ain't they canoes?«

»I fear they are—I—I—I'm sure they are. Don't tell Stella, Ned.«

»Tell Stella! Du you think I'm so stupid, and that nobody is considerate of her but you and George? I suppose the canoes are coming here?«

»I suppose so,« groaned Artie, emphatically.

For five minutes more they watched the dark specks, when to their delight they saw them one by one disappear, as if rowed in an opposite

direction.

»They may return, for all that,« remarked Artie.

»They may, so we'd better keep within our own domain,« said Ned, trying to assume brave indifference. »Here come Stella and the dog.«

Under the plea that they could see the two on their return quicker from the look-out, the lads, whose hearts were beating with nervous dread, managed to keep up there until dark.

They, however, saw no signs again of the canoes.

Still, for all that, they might yet come; therefore, when darkness fell, they proposed to Stella to return to the house.

Here they remained waiting for Tahi and our hero; Stella anxious about them, Ned and Artie about the Indians.

Finally assured that the two—if nothing had happened—were camping out till morning, they shut and secured the door, certain that Faith would warn them of anyone's approach, friend or foe,

Then Stella went into her room, more nervous and frightened than she had yet been owing to George and Tahi's absence,

The lads also laid down, but for long could not sleep for thinking of the savages who, at that very moment, might be performing their cannibal rites within a few yards of them.

One thing they entirely overlooked.

That they had left the Union Jack flying, an object so singular on the island that it surely would attract the attention of any human being, did he come within its vicinity,

CHAPTER XX.

GEORGE GOES BIRD-NESTING—NED'S TEMPTATION —A CAIN IN HEART.

Meanwhile, George and Tahi had turned their steps homeward, having decided that to pay a second visit in the daylight to that part of the island would be better than, unprovided as they were, staying there all night.

As they penetrated the almost jungle of underwood, they kept a sharp look-out for the strange monster and the mysterious light.

Neither, however, did they see.

Having once more skirted the base of the volcano and ascended the other side of the valley, they stopped and looked around.

All now was dense night.

The indigo sky was resplendent with myriads of brilliant stars.

A silence reigned everywhere—a silence, impressive, grand.

»That's it; well, aren't they canoes«

To George, he and Tahi seemed alone in that vast solitude.

A few acres of land surrounded by the immense ocean!

An awe fell on him.

Not the production of fear, but rather a holy, reverential awe at the wondrous greatness and goodness of the Creator, who held all this world in His hands, and marked even the sparrow's fall.

»How, then,« he thought, »can I fear?«

His eyes had been wandering along the horizon, and now they were arrested by a faint glow, which burst into a sudden glare.

It was not the light they had looked for.

Not only was it different, but in an opposite direction.

It rapidly increased in size, until all about it the heavens were in a glow, the glare broken by dark objects that rose and fell incessantly, while a small track of red reflection came creeping over the ocean.

»Fire mountain?« said Tahi. »Big way off?«

»How do you know that, Tahi I«

»Great glare—big,« responded the Indian; »yet no noise here—no smoke—no ashes!«

»Stay, what is that?«

The earth seemed to vibrate beneath their feet; a low rumbling sound appeared to issue from the volcano.

They looked up.

The shimmering vapour that incessantly played over the cone had disappeared.

Neither George nor Tahi was sufficiently well informed to know that this ensured their safety—

That there must be a communication between these two volcanoes and therefore when one was active the other became silent.

They fancied an eruption was again on the point of occurring, so, notwithstanding their fatigue, they set off from the mountain's vicinity as fast as their legs would carry them.

It wanted an hour or two yet to dawn when they came in view of Hope Bay, and a little while later they sighted the house.

»I say, Tahi,« exclaimed our hero, as he beheld it; »what's that on the roof?«

The Indian who carried over his shoulder a young pig he had succeeded in killing, contemplated the object attentively.

Then said briefly—

»Flag!«

»A flag. Why where on earth could they have got it? I suppose from the wreck, though I saw no bunting among it. Let us get nearer.«

They quickened their pace, when our hero who had been peering eagerly at the staff, cried almost with a shout—

»Why, Tahi, it's the Union Jack itself. Hurrah!—that flag never waved from the mizen of the ›Nevada‹. It's English—all English. Where could they have got it?«

»Not wise to leave it there,« remarked the Indian, quietly; ¢ Niuans come—see it.«

»True, true. Yet how it cheers an English heart to look upon it.«

They had been hastening on; and now heard a low whining sound coming from the house under the door, followed by a loud snuffing.

»It's good old Faith,« exclaimed George, running forward. »He recognises us; he musn't bark or he'll wake Stella.«

Quieting the animal, whom he could hear bounding inside, with his voice, he knocked softly.

»Is that you, Merridew?« whispered Artie in a few minutes.

»Yes, lad, open the door; we're dead beat.«

In a short space they were inside, our hero having much to do to control Faith's exuberant delight.

Though they were nearly dropping to sleep from fatigue, they gave a brief account of their journey, and asked what had occurred during their absence.

The intelligence about the canoes created instant alarm, and Tahī proposed going to the headland to see if they had really visited the island and were then upon it.

Noiselessly they let him out, and during the time he was away, George learned about the flag.

»I tell you what,« he said; »we must give a banquet to inaugurate the national flag, and in honour of our queen.«

»A banquet!« remarked Ned. »I suppose it will be breakfast, dinner, and tea repeated. A monotonous series of dittoes.«

»Not at all. Tahī has brought home a pig; part of which we can roast; we have yams and bananas. Stella can make us some cakes with the flour and milk, while I am sure I know where we can get nests of wildfowl.«

»But they won't be old enough to cook.«

»That's true. Never mind, they will grow, and shall be held in reserve for another banquet.«

»But where are these nests?« inquired Artie.

»You know those steep rugged rocks just beyond this bay?«

»Yes.«

»Well, when watching the wildfowl, the terns, and those lovely tropical birds, I see they go chiefly there to roast, while during the day

they frequently hover over it, making peculiar cries like the male bird to its mate!«

»But you can't climb up the rocks?« said Ned.

»No, but some shrubs and trees grow on the top, and I could lower myself by a rope.«

»It's awfully dangerous!« murmured Artie.

»Not to a sailor, if the rope's strong. And think, if we could make a poultry-yard here and get fresh eggs for puddings and Stella's breakfast!«

Artie, who fully appreciated the good things of this world, was about to clap his hands, but our hero checked him in time, whispering—

»Hush, you'll wake the queen.«

At that moment Tahi returned,

He had seen nothing.

Consoled by this news, they now all laid down and soon were wrapt in sleep.

The next day there being nothing particular doing, George, remembering the wildfowl, determined to get away to the rocks.

He thought to bring Stella home a nest of soft fluffy little birds would be a return surprise for the Union Jack.

Therefore, while they were all engaged down on the beach, he selected a strong piece of rope from among the wreckage, coiled it up, and set out as he fancied unperceived.

The spot to which he was bent was a small stretch of precipitous rocks.

Formed in a shallow circle they enclosed a tiny bay of yellow sand, inaccessible by land.

Cresting these cliffs were both shrubs and small trees, which with that vital power of tropical vegetation to take root on the slightest amount of soil, for some feet down, jutted from many a ledge and crevice.

Further beneath, the surface presented a quantity of projections, caves, and holes, wherein sea-birds delight to build their nests.

Here George's observation had told him he should very probably find the latter with young birds in them.

Leaning over, by means of lying down flat and grasping the bushes, he saw he was correct.

He could perceive several nests, but so craftily concealed by their cunning builders, that it was impossible to see them from shore.

Examining the rope, he found it strong and of sufficient length to allow of his placing a knot here and there.

Then he secured it firmly to a tree, which, as far as he could judge, was securely planted in the earth,

After that he took the rope in his hands and began rapidly to descend, sailor fashion.

Hardly had his head disappeared, than a figure glided from the bushes, the figure of Ned Conyers, pale and angry.

He was more jealous of our hero than ever.

That morning, Stella's reception of him had decided his hatred.

Her words »Oh, I am so glad you have come back; we have been so dull without you,« yet rang in his ears.

Could he have struck George down then, he would have done so, and, therefore, when he saw him quit Hope Bay he had followed—a demon of evil working in his heart.

He trembled in every limb as he crawled on hands and knees towards the edge of the cliffs.

He was aware, from the vibration of the rope, that George was, yet swinging at the end of it.

Ned, in his hand, held an open clasped knife; one touch of its keen blade across the taut rope, and he need be no longer jealous of our hero.

He extended his shaking hand until the keen blade actually touched it.

Then a fear and a deadly sickness came over him.

He dropped on the ground, his face buried in the grass, and he was seized by a violent, convulsive trembling.

Suddenly an exclamation reached his ear from over the cliff.

It was a cry for help from George Merridew, for the roots of the tree to which the rope was fastened were giving way.

Ned involuntarily leaned forward.

Then that demon of evil seemed to drag him back.

His fingers gripped tightly the grass, his dilated eyes were fixed on the tree roots, tearing, tearing]slowly from the soil.

His brain reeled and swam, and he seemed no longer to have power over himself.

Abruptly, though the space seemed an hour to Ned, the tree gave way with a wrench at last, and fell over the cliff.

A great cry—a shriek—rose from beneath; a cry which was echoed by one from Ned, who, leaping to his feet and covering his face with his hands, fled from the spot.

He was free of his rival.

But how?

He had not hurled him to his death, certainly, but he had held out no hand to try to save him from his fate.

He was innocent, but indeed in his conscience he felt that he was guilty

CHAPTER XXI.

THE FATE OF OUR HERO.

When George Merridew uttered that cry of horror on finding that either the tree or the rope had given way, for the moment he knew not which, he was near enough to the ledge, whereon was the nest he had descended for, to catch it with one hand.

Thus for a second he hung until he could grasp it with the other, while the rope and tree went whirling past, in such close proximity that they nearly hurled him from his hold.

That they had not done so seemed but a brief reprieve from a fate which our hero believed to be inevitable.

His position, in fact, was most perilous.

Above, was about some twenty feet of rock, which, owing to its slightly overhanging the base, made it impossible to climb, while beneath, extended nearly fifty feet of, to George's first glance, clear perpendicular cliff.

Well for him that he had been accustomed to look out from the masthead, or that downward glance at the waves dashing beneath, would have upset his brain, causing him to let go his grip.

As it was, his head felt giddy, his heart sick.

Whatever was he to do?

To shout for help would be useless.

All the others were at Hope Bay, or, he believed so, far beyond hearing, even if the sea-birds, scared at sight of him, had not filled the air with their own wild, discordant screams.

Could he raise himself on the ledge?

Impossible.

It was but the merest projection, sufficient to support and protect the nest, out of which the heads of the young birds were craning, while they screamed as if in derision at his peril.



»Certainly the victory's on your side now,« thought George. »Merciful Heaven, aid me! What must I do?«

Again he looked beneath.

His brain was steadier now,

It did not reel.

Then he thought he'd try a shout.

But as he did so, the sea-birds seemed to shriek louder, and to fly closer, flapping their wings almost in his face.

»It is useless,« muttered the poor young fellow; »they'd never hear me. I'm done for, that's certain. Good-bye, dear mother; goodbye, Stella, and the rest, I wonder whether Stella will ever know why I got into this strait? I hope she may.«

He thought of the bright pretty girl.

Of how her eyes had brightened on his return; of her pleasure at his delight in the Union Jack she had made for them.

Of what her grief would be when his body was found, if it ever were, at the foot of the rocks.

»And dear good Faith, too.«

Was it that word »Faith,« or Stella's grief, or the thought of the Union Jack, that suddenly seemed to endow our hero with fresh courage?

Certain it is, new energy came upon him, and he exclaimed—

»It's all very well to talk of the Union Jack of old England, but when did any British sailor give in without an effort? I, George Merridew, will not be the first to do so, at any rate, 'Never say die,' shall be my motto.«

It was time he came to some resolve.

His toes, fortunately without shoes, and his fingers were beginning to cramp from rigidity.

In a little while he must let go.

Again he looked down.

This time on the sea side.

His heart gave a great leap of joy.

Within six feet of him there was a larger ledge, and from it grew a stout, small shrub.

Our hero knew the kind well, and that it gripped into the crevices of the rock with the tenacity of steel.

Could he but reach it, it would give him a better hold.

Yet, after all, was it not but delaying his death? But George, with a brave effort, banished the idea.

»Nothing risk, nothing win,« he thought. »But how can I get to it I

There was but one way, and that was by dropping.

Our hero drew a long breath, prepared himself for the violent jerk he might get if he succeeded, told himself he mustn't be nervous, but calm and steady, commended his life into the hands of Heaven, and then—jumped.

George could never explain how he felt at that moment; only that every incident of his life seemed to sweep before his mental vision; and that an intense joy was beating at his heart, as he suddenly found his hands gripping tight on the sturdy little bush.

Taking as much rest as he could afford, our hero once more examined the rock's surface.

Lower again was another bush, almost a tuft, yet he did not hesitate.

Again he succeeded, and now the task appeared to grow easier.

There were some ledges by which he could lower himself some few feet.

Now he was within thirty feet of the beach.

His heart beat high; Heaven had, as it seemed, taken him into its keeping, and after all he was not to die.

He was not out of the wood yet, however.

There were no more bushes; but there was a ledge of above two feet broad, that projected in front of a small cave.

The leap here was not as great, but it was far more difficult.

»Never mind,« thought George. »Here goes.«

He oscillated his body gently until he could take a spring.

Then, letting go the bush, he felt his feet strike the ledge; there was a sensation as if he had been thrust by the rock itself, and he knew he was tumbling through the air—that he had missed his footing—that the end had come at last.

The earth seemed to come up against him with an awful violence; he felt an acute sensation of pain everywhere, and then all was oblivion.

How long he remained thus he did not know.

It must have been for hours; for when he opened his eyes daylight had gone, and the moon was shining calmly above him.

He did not attempt to move.

Every limb was helpless with acute pain; pain that forced the tears from his eyes and sickened his heart,

Sooner than move and suffer the excruciating agony he was aware must follow, he felt he would rather die.

As consciousness had come back, it seemed that voices had been in his ears.

He must have been dreaming of home; the home he should never see again.

Yet there was a sound, and he tried to call his stunned senses together to listen.

There was a creeping, rustling sound over the shore and about him, and he guessed that some kind of crustacæ, of crab or lobster kind, were approaching him.

He heard them come nearer, nearer.

Had they crawled over him he could not have prevented them; but instead, they seemed scuttling all in one direction, the rocks.

Why?

There was another sound he knew well—the coming in of the tide.

A cold shiver ran through him, for he was aware he laid within its reach.

He made one effort to move, and a scream, forced by pain, burst from his lips.

Then resignation settled on him, and, quietly listening to the approaching waves, he awaited death.

He had no fear,

He, on the contrary, felt a strange, calm happiness, as he laid gazing up at the stars.

Slowly but surely, the waves meanwhile, breaking with a monotonous tone on the shore, advanced.

Onward, onward; rolling back only to rush further next time on the beach.

»It cannot be long now,« thought our hero.

No, not long; the billows now touched his feet—now surged u% round him—now lifted him in their strong, briny arms.

Their first touch had refreshed him; but now a terrible pain seized every joint, and he fainted.

Just as he lost consciousness, a voice, uttering his name, broke the stillness.

But there came no answer.

The poor boy being borne out to sea had not heard it.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CONSCIENCE OF CAIN—FAITH TO THE RESCUE —THE SHARK.

When Ned Conyers fled from the heights, he was too terrified to heed where he went.

He could think of nothing but George Merridew—George, lying crushed, dead, on the beach at the foot of the rocks.

He went crashing through the bushes—his brain whirling—his breath coming quick and hot.

That last cry of our hero's rang in his ears like clashing bells.

He knew that throughout his life, however long that might be, the cry would continue ringing, ringing, ringing, only to be silenced by death.

And then?

Before he could contemplate an answer to that awful question, he tripped his foot against some tangled parasite and came full length upon the ground.

Rising, he wiped the perspiration from his face, which, despite the heat, was as pale as ashes.

Glancing his haggard eyes round upon the splendid, graceful palms and ferns, he gasped, as if addressing them—

»No one will ever know it.«

He was quite right there; no one would—no one ever did in this world!

Yet did that still make matters much better?

No.

He knew it himself, and that knowledge would haunt him until his dying day.

It was past noon before he found courage to go back to Hope Bay, where Merridew's absence had not been observed until Ned was also missing, and then, naturally it was believed that they had gone together.

Tahi was busy making some pots of clay down on the sands, Stella was trying her hand at basket-making, while Artie was engaged in gathering a kind of limpet from the rocks, which the Indian declared to be edible,

and Faith laid at the girl's feet, now and again flapping his beautiful tail as he gazed seaward with his large brown eyes.

»Apparently looking for a sail,« laughed Artie; »for you sce, Stella, he knows the Union Jack as well as you or. I. Eh, Faith?«

Faith barked, as much as to say with a tinge of contempt—

»Of course I do. Am I not a born and bred English sailor«

»I say,« said the boy, coming back from the rocks, »where have those two fellows gone? Do you know, Tahi?«

The Indian looked round and shook his head. He had not noticed their absence.

»Do you know, Stella?«

»No; but they are safe enough as they are together, you may be sure. We are out of bread fruit and cocoa-nuts in our larder, I daresay they have gone to get a supply.«

Thus for the time the matter slipped by.

Tahi went on with his pots, which he was going to bake in ovens he had dug in the sands; Stella with her baskets, singing a little Mexican song, and Artie with his limpet search.

He was wondering what the other two were doing, and wishing that they had taken him with them, when he beheld Ned coming slowly down the sands.

»Here they are, here they are!« he cried, running forward.

He reached Stella and Tahi at the same time as Ned.

The girl had glanced quickly round, and now exclaimed—

»They? I see but one. Why,« she added, in consternation, »how pale you are. What is the matter? You are ill.«

»Yes, that's it,« rejoined Ned, with a quivering lip, and not meeting the gaze of one of them, as he dropped on the sand. »I—I forgot to put my fern-hat on, and fancy I got a touch of sunstroke, for I've been lying in the bush for I don't know how long.«

Tahi did not say a word, but fixed his dark eyes on the speaker.

He always mistrusted Ned, though he did not show it.

Stella exclaimed—

»A sunstroke? Oh, poor, poor Ned! Don't stop out in the sun. Go and lie down.«

»Yes, I think I will.«

The boy's lip trembled more and more, and he felt growing hysterical under Stella's gentle sympathy.

He could not drive from his mind the picture of our hero's form extended on the beach.

Dead!

Supposing, after all, he was not dead—not quite?

If speedy help came he might be saved; yet how could help arrive?

Only by his, Ned, telling them what had happened, and where to find him.

He dared not do that, for that would inform them of everything, and they might even accuse him of Merridew's murder.

As he staggered to his feet, Artie said—

»Where did you leave George, Ned!«

If the boy could have turned whiter, he would.

Huskily, with something of his old surly doggedness, he answered—

»Leave him? He hasn't been with me.«

»Where is he, then?«

»How should I know?«

»You may be certain George was not with him,« put in Stella, gently, »for had he been, he would never have left him to come back alone, when he is so ill.«

The words went like a knife to the guilty hearer's heart.

At any personal risk or danger, Merridew would never have deserted him.

The talk and the glances of the rest maddened him, and muttering 'he'd lie down,« he moved to the log-house.

Artie ran to help him, but he said he preferred going by himself.

Oh, the conscience of Cain!

What more terrible, what more woeful to bear?

We will not follow him into the house; nor be a witness to his misery further.

Truly is it better to be Abel than Cain.

Better to be the brave, pure-minded boy, lying insensible at the base of the rocks, than Ned, tossing, sick and giddy with fear, on his dry fern couch, frightened to sleep, lest he should cry out and disclose all in his dreams.

For some time, the minds of the three on the beach were occupied with Ned.,

They would have given him cool milk, and bathed his head with water, while Artie would have sat with him.

But he had ejaculated, so piteously—

»Oh, please let me alone,« and they had done so, while Ned had cowered down, shutting out the light from his eyes, and his brain throbbing as he thought—

»But the night will come when I must sleep, and they will be here. No, I'll find the place too hot. I'll sleep out of doors.«

So ran the miserable lad's ideas; and yet, through all, no pity came for George Merridew, only for himself.

As hour after hour went by, however, and our hero did not return, alarm began to dawn in the hearts of those who loved him.

Stella's anxiety was almost more than she could conceal.

Finally, seeing the Indian after leaving off his work to gaze around, she cried, starting up—

»Oh Tahi! you, too, are anxious about George. I read it in your face. Do not deny it. Something must have happened to him. Please let us go in search,«

»Tahi go,« answered the Indian, rising. »Misser George brave, but should not go so far without Tahi.«

And the Indian's mind reverted to the hideous monster they had seen at the south of the island.

»We will all go,« cried Stella, then clasping her hands. ¢ Oh, dear Tahi, let me try to find him too!«

»And I also!« ejaculated Artie,

Tahi, who liked our hero the best of any, made no demur, only he bade the two keep together and not go far.

Then taking his spear, he set off.

Soon, Ned heard the clear, young voices of the boy and girl making the afternoon air ring with George's name.

He groaned, and pressed his hands to his ears to shut it out.

Stella ran to each high part of ground and called.

Artie dived into the valleys; but all was silent.

»Ah, he is dead. He must be dead,« said Stella, as she burst into tears.

Artie's fears misgave him, but he tried to cheer her.:

»Don't cry, dear Stella,« he exclaimed, his own young voice tremulous. »No, no, he isn't dead. Tahi will find him.

The night had now set in, and Ned had crawled out from the house—haggard, pale, and weak.

Presently Tahi was observed advancing, alone, towards them, and Stella ran to meet him.

»Tahi, dear Tahi,« she cried; »have you not found him?«

The Indian slightly shook his head, and then drooped it despairingly on his chest.

The girl threw herself on the grass, averted her face, and burst into tears.

She felt that George was as dear to her as a brother, and he was dead.

Suddenly she leaped to her feet.

Her beautiful face was animated by hope.

»I have it, I have it!« she cried. »Oh, why were we so stupid as not to think of it before?«

»Have what, Stella?« asked Artie.

»The way to find George,« she answered, as fleet of foot she ran into the house.

In a moment she returned with an old jacket of our hero's.

Going to Faith she showed it him.

»Dear Faith,« she said, excitedly, »we have lost your master., Find him. Search, good dog, search.«

The sagacious animal seemed instantly to divine her meaning.

He sniffed the garment, then he bounded in front of Stella, emitting sharp interrogative barks.

»Yes, yes,« she answered, pointing up the path our hero must have gone, »Search, Faith, search.«

Now he fully understood her.

He darted up the path, his nose to the ground, and whining in a low, inquiring key.

Then he darted back, running free here and there.

Anxiously the four watched him, for now Ned was as interested as the others.

Suddenly Faith threw up his head, and gave a short, sharp bark.

Then he started at a swinging trot up the path.

»He is on the track!« cried Stella, in delight; and all followed.

Yes, he was on the track.

He never swerved, for neither had poor George.

Onward he went, they after, until he neared the top of the rocks, when Artie uttered a loud cry.

»I know where he is now. Oh, why did not I remember it before?« he ejaculated. »Oh, dear Stella, he is dead, I'm sure he's tumbled over the cliffs.«

»What do you mean, Artie?« said the girl.

»That George wanted to rise you with a present of a nest of sea-birds. The nests are in these rocks, and I'm certain he must have been trying for them and fallen over.«

There was little doubt of it, for Faith had by this time reached the edge and was barking furiously.

Tahi motioned the others to advance cautiously; but he strode on himself.

His keen, rapid glance speedily descried the broken ground from which the tree had been torn, and that revealed to him the truth.

Lying down flat he drew himself to the edge and looked over.

The bay was full of calm moonlight, and he saw the form of our hero extended motionless on the sands beneath.

A shudder ran through the Indian's frame; but, though he feared the worst, he said—

»He is there. Call. Bee if Misser George will answer, Misser George fainted p'r'aps, or asleep.«

They all called aloud, even Ned, though his voice shook.

No reply.

»He fainted,« remarked the Indian, rising.

»Oh Tahi,« said Stella, »don't say he's dead.«

»Tahi not know. Tahi see. Fetch him. Tide coming in fast. Get boat.«

At their topmost speed they retraced their steps to Hope Bay and launched the boat.

Stella prayed to accompany them, and got in with Faith.

Ned, as the strongest, took one of the oars, and thus helped to save the boy, he had, a few short hours before, let perish for want of an outstretched hand.

Swiftly the boat bounded ever the waters; headland after headland was rounded; until, rounding the last, Stella, who was leaning over the bows, cried—

»Tahi, look! see that light! Ah, it has gone!«

»What light, Stella?« said Artie.

»It is not there now,« she answered. »It seemed like the glow of a bonfire, Then a dark, enormous shadow appeared to come between it and us, and it vanished.«

Tahi made no movement.

He knew that it was the mysterious light again.

Just then they shot into the bay, which was difficult to reach owing to the shoal water and jagged rocks.

There was the spot where Tahi had seen our hero; but the waves were flowing over it, and he was gone.

The Indian tried to shoot the boat in, but even it drew too much water to escape the rocks.

Before the tide would be high enough our hero would be drowned.

Eagerly Stella was gazing into the waters, when suddenly she cried—

»Ah! what is that dark object the waves first roll on the shore, then sweep back? It is he, it is he! Save him, Faith!«

But hardly had Faith plunged in than Tahiti was by the animal's side.

Beyond the narrow fringe of reef was deep, very deep water, and once in that, our hero would inevitably sink beyond recovery.

As yet, however, he could be seen, and a race began between man and dog.

They were within a yard when our hero, rolled back by a wave, disappeared.

Instinctively man and dog dived, and Faith caught the jacket collar.

Then the Indian's strong arms encircled the lad's body, and together they raised him and struck out for the boat.

Suddenly Artie uttered a shriek.

»The shark! the shark!« he shouted.

Stella screamed.

Yes; there was the cold dark snout, indeed, of one of those ferocious sea monsters, dashing swift as light towards the pair.

Quick, quick, brave swimmers! or your noble effort will be paid for by your lives.

Quick!

Why, what were they doing? Tahiti had stopped still, and was not only not swimming, but had checked the dog.

Good Heavens! was he mad?

In a few seconds now, the monster would be near enough to turn to make its fearful bite.

Now Faith was panting along alone with his burden, and Tahiti had disappeared.

Had the shark seized him? No It was coming on swifter after the dog.

Stella shrieked, but could not avert her eyes, and then abruptly the shark stopped, dashed the waters furiously with its tail, and seemed to dive,

It was about to seize its prey, but no! It rose again to the surface, but belly upwards, in which was a deep gash!

It was motionless; it was dead!

The instant after Tahi reappeared by our hero and the dog.

Soon they now reached the boat, and quietly placed George in, who was groaning faintly.

Stella, sitting down, took his head on her lap.

»He is saved, thank Heaven« she said, »but the shark.«

»Tahi get out Misser George's knife; Tahi dive down beneath shark and kill him,« said the Indian, quietly, as he bent to the oar; »Tahi's tribe hunt sharks.«

Ned sat motionless, grasping his oar with a horrible fear upon him.

George lived; and suppose by any chance he had seen him before he fell?

Even as the thought came into his mind, our hero's eyes opened, and rested upon him.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE SHADOW OF DEATH—THE PROPOSED FEAST— THE MONSTER'S FOOTPRINT.

George's eyes opened and fixed themselves upon Ned, causing the latter to tremble from head to heel.

But he soon perceived that the gaze which met his was devoid of all consciousness.

Disconnected sentences began to fall from his lips, frightening Stella and Artie.

But more than either Ned, until he found he was speaking of his home and his mother.

Quickly they rowed back to Hope Bay, and lifting out our hero, carried him to the house.

Gently as they did it, he moaned with pain.

Stella could not restrain her tears.

»Oh, that I could do something to help him!« she sobbed.

»You nurse Misser George,« remarked Tahi kindly; »you find herbs—do Misser George good.«

He showed her a specimen, and she with Artie, at once set out, for it was as light as day, owing to the moon.

While they were gone the Indian examined our hero.

He soon found he was terribly bruised, but fortunately no bones were broken.

Tahi was a doctor in his way, so he was not quite at a loss.

He lubricated our hero's limbs with a kind of oil he knew how to extract from certain trees, and which apparently gave the patient instant relief.

Then in one of his clay pots he managed to boil down the herbs Stella and Artie brought, the decoction formed from which he made our hero swallow,

The grimace of the lad showed that it was uncommonly nasty, but it is not always that nice things are best.

In less than half-an-hour George was asleep.

Stella would not leave him until they had to separate for the night.

The next morning when our hero awoke, he was conscious, but in excruciating pain.

In a faint voice he told them every particular of his accident.

»And you suffered all this because of me,« said Stella, bending over him, the tears brightening her eyes.

»That was the sole idea that gave me the strength to endure,« he smiled.

Stella stooping, kissed his forehead, while Ned bit his lip.

He saw plainly that all his efforts to separate these two appeared only to unite them more closely.

»You will live, George,« murmured the girl.

»I hope so,« he answered. »But how did you find me?«

»Stella and Faith found you,« broke in Artie. »We had hunted I don't know for how long, when Stella showed Faith your old jacket, and bid him search. Stella knows everything; for Faith obeyed at once, and took us to the top of the rocks, when Tahi saw you at the bottom.«

Artie proceeded to tell also about the shark,

»Then it seems,« smiled our hero, »I owe my life to all of you.«

»We have but paid a debt,« said Stella. »Have we not all before owed our life to you?«

»That's true,« cried Artie, »How funny, Even Faith.«

As the boy spoke, he coloured, and looked at Ned. He suddenly remembered who had imperilled the animal's life.

Ned, however, had turned away, and was standing at the door of the log-house.

»Where is Faith?« asked George.

Where?

By his master's side, of course,

At the mention of his name, he drew himself up gently, as if aware a touch would cause him pain, and licked his cheek,

Tahi now interposed.

George must lie still and not talk.

He gave his patient another dose, at which our hero made more wry faces than before, and then went out with the two boys, leaving Stella and Faith as nurses.

For three days George seemed getting better, but then there was so bad a relapse, that even Tahi thought he was going, after all, to die.

Stella would not leave his side.

He had told her all his history while they had been 'together, a different history to what Ned had given; one that loaded his father and George with honour, not blame.

On the fifth night, when the sick lad and girl were alone, he said, taking her hand—

»Stella, dear, I want you, in case I die, to promise me two things.«

»Oh George, please don't!« she pleaded.

»I must Stella; and I know you will promise, for it will make me happier.«

»Of course then, I'll promise. What is it?«

»That if ever you get off this island, and go to England, you will visit my mother. She would love you, Stella, and I'm certain you would love her.«

»I do already, George.«

»The next is, that if I die, you'll bury me near Gibson, and—and—wrap the Union Jack round me. It would make me feel as if my grave were not so far from my friends and dear old England.«

Stella could not answer, but sobbing bitterly, she pressed our hero's hot hand to her lips.

Finally, she gasped between her sobs—

All shall be as you wish, dear George. But you must not die. You must not, for your mother's sake, for mine.«

»I will try not,« he answered.

That night, Tahi gave George up.

He laid in a deep lethargy, and silently they sat about him.

Stella's hands were clasped in prayer.

The Indian watched her, for the religion was strange to him, and once he softly stroked her hair with his hand in sympathy,

Ned had drawn apart.

As our hero had lived so long after his accident, he did not so much regard himself in the light of Cain as before.

Jealousy and self overcame all the humanity in him, and he sat silent, planning how he should arrange things when George was dead.

Faith laid close to his master.

He had refused to be enticed away.

The daintiest morsel of pork could not tempt him to eat.

Altogether, it was a gloomy night, when in this desert island, these four were grouped round the sick boy, so far from home and friends; for the shadow of death hung over the log-house.

It was only the shadow of death, not the reality, which had threatened our hero, for when day dawned, George, instead of passing away, awoke, very weak, but better. His hands and brow were cool, and from that hour he began to mend rapidly.

Stella was delighted.

She proposed that they should give a feast in honour of our hero's recovery, and the suggestion was eagerly agreed to.

The day was fixed, and great preparations were made.

Tahi had by this time managed, out of the fibre of the long grasses, to construct some lines, and he proposed therefore to contribute a course of fish.

For the next, he managed not only to stick another pig, but captured two little ones, for which, with Ned and Artie's help, he had built a small enclosure.

»If we could only 'get some fowls,« said Artie, »we should have a perfect farm-yard.«

»Tahi get some,« said the Indian, smiling.

»You? Oh Tahi, pray don't you try to get over those awful rocks.«

»No, Tahi take care. There no danger,«

»None! Then may I go with you?«

The Indian giving consent, after he had made his preparations they set forth.

Tahi's preparations were not many,

All he had was a very long supple bamboo, along which ran a strong fibre cord, with a noose at the end.

Reaching the rocks, he examined them to find where were the nearest nests.

Discovering one that seemed suitable, and bidding Artie hide behind a bush, he laid flat down, lowering the bamboo and string, of both of which he of course retained an end, to the nest, letting the noose dangle near.

Then he began to imitate the scream of young birds when in terror, so perfectly that it would have been impossible to have told the difference.

Soon, however, there was an answering cry, and shortly after the parent bird was observed flying home in evident alarm.

As it drew near enough, screaming and elongating its neck, Tahi, with a skilful move of the bamboo, swung the noose over its head, gave the string a jerk, and soon was hauling the bird to the top of the rocks.

When there he cut its flying feathers, then gave it in charge of Artie, whose delight knew no bounds.

In this manner the male bird was also captured.

Artie would have tried every nest within reach, but the Indian shook his head.

»If birds scared, they leave rocks. Never come any more. Bat Tahi have nest.«

Pulling up the noose he reconstructed it, fastening branches of a strong thorny plant, their top ends lashed together, but the others expanded.

Round these latter he lightly placed the noose, which, on being pulled, would draw the ends closer, causing the thorns to take a firm grip of anything which was between them.

These he lowered like an extinguisher over the nest.

Jerking the string the thorns instantly closed upon it and its squalling feathered brood, which a few seconds after were being drawn up to their

captors.

»This is jolly,« cried Artie; »ah, if George had only known the fashion of catching them.«

In triumph they returned to Hope Bay, where in due form Tahi presented Stella with the nest.

As to the elder birds, as it was known they would only pine in captivity, it was decided that they must be killed to do honour to the feast.

This little incident had occurred before Tahi had captured the pig, which was also to be served up on the same occasion.

The afternoon following the taking the birds, he set forth alone for that purpose.

Artie or Ned would have accompanied him, but the hunt was sometimes attended by danger, so the Indian preferred to have no one with him whom he would have to look after.

The pigs, however, seemed to have made a stampede from that side of the island.

Not one could he come across, small or great.

Resolved not to return if possible without one, he hurried on towards the south of the island.

He had proceeded for over an hour in a thick part of the bush before he came upon a little squeaker.

It was very small, but Tahi seemed to have heard the old proverb —»Half a loaf is better than no bread,« so without much difficulty he brought down his game.

Slinging it over his shoulders, he was about to retrace his steps, when he heard the bushes rustling.

Turning he listened, half raising his spear, imagining the maternal pig might be coming in search of her young ones.

But no.

It was no boar that was crashing its way through the bushes.

It was a larger body, coming forward rather with the tread of a man.

The Indian bent forward, waiting.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds, and he lifted his spear in readiness.

Then the sound ceased, and there was a dead silence.

Then the sound was again heard, but evidently in retreat, and the Indian started into the bushes in pursuit.

But all was in vain; whether, whatever it was, it had swung itself into the trees, or managed to disappear otherwise he could not tell, but Tahi could find no trace.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DESCENT OF HOSTILE INDIANS—STELLA FLIES— THE BLOW AVERTED—SHE IS CAPTURED BY THE MONSTER.

The next day was the day of the fête to be kept as a general holiday.

The sun was glorious; Stella looked radiant; her lovely hair fell over her shoulders, and was ornamented with some of the splendid tropical flowers in honour of the occasion.

It was decided to dine a little after noon, so after breakfast all were engaged in cooking.

By the use of Tahi's clay pots, they were able to have boiled fish, yams, taros, bananas, and plantains; the fowls and the pork were roasted.

All had their duty assigned them, and with much merriment they set to work.

Tahi took upon himself to make a delicious pudding of cocoa-nut juice, poured over bananas and baked.

Soon on the balmy air arose the delicate odour of poultry, overcome by the stronger one of crackling.

»Oh, I say,« ejaculated Artie, stopping short; »Where is the sage and onion«

»Where the little boat was—all at sea,« laughed our hero; »we must eat our pork without sage and onion, and our mutton without capers. Get out, old man, those yams will boil themselves to death.«

»Oh, please do some one come and help me?« ejaculated Stella, hanging over another pot. »I'm sure the fish is breaking. If it comes out all in bits, what a cook I shall prove.«

Tahi, who had just returned from gathering some fresh bread fruit, came to the rescue.

The Indian looked rather contemptuously at the fish.

»Ah, Tahi ought to have kept shark,« he said, regretfully; »Tahi stupid, shark good.«

»Shark good!« cried our hero. »Good gracious, Tahi, you don't eat shark?«

»Tahi does, shark good. Why not?«

At length all was ready for dinner.

Under the shady palms they manufactured a table, and set out their first course, Stella making the whole gay with flowers.

Their dishes and plates were all of a similar pattern—the broad leaves of the bread fruit-tree.

Rarely'was there a merrier party.

Healths were drunk, first to the Queen of the island, then to Tahi—to the loved ones at home—to each other—to the Union Jack floating over their house—lastly, to Faith, who looked up from his pork bones, to bark his thanks.

Then Tahi, making a sign to Ned, the two retired.

»Where are they going I« asked Stella.

»Don't let us be curious,« laughed our hero; perhaps they have improvised another course to surprise us.«

George knew very well what they had gone for, a handsome chaplet made of beautiful-hued shells for the queen.

To keep her attention occupied, our hero and Artie kept talking, the only other sound being the crunch of Faith's strong teeth.

None there dreamed at that moment of danger, more than if they had been seated in some pleasant country spot at home in England.

Yet how very near it was!

Ah, at the very door.

Suddenly, Stella, laughing at some remark of Artie's, happened to raise her eyes, and with a wild frightened scream, she sprang to her feet, her eyes dilated, and her cheeks pallid with horror.

»Look, look I« she shrieked; »the Indians«

The boys turned in the direction of her gaze.

Great Heaven!

The look-out was lined with savages.

There they stood, in their war-paint and eathers, armed with their terrible shark spears, and staring down with evident amazement at the peaceful scene before them.

No sooner, however, did they find themselves discovered, than, uttering their war-whoop, and brandishing their arms, they came rushing down the hill, like a cloud, upon the three.

Our hero leaped to his feet, his heart sick with fear for Stella.

The idea of her, so pretty, so delicate, in the hands of the fierce savages, maddened him, and, while Artie fled to the shore, calling upon Tahi, our hero threw himself before the young girl, alone facing the horde of Indians.

That he possibly could for a moment stay that rush was absurd.

The bold aspect of the dauntless boy, with Faith by his side, displaying his white teeth, caused the Indians a second to pause.

But the chief's eyes had again rested upon Stella, who had fled back to the bush, and, raising the war-whoop, he again sprang forward.

Stella saw by his eyes that he intended her capture, and with a wild cry she turned and dashed into the bush.

»Faith, at him! Seize him!« cried George, and in a second the dog with a bound was at the chief's throat.

So violent and unexpected was the assault, that the savage fell, letting go his spear, and darting forward, our hero seized it.

Before, however, he could use it, the Indians rushed on him.

He saw the chief rise, and with some others proceed swiftly in the track of Stella.

He could do nothing more now as they were separated, and he retreated quickly towards the shore.

The Indians advanced after him, raising their spears, and then our hero saw them come to an abrupt halt, uttering a guttural cry.

Their eyes were directed seaward, and George, looking over his shoulder, saw some half-dozen canoes, crowded with Indians, shooting round the headland.

Then again, those on land came on, howling, yelling.

They wore upon him—surrounding him.

George felt a blow, or stab on the shoulder, which felled him to the ground, and then he remembered no more.

Meanwhile Stella fled on.

Blinded with terror, she knew not in what direction she went.

She was only conscious that she must escape.

This was not easy, though the thought of the glaring eyes of her pursuers, and their hideous tattooed bodies bedaubed with war-paint lent her wings.

Yet the Indians were fleet of foot.

Though keeping to the bushes for concealment, Stella intuitively selected the thinnest portions as being easier to traverse.

Her feet carried her mechanically, for her brain was in a whirl.

She seemed to hear anything but the steps of her pursuers.

They were gaining upon her fast, and though she was conscious of their separating, one kept continually on her track.

Suddenly a pig ran across her path, throwing her down, but she rose to her feet in a second, and continued her way.

The pig scuttling away in a different direction had, for a time, put the Indians off the scent, and the poor child's heart beat with hope.

It proved but transient.

With a guttural yell the savage had discovered his mistake, and was again on her track!

Stella ventured one glance behind her, and through the mimosa bushes she beheld the dark face of the savage, as he too, beheld her, his eyes glaring with triumph, his long arm extended.

She strove to run, but her trembling limbs refused to support her, and she fell helplessly on to her knees.

»Mercy!« she cried, her small hands, piteously clasped; her blue eyes uplifted; her hair falling like a golden veil round her pretty, girlish figure.

With one bound the Indian was beside her.

His dark fingers were in her hair, and grasping it, he manipulated it with a low chuckle of wondering savage delight.

Stella remained paralysed with fear.

Her captor passed his hand over her face, then stooped over her.

His hideous countenance came close to hers, while the lips uttered some guttural sentences.

Then he flung his long arms round her, and lifted her from the ground,

Stella shrieked again.

»Mercy,« she cried, »mercy!«

She might as well have appealed for mercy from the wild boar.

»Oh Heaven, help me!« she ejaculated as the savage, clutching her tightly, began retracing his steps.

Then gathering all her strength, she struck the savage in the face with her hands.

She had read much of Indians, and would rather him kill her, than carry her away to his tribe.

The savage, infuriated, dashing her to the ground, raised his club, the head of which was somewhat like the beak of a bird.

Stella, pale as death, closed her eyes, commended her soul to Heaven, and awaited the blow.

The savage swung round the club.

A moment it was poised in the air.

Then it descended swiftly towards the pretty girlish head.

Stella shuddered as she heard it whiz through the air: her last hour seemed to have come.

»Oh, dear papa,« she murmured.

The club fell with a dull thud; but upon the earth, not upon Stella.

A violent blow from a thick branch of a tree, brandished by a hideous-looking object, who had suddenly sprung into view, had sent the savage reeling back stunned among the ferns.

The creature, then rapidly stooping, caught the girl in its arms and away.

Stella, bewildered, opened her eyes.

Was she saved?

No sooner did her gaze rest upon her new captor, than with a shriek of horror, she fainted.

She was brought to by a sensation of being plunged into cold water

Where was she?

Drowning?

No. The creature still held her, and was swimming quickly away from the island, and Stella, recollecting the shark, again lost consciousness.

As the reader has no doubt guessed, she was in the power of the monster seen by our hero and Tahi.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FIGHT—OUR HERO SEEKS TO ESCAPE—IS CAPTURED — THE INDIANS RETREAT — ANOTHER PRISONER—OUR HERO PREPARES FOR TORTURE AND DEATH.

When our hero recovered consciousness, he was aware of an awful yelling, and that a lot of persons were regardlessly trampling him beneath their feet.

Recalling his senses as well as he could, he recollected what had happened—that the Indians were upon them.

His first idea was to spring to his feet.

His second not only told him that discretion was the better part of valour, but that it was impossible for him to rise.

His right arm had been stunned by the blow he had received, while the breath had nearly been stamped out of his body.

A hundred naked black legs seemed to have nothing else to do than pound our hero into pulp.

»Whatever could be going on?

Unable to rise, George lay still, shielding himself as well as he could from the pounding, and hoping that the Indians might forget all about him,

But whatever did it all mean?

The war-whoops, the yells, the attacks and retreats, showed that a battle was going on.

But with whom?

Had the savages he had seen coming round the headland been of a different tribe from those who had descended from the look-out?

Were they enemies, and this their battleground?

Surely it must be. Tahi, alone, could not hold these demons at bay.

Then our hero's heart turned sick, as he thought of Stella.

What had become of her?

Was she in the power of the Indians?

These thoughts brought more strength to George than any personal danger could.

He slightly raised his head.

Each side of him he beheld nothing but moving black legs, much bedaubed with paint. Nevertheless, he resolved to try to crawl out of the mêlée, hoping that the savages were far too occupied to notice him.

By waiting patiently for an opportunity, not to come in contact with any of the painted legs, he succeeded in advancing a few feet, when a war-whoop, ringing and triumphant, burst from the other tribe.

There was a halt; then a quick retreat. Whoever the other tribe was, they appeared to be getting the victory.

Would they be friends or foes? That, the future must decide.

He must take the risk, and dropping flat, hoped to be over.

As ill-luck would have it, however, at that very moment, a savage leaping back, tripped against our hero's body and fell.

The next instant he was on his feet, his clutch on George's arm.

His eyes glared into his prisoners; his white teeth gleamed between his full lips.

Rising rapidly, he retreated with the rest, dragging our hero after him, but the lad displayed no fear.

Boldly, steadily he had met his captor's glance; and now he walked whither he was led. Had there been any chance of escape by resistance, he would have resisted. But he saw such an attempt would be absurd. It would have brought instant death, and he felt, until Stella was safe, his life was not his own.

Being now on a level with the rest, our hero saw that his worst fears were correct.

The savages were their old visitors, the Niuans.

They were armed with spears, clubs, and bows, which they used with skill and effect.

The elders alone wore beards, which were plaited and adorned with pieces of oyster-shells.

At the foot of the look-out they halted, with the exception of the ene who had possession of our hero.

He was alive, and they regarded him as a prize.

Uttering some words to another savage, the latter joined him, and taking the captive's other arm, they hurried him to the top.

They jabbered excitedly, and our hero knew he was the subject of their talk, as they glared with their hideous painted faces down at him.

He, however, showed no fear, though he could not help asking himself, with some anxiety, what could be their purpose.

Would they kill him at once? Would it be by a sudden blow, or would they reserve him for torture?

He was not kept long in suspense.

Reaching the crest of the hill, the Indians, throwing him down, proceeded to fasten his hands and feet securely.

Then one raised his spear.

Our hero thought it was to fling it at him. Instead, the Niuan passed it between his arms, fixing it firmly in the earth, so that did anything occur to call off their attention, their prisoner could not roll away.

Each then took his seat, one on either side as guard, and watched the scene below.

Our hero, by no means loth, did the same. To his surprise, the whole place seemed a moving mass of Indians.

That they were two rival tribes, he could no longer doubt.

Armed with their deadly spears, they fiercely attacked each other, yelling and howling like fiends, while others made the assault with their formidable clubs.

In vain George strained his eyes beyond to see if he could discover any trace of Tahi and his two companions.

He knew he should not see Stella,

He had seen her disappear into the bush, and was aware she would not leave it of her own will while the turmoil was taking place.

Of the others he could behold nothing, and in despair, he turned his gaze back upon the combatants.

Those who were attacking the Niuans, he perceived, were tattooed nearly all over their body, and wore their long hair tied up in a knot at the top of their head.

This enabled him to distinguish the two; but for a long time the battle raged without his being able to tell which was getting the best of it,

Sometimes it appeared one; sometimes the other.

He could easily tell which from the behaviour of his captors.

They howled and yelled defiance when their party seemed worsted, and shouted, gesticulated, and capered when the reverse.

George, however, saw plainly it was far less often the latter.

Indeed, though the tribes appeared equally matched, the Niuans must, if the conflict continued, be ultimately defeated was certain,

Then what would be his fate?

Certainly his life hung in the balance.

It was near sunset before he beheld a decided alteration in the combatant's tactics.

It appeared to him that they had come to some sort of parley.

The fighting ceased, and in a compact mass, dragging away as many as they could of their slain, the Niuans retreated up the hill, the others making no attempt to follow.

It was evident a truce had been proclaimed, probably, though, only for the night.

Directly the Niuans began to move, George's guards sprang up, jerked out the spear, and pulling their prisoner to his feet, hurried him along in advance.

For the first time our hero felt real alarm at the idea that they were going to the canoes.

He would rather have died than leave the island where were his friends.

»It's useless to resist, I know, against such numbers,« he reflected; »but I will attempt it. I cannot, will not, while alive, desert Stella and the rest. There may be a chance of learning their fate if I remain here; never, if I am taken away.«

His fears, so far, were speedily laid at rest. His guards did not take the path to the shore, but at a quick pace, made across the island to the table-land.

George could not help shuddering as he perceived this, for he recalled the horrible preparations he had witnessed there for the cannibal feast.

Reaching the vary spot, they proceeded to lash our hero securely to the of a palm-tree.

His face now fronted the enemy, who were advancing at a dignified pace, and in perfect order.

The sight they presented was sufficient to make a strong heart tremble, but George remembered how dauntlessly the poor Indian of Tahi's tribe had met his fate, and decided that an English lad should show himself as brave as a savage.

As they approached nearer, to his grief he beheld they, too, brought a prisoner.

Darkness was falling, but he could easily distinguish among their dark bodies the »white skin«

Who, or rather which, of his companions was it? He leaned his head a little forward, so tightly was he secured it was the only member he could move.

The head of the captive drooped, his limbs seemed to lack the power to support him, but our hero at once recognised Ned Conyers.

As they came across the open, the savages were jabbering excitedly, and now dragging their captive forward, they lashed him to another tree within eight feet of the other.

George heard Ned groaning piteously,

Every now and then he ejaculated—

»Oh, please, don't? oh, mercy! mercy! Oh, why did I ever leave England! Oh, isn't there anybody to help me? Oh dear, oh dear, They'll roast and eat me, I'm sure they will, Oh—h—h!«

The last prolonged ejaculation was occasioned by ene of the savages prodding Ned with the point of his spear.

His writhing contortions and abject terror apparently much amused his captors, who, yelling with glee, performed a demoniacal dance

around the wretched lad.

Every time he left off howling they prodded him again.

Our hero had in silence witnessed the performance first with compassion, then with contempt, for his companion's cowardice and want of nerve.

Finally, unable to keep still, he cried—

»Take heart, Ned. Never let these brutal savages think English lads have less pluck than they. If we are boys let us at least suffer like men.«

»Merciful Heaven!« ejaculated the other, looking up with evident relief; »are you there, Merridew? I'm so glad.«

»Thank you,« retorted George; »for my part I should rather have seen you in safety.«

»I didn't mean that, Merridew, but oh—h!« (another prod), »look at the villains—oh—h—h, they'll murder me! Oh—h~h, don't, please! Oh—h—h!«

Ned's contortions to avoid the spear-points were so ludicrous that had the matter not been so serious, our hero himself must have laughed.

As it was, he was indignant at the torturers, and also at their victim.

He had learned from Tahiti many native words, and in hope the Niuanians would understand him, he shouted in Tahiti's language—

»Cowards«

The syllables electrified the savages.

They wheeled round, facing the youth with surprise.

He met the glance of their dark fierce eyes with one as fearless.

Not a muscle quivered, not an eyelash trembled. His young lip was curled in scorn.

In a few moments they talked, then one addressed him.

»English,« he answered, in their tongue, for though he did not know it, our language with slight alteration is universally spoken throughout Polynesia.

Raising his spear, a savage pricked him in the side.

The prick was severe enough to make the flesh wince, but our hero set his teeth firm, and let not a muscle move, whereupon another

advancing made a like experiment, with a similar result.

He saw they were testing his courage, and resolved, as long as his strength would permit, they should elicit no amusement out of him.

After about five minutes prodding, he laughed scornfully, repeating—

»Cowards! English brave, generous!«

»You warrior?« questioned an Indian.

»Yes, English warrior.«

Whereupon the savages set up a yell of derision, and pointed to Ned's pallid face.

»You warrior I they said; »him coward, ugh,« and they shrugged their shoulders; »him girl, good for laugh.«

»You see,« said George, in English, to his companion, »by seeking these savages' mercy, you only obtain their contempt. Be a man, Ned, and we may weather through it yet.«

»It's all well,« grumbled Conyers; »but I don't like being made a pin-cushion of. Oh! what are they going to do now?«

The Indians again had been in converse, but now four separating from the rest, advanced towards the prisoners.

Two approached each, and began critically pinching them.

In a minute Ned began to roar like a bull.

»Oh, they want to know if we're fit for cooking, I know they do. Oh Lor'! oh Lor'! Oh the wretches! Oh—h—h!«

Whether it was as he said or not, they seemed far more satisfied with our hero's condition than lanky Ned's, and after their inspection, retired, leaving the lads alone.

»Oh Merridew, whatever do you think they are going to do with us?« groaned Ned.

»I really can't tell, Ned, but I very much fear that they'll roast and eat us?«

»Oh dear! Oh dear!« moaned Ned, with a howl; »what will you do, Merridew?«

»Try to bear it like a man,« was the brave response.

»It's all very well to talk, but it isn't easy to perform,« groaned Ned;
»I'm glad I'm so thin, Perhaps they won't kill me first. They'll wait till
I'm fatter.«

Our hero made no comment upon his companion's selfishness, but
tried to prepare himself for the horrible death he knew threatened him.

Yet it was difficult, for his mind would wander to Stella,

Had the other tribe got her?

Was she suffering like they were?

George would have been roasted twice over to have saved the fair girl
from pain and such degradation.

It occurring to him that Ned might know something, he questioned
him, but he was too engrossed by his own peril to give very lucid
answers.

He knew nothing of Stella nor Artie.

All he was aware of was, that hearing the Indians yell, Tahi had run
back towards our hero and the others.

As to Ned, he had dashed down to the sea to get the boat and escape.

He owned to his selfish cowardice without a blush.

Just, however as he was about to push it off, he had seen the canoes
dart round the headland.

Believing the cries had come from them, he had run blindly up the
shore again, right into the midst of the Niuans, who, felling him with a
club, made him their prisoner.

Here Ned broke off his recital with a cry of terror.

»Oh, look, Merridew, look! The wretches are going to eat us!«

And George, raising his eyes, saw that the bonfire the Indians had
made was now burning fiercely, and that similar preparations for a
cannibal feast, such as before they had witnessed, were being arranged.

Ned's words seemed indeed too true,

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE CANNIBAL FEAST, AT WHICH GEORGE PLAYS ON-LOOKER—A FRIEND—THE STALACTITE CAVE— THE CANOE.

Never mind, Ned, old fellow,« said George, encouragingly; »the pain is but transient. Think how many noble martyrs have died a like death for their religion. When it is over, though our bodies may go to glut the appetite of these savages, our souls will be in heaven.«

»Oh Merridew, if I could but feel as you feel! But they surely won't roast both of us yet? And—and I am the thinnest.«

Despite himself, our hero could not refrain from saying—

»True; but, Ned, you see they have to supply a feast for almost an army.«

»Oh!« howled the other.

Then he would have shrieked, but terror paralysed the sound on his ashen lips; for two savages, coming from the bonfire, close to which a stake had been driven, advanced towards them.

»Our time, I fear, has come indeed,« said our hero, huskily. »Conyers, let us pray to Heaven for strength.«

He turned towards the other as he spoke, but received no answer.

Ned's head had dropped on his shoulder.

By the red glare of the bonfire, George saw that he had fainted.

»Poor fellow,« he thought; then he drew

Himself up quickly, for the Indians were by his side.

It seems almost an imperative duty now to follow the adventures of Stella, yet, for a space, it is impossible.

The awful death threatening our hero and Ned, makes us feel we must not keep the reader in suspense.

No sooner did George raise his eyes, than his heart gave a throb of relief, for he saw, by the Niuan's faces, that they were not come to

convey them to death; instead, they carefully examined their bonds, and then sat down close by their side.

They had evidently been told off as the prisoners' guard.

It would not have been natural if our hero had not felt his spirits considerably lightened by this reprieve, though transient.

He tried to catch what the two were talking about.

This, however, he could not succeed in.

He again, therefore, turned his attention to the rest.

If neither he nor Ned were to be served up for the feast, who was to be?

The question soon was answered.

He saw those Indians who took upon themselves the culinary duties, drag a black form within the radius of the fire.

Every nerve in George's body thrilled with horror, but his feelings were in a measure modified, when, gazing more intently, he perceived the savage was not alive.

No doubt it was one of the enemy, slain in battle.

George would feign have averted his eyes, but a terrible fascination made it seem impossible, and, with a sense of deadly sickness, he witnessed the awful scene.

Cutting the body up with a kind of knife, made of flat stone, oval in form, and about seven inches in length, the cook placed the separate portions down to roast.

Soon an odour, sickening to civilised nostrils, pervaded the air.

George felt his heart failing, but the effect on his watchers was very different.

They displayed signs of the greatest delight and jabbered incessantly.

Meanwhile, the rest were performing wild dances, interspersed with savage songs.

The cooking did not take long, many tribes requiring animal food to be little more than warmed through, indeed, almost raw.

Then the sickening feast commenced.

Our hero might have borne with it at a distance, but when two horrible portions were brought to his guards, and he beheld them devouring them with the greatest gusto, he could bear no more.

His brain swam, his throat swelled, and for a brief space he, like Ned, must have lost consciousness.

When he came to, he could not tell how much time had elapsed, but the bonfire was burning low, the stars were in the heavens, and the savages were lying about, probably full to repletion.

His two guards, seated between himself and Ned, were silent, and seemed also to doze.

As to Ned, he must too have sunk to sleep, for surely his insensibility could not last so long.

George appeared the only one awake in that vast solitude.

His head was heavy, and his limbs ached from the tightness of the cords.

Yet he could not slumber, though he felt a few moments' rest would give him nerve better to endure what suffering the morrow might have in store.

He wondered and again what had become of Stella, Tahi and Artie.

Then his thoughts flew over ocean and land, to Amblemere—to his mother.

Fervently he thanked Heaven that she was ignorant of the peril he was in—that she would never, in all probability, be cognisant of the shocking, the revolting fate that was threatening him.

»These thoughts but serve to unnerve me,« he muttered, shaking his head to free his eyes from the tears that swam in them, »Let me bring my mind to dwell on the happiness of that other world, to reach and secure which we should be strong enough to scorn the most painful death here.«

Using his brave will, he succeeded in diverting his meditations.

Slowly the hours crept by.

The bright stars, which he might never behold again, moved quietly across heaven's vault.

Not a sound broke the stillness.

The boy seemed alone, friendless, in his great trouble,
Alone, save for Heaven.

Suddenly a rustle among the bushes growing some yards behind the trees to which he and Ned were tied, caused him to raise his head.

George looked at his guards.

They were partly dozing, their spears in their belts, their clubs, ready to hand, across their knees.

It was evident they had not heard the sound, and perhaps he too had been mistaken.

Nevertheless, hope springs eternal in the human breast,

Our hero tried to crane his neck round to see behind him, but this was impossible,

He listened.

There was not a sound.

He could hear nothing—see nothing now.

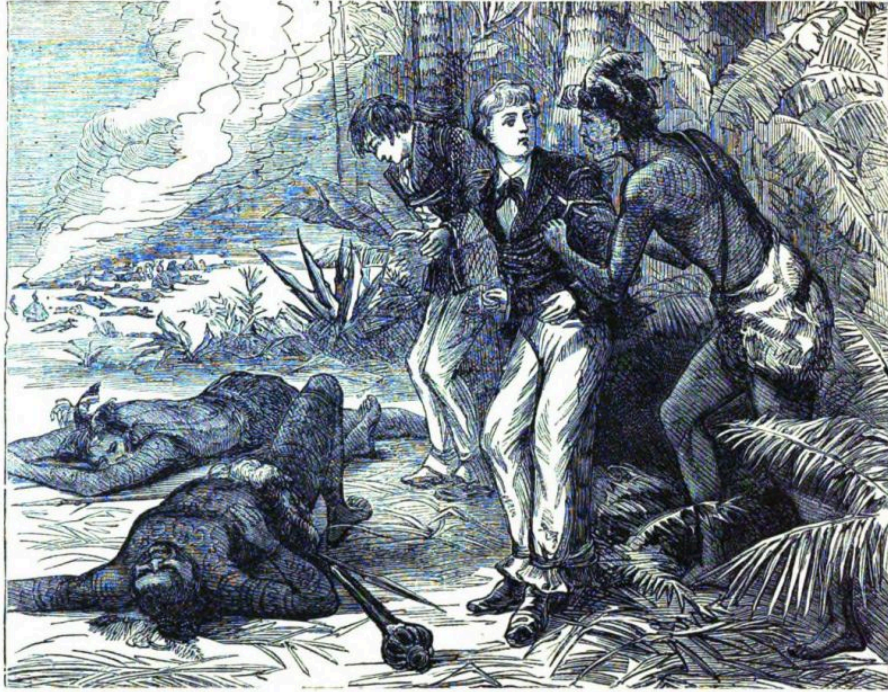
Notwithstanding, an Indian had emerged from the bushes, and crouching, swiftly, cautiously, was coming forward, nearer, nearer without the slightest noise.

The guards, after their horrible feast, never moved; and the Indian rose erect.

He swung the native club he carried in the air, and there was a whizz as it rushed once, twice, through space, and fell swift as lightning, with the deadly blow of a sledge hammer.

The two guards rolled over without a moan, senseless on the grass.

»Tahi!« gasped our hero, who, in amaze too great to be realised, had watched this scene, the work of a few seconds, and recognised his friend.



The Indian made him a sign for silence, and gliding forward in a moment had severed the lad's bonds.

He was free

Free once more.

A minute he stood as if stunned,

Then he flung himself upon his friend, and burst into tears.

»Oh Tah! good, kind, brave Tah!« he exclaimed; »what do I owe you?«

The Indian pressed the lad to him. Then whispered—

»Not a second to be lost, Misser George. Come! Niuans not dead,« pointing at the pair on the ground, »only stunned. Stay, Tah! make sure.«

Dropping on his knees he caught one of the spears, and shortened it to strike.

»No, no, Tah!« and George seized his arms. »Don't do that. Brave warriors kill in battle. Only cowards slay defenceless men.«

Tah! looked up. Then—

»It's true, Tah! no coward. Tah! a brave,« he said, getting up.

»Still,« proceeded our hero, who had no desire that his guards should soon give an alarm of their flight; »can't we gag and secure them?«

The Indian caught the idea, and the two savages were gagged in a second, and lashed back to back to the tree.

»Now come, quick, Misser George?«

»What, and leave Ned? No, Tahi, whatever the danger, I could not leave him.«

»He sleep, we wake him, Him coward, cry out. Rouse Niuan. We all lost.«

»I can't help it, Tahi. I couldn't leave the Quick the knife.«

George had his own with him.

But before using it, he took the precaution to stuff his handkerchief into Ned's mouth.

It was well he did, for Ned's stupor was that created by abject fight.

No sooner did he feel a hand upon him, than he began crying out like one half killed.

»Oh, mercy, mercy!« he cried. »Oh, to be roasted and eaten!«

George muffled his head quickly in his jacket, while he whispered, authoritatively—

»Silence, Ned. We are escaping. If you make the slightest sound, we shall leave you, and you'll be roasted and eaten indeed.«

The threat held the other speechless.

He trembled like a leaf, while Tahi, who had taken the knife, quickly severed his bonds, and seemed hardly conscious of his freedom.

»Come,« said Tahi, curtly, »lost too much time already. Come!«

But Ned's cramped, shaking limbs, could not bear him.

He stumbled on, moaning beneath his breath.

The Indian grew impatient, for dawn was not two hours off, and when that came, all chance of escape was hopeless.

Our hero would not, however, leave his comrade.

Holding him up, he strove to help him along.

Suddenly Tahi stooped, caught Ned, flung him on his shoulder, and plunged into the bush.

George managed to keep up with him, for, despite the burden the Indian carried, he frequently lent a kindly helping hand to the lad.

»Where are we going, Tahi?« whispered our hero.

»The cavern. Safe there,« was the response.

They proceeded in silence for some time, and then George again spoke

—

»Where is Artie, and—and Stella?«

»Young Misser in cave, waiting,« answered Tahi; »Miss Stella« (he shook his head). »Tahi ask you that, Misser George.«

»Oh Tahi, I do not know. I'll tell you how it was.«

»No, no time. Wait.«

Our hero obeyed, but his mind was full of anxiety, for all were safe—but Stella!

They were now descending the little valley, and soon after they reached the cavern.

Hardly had they entered than Artic started forward and flung himself joyfully upon George.

»Oh Merridew, you are safe, safe!« he cried; »so is Ned. But is he hurt? Oh, dear Merridew, what an awful night it has been. We should have all been murdered but for good, brave Tahi. But,« and the lad staggered back, »where is the Queen of the Island? Where is Stella?«

Our hero bowed his head in silence.

Ah! where was she?

Ned was now a little more composed.

He sat all of a heap, trembling yet, but with his wits about him.

In a few words George told what had happened.

Tahi checked him, after he had learned of the girl.

»Soon be dawned,« he said; »Tahi must act. Tahi much to do.«

»What, Tahi?« asked our hero.

But the Indian would not wait to explain.

Quitting the cave he plunged into the sea, and disappeared.

Tey might have entertained fears for him, had they not known how regardless he was of the monster of the waters, the shark.

»Whatever can he be going to do!« said Artie.

»Be sure, whatever it is, it's for our benefit,« said our hero; »so, tell me, Artie, how you so fortunately escaped?«

The boy had not very much to tell.

He had run off towards the beach at the sight of the savages, but had been brought to a halt by the appearance of the other Indians on the water.

A moment he knew not what to do. Then, unable to go back or forward, giving up all hope of reaching Tahi, he had dived into the bush, which was not far off.

The fight between the hostile tribes was his safeguard.

He ran as far as he could, then cowered down among the vegetation.

He saw nothing of the battle, but he heard the fierce yells, and waited for hours, trembling for the result.

Suddenly he had been startled by some one coming through the ferns, and had half sprung up to retreat, when, to his delight, he had recognised Tahi.

The Indian had brought him to the cave, assuring him he would be safe, while he, Tahi, went to reconnoitre, to see what had become of his companions.

In return, our hero told his adventures. He ended by saying, while his voice shook—

»There is yet another missing. Dear—dear Faith.«

»Oh, we'll find him,« said Artie. »They wouldn't dare to hurt him. But I know,« cried Artie; »he's gone with Stella. He's taking care of the Queen of the Island.«

That suggestion brought comfort to all.

The idea had never, strangely enough, occurred to our hero.

He hoped, he prayed that the young girl and her canine protector might be somewhere together safe.

At that juncture, the sound of paddles fell on their ears, and creeping nearer the entrance, they looked forth.

»Merciful Heaven |« groaned Ned, dropping back, »here are the savages again.«

Through the night, not yet lightened by approaching dawn, the lads' alarmed gaze dimly beheld a canoe, in which an Indian sat, swiftly making for the very beach where they were.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A FIGHT WITH A SHARK—THE CAPTURED CANOE— OUR HERO IS STOPPED SEEKING FOR STELLA— FAITH—THE MANGAIANS.

No sooner did Ned's eyes fully assure him that the occupant of the canoe was an Indian, than strength came back into his legs. Remembering all the horrors he had recently undergone, he at once took to his heels and fled through the cave.

Artie, catching the scare, followed; and the chances are that both, in their terror, might have plunged headlong into the chasm, had not our hero been in time to catch each by the arm, while he cried—

»Come back! Don't be so stupid. It's an Indian, but none that will do us any harm, It's Tahi.«

That name brought them to a halt.

»Are you sure, Merridew?« said Ned. »Those black fiends are so abominably alike.«

»They may be black, but they must be very much so indeed, to prevent my knowing a friend from a foe. Come, Artie.«

Turning back, he walked from the cave on to the sand, Artie following, Ned hanging in the rear.

Tahi, for of course it was he, had now run the canoe on shore.

While the boys are hastening down to him, it may be as well, in a few words, to relate how the Indian had come in possession of the native boat.

On plunging into the sea, he had swum with that swiftness of his tribe, which makes them fearless of the voracious shark (unless the latter darts unexpectedly from some hole and lops off an arm or a leg), round to Gibson Bay.

Here, as he had been aware, he found the Niuans' canoes moored.

Some had been pulled on to the beach, while the others were afloat, but lashed together by their outriggers.

Tahi had come with the purpose of securing one of these; and he resolved not to return until he had done so.

That he should was a matter of considerable importance.

First, because he knew their boat was captured by the enemy.

Secondly, because their safety might depend upon possessing the means of quitting the island if need arose; and thirdly, because the disappearance of the canoe would serve, in all probability, to throw their pursuers off their track.

Raising his head slightly out of the water, and keeping in the shadow of the boats, he surveyed the scene.

There were apparently none of the Niuan on guard, and so, seizing the prow of the nearest cautiously, he was raising himself up, when a dark head was suddenly lifted within a few feet of his own.

Was he discovered?

No. Only the back of the Niuan's head was towards him.

Nevertheless, Tahi dropped down below the surface.

But rapidly he shot up again, and struck out obliquely.

His foot had come in contact with a cold, slimy substance.

It was a shark, which had turned, and was coming swiftly towards its prey—its horrible muzzle protruded, and its eyes gleaming with a phosphorescent light.

It did not know with whom it had to deal.

Tahi waited until the brute flung itself over to seize him, when he dived like an arrow.

The shark, baulked of his victim, righted itself, and whirled round, evidently thinking—

»Where has that black nigger got to?«

Tahi met him front to front, and then dived again.

Rose again immediately beneath the monster, and with his knife, ripped him open.

The creature gave one big flounce, then turned instantly upon its back—dead, and soon floated away to sea, for the tide was going out.

Much regretting losing it, especially because of the teeth, Tahi resumed his work.

Again he looked up above the surface. All was still.

The man and shark fight had made no noise, and the Niuan was not disturbed.

So far so good.

The Indian now swam at each side of the nearest canoe, which was secured to the rest by both outriggers.

That was well.

It was as good as his already. Noiselessly he cut the lashings.

Only one remained, when he stopped.

He was assured that but one Niuan was on guard, and an irresistible desire seized Tahi to look at him.

Rising, he imitated the cry of a night-bird. The other made no sign.

As if such things as sharks were not in existence, the Indian dived beneath the canoes and slid up between them by the side of the, one with the Niuan.

Cautiously he looked over the gunwale, and saw, as he had suspected, that, satiated with food, the Niuan slept as noiseless as a cat.

Quick as a snake, Tahi slid into the boat, and seized a native mat and rope lying there.

Then he flung himself upon the savage.

Taken off his guard, the latter's struggles were futile in the Indian's strong grip.

He was securely bound before he hardly knew it, while the mat, wrapped round his head, not only stifled the slightest cry, but prevented his seeing who had been his assailant.

Much delighted with his success, Tahi now openly walked over the canoes, got into the one he had selected, finished severing the lashings and rowed away.

He knew the Niuan could not get free until his friends freed him.

Why had not he killed the savage as he laid helpless?

Because he remembered George Merridew's words—

»Only cowards kill sleeping men.«

This shows how much good a high-minded, just-principled boy can do!

Once in the canoe, the Indian speedily reached Cave Bay.

Springing on the shore as the boys came up, he said—

»Mangaiaans got boat; we got Niuans canoe. Nearly yet an hour before day come. Enemy have island. We fly in canoe. Before light, far away on ocean. Mangaiaans, Niuans not see; not find us. Shall we go?«

»Go? Of course,« cried Ned, reviving quickly. »You're a brick, Tah. Don't let us lose a minute. Who'd stop to risk falling into the hands of those fiends again?«

While speaking, Conyers had caught hold of the prow and sprang in.

Artie was about to follow, when he looked back.

»You are going, Merridew« he asked.

Our hero had stepped back with his arms folded.

An expression of deep sorrow, of pain, was on his features.

Tahi was watching him.

»I going?« answered George, with a dash of bitterness. »You can all go. I have no right to ask you to stay, but I shall remain.«

»Remain? Why?« ejaculated Artie, surprised.

»Why? Can you ask? Have you forgotten Stella? Do you think I would leave the island while she, poor girl! is helpless upon it?«

There was a pause.

Ned looked as amiable as a thunder-cloud, yet he was sufficiently recovered to feel a little ashamed of his past cowardice.

He left Tahi to bring George to reason, as he expected he would.

Tahi made no sign.

A struggle was evidently going on within Artie's breast, and the good conquered.

Quitting the canoe, he walked to our hero's side.

»You are right, Merridew,« he said. »I am sorry for a moment I was a coward. We will not desert dear Stella nor Faith,«

George pressed his hand.

»I have no right to keep others in danger,« he began, when the Indian, drawing the boat higher, broke in quietly—

»Misser George says what is true. Tahi never meant to leave island without Miss Stella. Tahi say only to try. We all stop.«

Ned, controlling his wrath, got out.

»Why did you fetch the canoe then if we are not to use it« he grumbled.

»I know,« exclaimed Artie; »I can guess. The savages, seeing the boat gone, will think you two fellows and the rest have escaped in it.«

Tahi smiled, and nodded.

»That my reason,« he remarked; »but canoe useful when enemy gone.«

Our hero experienced considerable relief on finding that it had never really been Tahi's intention to leave the island.

As they were themselves in comparative safety, all anxiety now was to seek news of Stella.

In fact, he had mentally resolved that before an hour, Niuans or no, he would start even by himself, and try if he could not procure some intelligence.

It was, he felt, cruel and unmanly to sit down passively while a weak, helpless girl was perhaps alone and in peril.

The native canoes are not heavy like English boats, so the Indian, with the boys' assistance, managed to lift and bear it into the cavern.

They lifted it so that should the savages chance to come near, their quick eyes might not discover the trail.

They carried it far in, and no sooner was it placed down, than our hero begged Tahi to call a council.

»Why« asked the Indian. »What to do?«

»To find the Queen of the Island,« answered George, promptly. »I cannot remain quiet here. I must try to seek her and Faith.«

Tahi bent his head thoughtfully.

»You right,« he remarked, finally, »but no use at present. Soon Indians about everywhere. Niuans seek, find you. You caught, you no help young girl. Wait.«

»Wait! Oh Tahi, it is impossible!«

»No. Possible. Wait. Mंगाians, Niuans, fight again; not look for you. We reconnoitre. Then find Miss Stella. No good yet.«

Tahi shook his head emphatically.

George, despite himself, saw the wisdom of this advice, though it was difficult to swallow.

Had he not been convinced by Tahi, he shortly would have been by other means.

Scarcely had day dawned than the whoop and yells of the savages became plainly discernible in the distance.

Soon they spread, it seemed, all over the island.

It was evident the prisoners' escape had been discovered.

Breathlessly the four waited, or rather the three, for Tahi bore all excitement with that calm stoicism for which many savage tribes are renowned.

Sometimes the yells appeared to approach close to the little valley, then to go further off.

Once they perceived two or three canoes full of armed Indians dart out and row away for some distance.

They returned, however, giving up the chance of overtaking the fugitives if they all fled by sea.

Until noon the yells and shouts continued.

Tahi hearing them last so long, said that the Mंगाians and Niuans must have come to a truce, or were each searching; each hoping to find the fugitives.

Ned sat trembling, and mentally wishing they had gone off in the canoe, while Artie, pale and anxious, did his best to keep up his courage.

Tahi sat, impenetrable; our hero, thoughtfully, his mind full of Stella and his dear old Faith.

They had withdrawn far enough back not to be seen by any one on the beach, yet they themselves could see.

For some little while, however, the shouts and commotion had grown very distant, and the listeners hoped that the savages, believing they had all fled in the canoe, had given up the search.

Vain hope!

Suddenly, about an hour after noon, they were heard again, seemingly coming in the direction of Cave Bay, as they had named it.

There could be no doubt it was so.

Nearer—nearer they came, and louder and louder grew the yells.

There was, too, a ring of exultation in them, as if the utterers were assured now of success.

Consternation began to spread over every countenance but Tahi's.

He gave one of the spears they had taken possession of to our hero.

»We can fight, and we can die,« he said, epigrammatically.

»Yes, Tahi,« answered George, with a quiver in his tone. »But Stella? I should not mind what happened me if I were certain she was safe.«

»Hush!« cried Artie, though in a whisper, as he sprang up; »listen—they are here.«

Yes; there was a quick rush through the bushes of the valley,

Then a rattle on the beach of someone or thing approaching.

Then a dark object appeared at the entrance of the cave, and darting in, fell panting at George's feet.

It was no Indian.

It was poor Faith.

What his adventures had been through that past day and night could never be known to any one.

They could be only surmised.

His tongue lolled out, blue from exhaustion, while one of his front legs had been so wounded or injured, that he could not put it to the ground.

But as he lay with his beautiful head raised and his fine tail beating the ground, nothing but delight and joy were in the brown eyes, at again beholding the master he loved.

Dropping on his knees, George, almost crying, kissed and caressed his faithful friend.

Abruptly looking up, he exclaimed—

»Oh Tahi, he could not have been with Stella. He never would have left her.«

But other thoughts were occupying the Indian.

Striding forward he showed that a piece of native rope was tied round the animal's throat, to which a jagged end was attached.

»Dog been prisoner,« he said; »Mangaia use dog to trace master. He break rope—escape. But Mangaia close on track. Mangaia soon be here.«

The increasing yells showed too plainly that Tahiti spoke truth, and his words created a new alarm.

His surmise no doubt was true, consequently it would not be a chance savage or two who might come upon their retreat, but the whole army.

What was to be done?

There was an anxious pause, while instinctively all eyes were bent on the Indian.

The boys' trust was by no means misplaced.

»There but one way. Tahiti, and all risk it,« he said.

»What is that?« asked George.

»Retreat into cave.«

»But the chasm? The darkness?«

»Wait!«

Approaching, Tahiti looked cautiously forth.

The yells were nearer, louder, but not close.

In losing Faith, the savages had for a moment lost the track, but Tahiti knew well that they would soon find it.

Swiftly he darted into the bush.

In a few seconds he reappeared with a stout dry piece of a branch.

Entering the cave with the aid of two flint stones he succeeded in igniting the wood, which flaming up, made a torch.

»Now,« he said, »quick! No time to lose.«

Taking the lead, he penetrated into the cavern, the lads close at his heels.

Reaching the canoe, they saw Tahiti had no intention of leaving it behind.

Giving the torch to Artie to carry, he bade our hero and Ned help in raising the boat.

Then as rapidly as they were able they hurried on.

»But if the chasm is in front, I don't see how very well we are to escape, unless we jump in,« said Ned.

»That indeed would be out of the frying-pan into the fire,« answered our hero; »be sure we shan't have to do that. Tahi knows perfectly what he is about.«

As they plunged deeper and deeper into the cavern, they naturally lost the sound of the savages' cries—a fact which gave courage to Ned and Artie.

George, however, knew from the unslackened pace of the Indian, that he drew no hope from this, and that danger was as surely before them as ever.

The murmur of the chasm had long been audible, but the roar, so deafening and bewildering to the senses, was absent, owing to the tide not being fully in.

Reaching the brink, Tahi put down the canoe, and waved his torch around.

Ned and Artie for the first time beheld the vaulted dome festooned with stalactites, and also their gigantic shadows bobbing all over the wall, and recognised what had scared them the previous time.

Our hero saw it too, but was in no humour to quiz his companions at being terrified at their own shadows.

After waving the torch, Tahi advanced to the side, and they saw that at each side of the pit was a small path or ledge, scarcely twelve inches wide.

It was perilous, but their only chance of safety was to cross over it.

Tahi had no fear for himself but only for the boys.

His head and eyes were as steady as the eagle's.

It must be risked, however, and coming back he explained what was necessary.

Our hero felt a shudder as he recollected the vertigo he had experienced, but he concealed it, for he knew that Tahi was giving them

their only chance.

Tahi went first to give confidence.

Then he bade Artie follow, commanding him not to look down.

»Show your pluck, old fellow,« said George, encouragingly, and Artie laughed and stepped on the ledge.

Tahi met him half way, taking his hand.

Ned followed, George persisting in going last.

Then he looked back.

Faith sat at the other side, wagging his tail as if to say—

»Whatever does all this mean?«

Before any of them knew his intent, George was again at the other side.

In the canoe was a rope.

This he fastened securely round his favourite's throat.

Then, now fearlessly, the other end in his hand, he recrossed the ledge.

Once at the other side he called—

»Come, Faith. Quietly, quietly.«

But Faith was too full of healthful vitality to do anything quietly, and as his master had expected, he obeyed his call with a bound.

Half—two thirds of the way was accomplished, when he slipped and fell over.

But for the rope none of them would ever have beheld the animal more.

The poor creature uttered a moan of terror.

His tongue turned blue.

Piteously he regarded his master, as he hung over the terrible abyss, madly, fruitlessly, scratching and seeking to get foot hold on the precipitous sides.

»Oh Tahi, save him,« cried George, clinging to the rope, though nearly being jerked over. »Artie, help me.,«

In neither case was the call needed.

Artie had already caught the rope, and Tahi had flung himself down, and was leaning over the chasum.

His arm only reached within an inch of the struggling animal.

If he would not struggle—if he had only sense to put his paw in the Indian's hand it would be all right,

»Raise him—high—bit high,« said Tahi.

»I—I fear the rope will break. Oh my poor, poor Faith!« ejaculated our hero.

»Misser Ned,« proceeded Tahi, »hold my legs. Quicker, save dog—quicker, escape Niuans.«

No words could have proved better argument to Conyers:

He gripped the Indian's ankles with all his might, while Tahi leaned so dangerously far over, that George turned sick with fear for

»We have him leg,« cried the Indian, »pull, pull!«

The boys obeyed, and Tahi struggled to recover his equilibrium.

In a moment all would have been safe, when the rope snapped in two.

George and Artie were flung back.

The Indian and Ned were jerked forward.

In a second all three, Ned, Tahi, and the dog might have been hurled into the chasm but for our hero's presence of mind.

Swift as light he recovered himself, and seized the Indian's arm, pulling at it.

Artie following suit, pulled at him.

Faith began to use his hind paws to raise his weight, and in a few minutes all were safe.

»Now,« said Tahi, quietly rising; »the canoe.«

»Why, we can never get that across,« cried George.

»Tahi try. Tahi not let Niuans get it,« was the response.

Crossing, the Indian, dividing the rope, fastened one portion to the stern, the other to the bows.

Then he ran the canoe so that its keel rested in the angle of the ledge.

After that he flung the end of the rope over to George, bidding him and the others pull gently.

They obeyed, and the canoe began slowly to move along the ledge.

Tahi followed, guiding, and holding it steady; and in less than five minutes it was securely landed on the other side.

At any other moment the boys would have given a shout of delight, but now their work was too serious to admit of it.

Artie now took up the torch, the others the boat, and they made their way to the opening, which has been mentioned as fronting that from which they had emerged on the opposite side.

Before they reached it, the whole place echoed with the triumphant shouts of the savages.

They had, as Tahi had known, found the track, and were already in the cavern.

Looking back they could even perceive on some of the stalactites the refracted light of the torches they carried.

»Oh, that they would all rush forward and tumble into the pit!« ejaculated Artie.

But Indians are far too clever to heedlessly run into danger.

»On, on,« said Tahi, and dived into the passage.

He now had to carry the torch, also to proceed with caution, for at any moment they might find another chasm yawning at their feet.

The passage was much narrower than the one they had left.

There were very few stalactites, and the roof appeared composed of huge rugged loose blocks of rock.

The pursuers' shouts increased each second, until presently they had crossed the cavern, and were pouring into the passage.

The glare of their waving torches was plainly visible.

At the same instant Tahi came to a halt.

The passage had abruptly widened into a species of small vaulted chamber, out of which there was no exit.

The fugitives could go no further, and were caught like rats in a trap.

The Indian putting down the canoe, calmly took his place opposite the opening, his spear in his hand.

»We must die,« he said, gravely.

In silence our hero went and stood by his side.

Even Ned was silent, either from resignation or fear.

Onward, onward came the shouting enemy.

Raising their torches, their eye-balls glared out from beneath; then with a whoop they darted forward.

Tahi lifted his spear, but he had no need to use it, for suddenly there was a roar—the earth shook under their feet.

For a moment it seemed that the rocks were falling upon them, and then came quiet once more.

All were there unhurt, but where were their enemies?

Nowhere.

A huge mass of rock, either loosened by a slight earthquake shock or the reverberations of the savages' yells, had fallen between the pursuers and pursued.

They had escaped the Niuans it is true; but in a second, as they glanced around, they saw that they were buried alive!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

NEVER SAY DIE—A THREAD OF LIGHT—HOPE— ANOTHER LANDSLIP—FREE AT LAST—THE NIUANS BAULKED.

Entombed alive!

The very idea sends the blood flying chill and cold back to the heart.

Aghast, the boys looked into each other's faces.

It was an awful death to die.

Hark!

Were the Niuans going to try to unearth them?

They were yet on the other side of the barrier, but their shouts had altered in tone.

They were those of terror and interspersed by groans.

The truth was evident.

A great portion of the roof must have given way, burying some of the savages beneath it.

No doubt their friends would seek to extricate them.

Would they then try to come further after the fugitives?

It was a question with the four which to desire; to be captured and killed by the Indians, or to remain there slowly to perish from starvation?

To perish, too, in darkness; for glancing at the torch, George saw it would not burn another quarter of an hour.

»Oh, whatever are we to do?« ejaculated Artie, wringing his hands.

»If we had gone off in the canoe this wouldn't have occurred,« exclaimed Ned, angrily. »We should have been safe by this time, and I don't see, for my part, that we have done much good to Stella by remaining.«

Our hero made no reply.

He knew Ned was right, and that he had been the means of bringing them into this trouble.

He was sincerely sorry, yet, on his own side, he could not regret having refused to act like a coward.

Neither would he now give up hope.

How many perils had Heaven in its mercy brought them through!

»Tahi,« he said, »unless the Niuans unearth us, it seems we are shut in here to die. Still we have not examined the place at all yet, nor the rock that has fallen. See, the torch will not last many more minutes. What we do we must do before we are left in darkness.«

The Indian uttered a word in his own tongue signifying assent, and instantly rose to his feet.

As he did so the sounds made by the Niuans grew less distinct.

It was evident they were retreating, either from terror or believing those they pursued must have been crushed beneath the fallen rocks and earth.

It was no longer in the little party's power to select a death.

Apparently one was inevitable.

Raising the torch, Tahi began to examine the walls.

Rugged enough were they, but not the smallest opening broke the surface.

The boys' hearts fell.

Reaching the other side of the entrance to the passage, they had prepared to proceed down the latter to inspect the fallen mass, when to their dismay and consternation the flame of the torch leaped up, flickered, waved aside, then went out,

They were in total darkness, and the consciousness of their misery was even too deep for words.

Save the first quick gasp when the light vanished, a deathlike silence reigned; but it was presently broken by a sob.

Artie, the youngest, the most delicate of constitution, had felt his courage fail at

»Oh, Merridew,« he murmured, »can nothing be done? Oh, do try. It is so awful to die like this.«

»Don't you think we know that as well as you?« broke in Ned, roughly. »If anything could be done it would be without your asking us to try.«

The unkindness of the speech aroused Artie's feeble spirit.

It made him cast off the allegiance of fear he had ever rendered the bully.

He retorted sharply—

»I asked Merridew, not you. I know you can do nothing. You have no more courage than I have.«

Ned aimed a savage blow in the direction of the speaker's voice.

But fortunately our hero had drawn the lad to him.

»Come, come,« he said, »surely our position is bad enough without adding quarrelling to it. Tahi, where are you?«

»Here, Misser George,« answered the Indian, quietly resting his hand on the boy's shoulder.

»Is there anything to be done I«

»Tahi fear not.«

»Still,« proceeded our hero, more to cheer poor Artie than for any other cause, »don't let us sit idly down yet. As Myers said, can't we try? ›Nil desperandum‹ is a good motto; but 'Never lose faith in God's mercy' is a better, so—«

He«stopped abruptly, bending forward towards the passage.

»What is it, Merridew?« questioned Artie.

»Hope, hope,« ejaculated our hero, with a wild cry, as he darted into the passage.

His hands were extended, and when they touched the rock, stopping and turning, he looked up.

Another cry burst from his lips.

He raised his arm to the roof.

»Come, come,« he called, »did I not bid you to hope and not despair! See—see— there is light!«

Only those who have been long enveloped in darkness, which they have believed would be as their shroud until the Last Day, can imagine the exquisite thrill which one word »light« occasioned the hearers.

The others hastened to him.

Breathlessly they, too, raised their heads, and a shout they could not restrain, despite the Niuans, burst from their lips.

Through a small crevice, a slit between the mass of rock and the place from which it had fallen, appeared the light of heaven.

»The thing is,« said George, »can we, without danger, enlargen that hole?«

That indeed, was the question.

Did they seek to move the mass of rock, it might bring down another landslip, burying them beneath.

»It will be a risk equally to all,« remarked our hero. »Hence we must all be agreed. To say the least, in seeking to get out there is a chance, while to remain here is a certain and terrible death. Come, what shall we do?«

There was a pause, and then Artie cried—

»Let us try to get out, Merridew.«

»And you, Ned?«

»It's better than to stop to die like a rat here.«

»You, Tahi?«

»Tahi would get out. Not die a prisoner.«

»Good; then let us to it. Tahi, you shall direct us.«

There was not much to direct.

There was one of two things to do; first, to try to push the mass of the rock back, or pull it forward into the chamber; and secondly, to endeavour to remove some more of the roof.

The former appeared a useless attempt; still, as there was not much danger, they made the effort, and to their delight the mass moved.

It must have been slightly inclined against the opening nearest them, for now it moved away as if to topple over.

Not far, however, and worse still, no sooner did they remove their hands than it returned to it a place.

But this was soon rectified.

There were plenty of small fragments of rock about, which, while the rest pushed the huge mass back, Artie put pieces beneath to keep it in

its place.

After that, they had to rest awhile to get breath.

The space between the mass and the side now was about nine inches—no more,

In vain they continued to push.

It was evidently now resting on the heap of fallen earth at the other side and would go no further.

To squeeze ont between that space was impossible; and they saw that their only chance was to remove the earth of the side.

The greatest peril necessarily was run by the one who loosened the earth, and this part—though our hero desired it—Tahi would not renounce.

Bidding the boys stand well back in the broadened space, the Indian set to work.

With his hand and the end of a spear, he began crumbling away the loose earth.

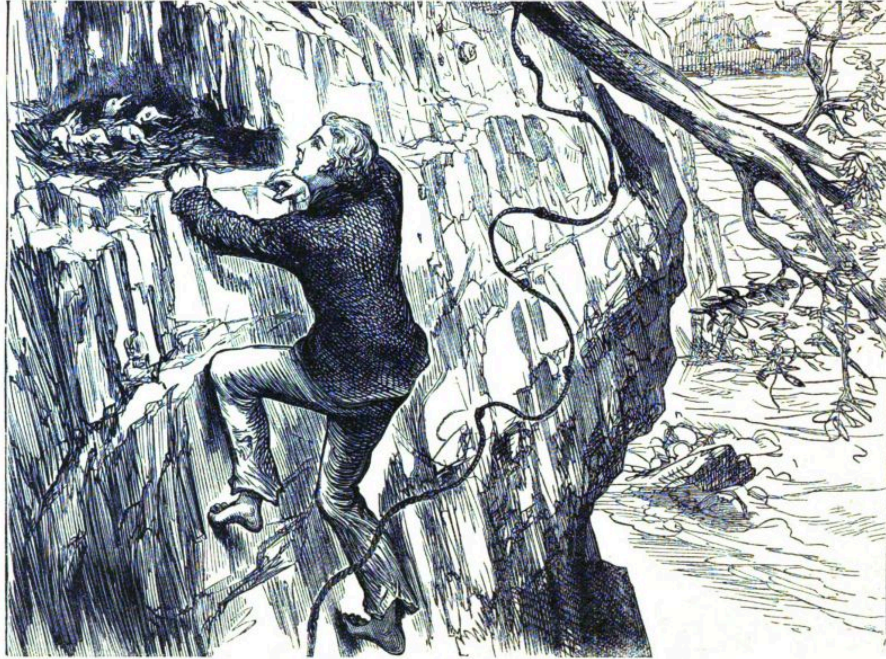
The boys watched him eagerly; but little progress to their impatience, seemed to be made.

This, however, was not the case; for, taken slantingly, the orifice was now nearly a foot wide.

A little more and Artie, and even Ned, might succeed in pushing themselves through.

Encouraged, Tahi worked on.

Perceiving a crevice, he inserted the point of his spear to prise the lump out, when the hole would be large enough for all.



After a few moments' exertion it moved, then fell, but it caused a landslip; the place was full of dust, and the boys believed that the Indian had been crushed.

»Tahi, Tahi!« cried our hero, in alarm, »where are you? Are you hurt?«

»All right, Misser George,« came the muffled reply through the wall of earth. »This is bad, but might have been worse. Earth loose; pull away on your side.«

Doubtful still whether their friend, or some part of him, might not be buried under the débris, the boys set to work with a will.

They proceeded like the mole, scraping or lifting the blocks from the front and throwing them behind them.

Soon they began to feel a cooler air blow upon their hot faces; then light began to show.

At this point, Tahi's voice warned them to stand back, as he was going to push inward.

Almost immediately, the loose earth fell forward, and they saw Tahi before them.

He was, though, a prisoner up to his knees.

With the boys' aid, however, he was speedily released, when it was found he had only sustained a few bruises, which he treated with perfect

indifference.

The landslip, therefore, had done more good than harm, for the hole was large enough now for them to all have got out together had they desired, while the rock formed a stepping stone.

Artie was the first to scramble out; but he came quickly scrambling back again, declaring he could hear the Indians whooping not far off.

»All stop here,« said Tahi, »Tahi go and see.«

Springing out, he disappeared for ten minutes, which to the boys seemed like an hour.

»It is true,« he said, when he returned. Niuans on the plain. Niuans probably seek for other opening of cave. All must go, quick. Stay—the canoe!«

The lads needed no urging.

Every hand was lent to extricate the boat, which with much trouble, and not without risking another landslip, they finally got free.

Fortunately, the spot was well covered with vegetation, and night was falling, both of which circumstances, promised them better concealment.

As the shouts came from inland, Ned would have had them make their way to the bay they were nearest to.

Tahi, however, shook his head.

First, he bade the lads bring the largest stones they could, and fill up the hole.

In answer to their rather impatient glances of inquiry, he said—

»Niuans come—find hole—look in. See it empty, know we escaped—know we on island alive; search still. Now, Niuans think we crushed; shut in.«

Succeeding in making the place assume very much the appearance necessary to deceive the savages, they again hoisted the canoe, and set off through the bushes.

Yet, though the whooping was near, Tahi did not go to the bay.

»First place Niuans search,« he said. »We go on next.«

Before they had advanced far they felt his words were true, and they had only escaped in time.

A change in the savage hubbub told them the savages had reached the spot where the earth had fallen in.

There was a commotion like flies about a honey-pot,

Then the whoope and shouting arose-again, and Tahi halted to listen.

»Yes,« he smiled, marking the direction of the voices; »them gone down to shore. We safe yet. Quick.«

A long time they tramped, getting desperately fatigued for want of rest and sleep.

Fortunately they could satisfy both thirst and hunger from the fruit of the trees they passed among.

Night now had quite fallen, and happily, it was a very dark one.

The Indians' shouting was hushed.

»When are we to stop, Tahi« asked Artie; »I'm so dead sleepy. I shall have to get a twig to prop up my eyelids soon.«

»My feet are all over blisters,« remarked Ned.

»Stop in minute; in very short minute, now,« answered Tahi, quietly.

For some little while they had been conscious that they were descending an incline, and, just as the Indian spoke, the path getting freer of vegetation, they saw they were in another of those pretty valleys leading to the shore, which in a very brief space they reached.

»What are we to do now, Tahi?« asked our hero.

»Go in canoe. Not safe here, Misser George. Too near Niuans or Mangaian. Go to other part of island.«

This met universal approval,

The boat was pushed off, all, with Faith, who had behaved like the very pattern of dogs got in, then they pulled from the shore.

As it receded, and darkness dropped around them like a cloak, for the first time our modern Crusoes experienced a sensation of safety.

»But,« thought George, with an aching heart, »where is Stella? I'll never leave the island until I have found her, or learned her fate, let the savages do what they will with me.«

The canoe went gliding noiselessly along, so that even had the Niuans placed a guard on the headlands, they could not have descried it.

The night was too dark, while Tahi had taken the wise precaution to keep as far from the land as the encircling coral reef would permit.

»Tahi,« asked George, in a low tone, »where do you propose to land?«

»Tahi been thinking, Tahi fancy small bit of island best.«

»What, where we saw that monster go!«

»Yes. Monster not so bad as Niuan, Monster run before Tahi's spear. Two spears now and dog.«

»That is true,« answered our hero, bending manfully to the oar. »To the island by means, monster or not.«

CHAPTER XXIX.

THEY LAND—THE MONSTER—FAITH PREVENTS MURDER—A TREMENDOUS SURPRISE.

Through the dark silent night the canoe shot, the oars or paddles making but a faint rippling sound.

Artie dozed, lying at the bottom of the boat; Ned, half asleep, steered; while our hero and the Indian pulled.

Stillness reigned over the sea.

In the heavens above star after star shone out on the fugitives.

Altering his position so as to row backwards that he might face the Indian, George whispered as their faces approached each other—

»I wonder, Tahi, if we take up our abode on that little island, whether we shall discover the cause of the mysterious light?«

»Think, p'r'aps yes, Misser George. Coming to island,« added the Indian, looking over his shoulder, »There island is.«

His keen eyes had been the first to discern it, as it rose out of the water, a small forest of trees, with ferns and other tropical plants at their base.

The stars now were beginning to silver the waters, rendering shadows rich from contrast.

It was deemed safest to steer for the side of the island furthest from the larger one. So, making a wide sweep, they shot the canoe cautiously under the hanging branches, for the vegetation grew down to the water's edge.

Tahi had relinquished his oar to Ned, and standing erect at the prow, peered into the trees.

All was silent.

There was, at present, no sign of the monster.

They all needed strength, which could only be obtained by repose. And so landing, they drew the canoe up among the bushes, so as to be out of sight.

Then before seeking rest, they resolved to cross the island, to be prepared for any peril that might threaten.

This patch of land on the vast ocean was so small that the task of examining it was not difficult.

For the first few paces the ground was soft, and the bushes not easy to penetrate.

Tahi took the lead, his spear ready to band.

Faith, as if he guessed there was danger, keeping nearly by his side, sniffing the earth.

Our hero came next.

There was no sign, however, of the creature for some time, until suddenly Tahi halted and pointed cautiously over a mimosa bush,

George craned his neck forward.

There the monster was!

At the other side of the bush was a clear space, much shaded, however, by trees.

And there, in the dim light, they beheld it.

It was like nothing they had seen alive or in books.

So singularly human was it that it must be an ape of a large species; but it appeared covered all over with dead leaves.

Our hero had heard of the African snake, the body of which was covered as with green leaves, but never such a thing as this.

It was coiled up under the trees in a ball, and asleep—emitting a sound like a growling snore.

Tahi waited an instant, then poising himself on his right toes, hurled his spear.

As true as needle to magnet, would it have penetrated the creature's body, had not another creature prevented it.

That other creature was no less than Faith.

Just as the spear was quitting the Indian's grasp the dog bounded through the bush into the opening, with a loud, sharp bark.

In a second the monster was on its feet, a thick rough tree branch clubbed in its hand.

Tahi seized the other spear from our hero.

But hardly had he raised it than the monster spoke.

»Split my top-gallant mast, you nigger! You're there are you. Come out into the open then, and fight like a man, you Jim Crow!«

Our hero gave a great shout, pulled down the Indian's spear, then rushed through he bushes, crying—

»It's Jack Milward as I live. Der Jack Milward—saved—saved!«

And in his delight, he flung himself on the old sailor, for it was he, and no other.

»What, Master George, is it you?« ejaculated Milward, yet with scarcely so much surprise as might have been expected. »Well now, this is jolly indeed. Heaven be praised we are together, and there is you Master Ned, and you Master Artie, and Faith, that uncommon dog.«

»He knew you before we did, Milward.«

»O' course he did, bless his heart. Yes, Mister George, he knowed me at once.«

»It wasn't very surprising we didn't,« laughed our hero, »considering your new style of dress.«

»Why, what a figure you've made of yourself?« exclaimed Ned.

»Figure or no, Master Ned, decency's decency,« responded the old salt, gravely. »So as the sea carried off most of my clothes, I had to make up with whatever Heaven sent me, and thankful enough for that blessing.«

»We might have given you better, but for the Indians.«

»Oh Milward,« said Artie, »there are such lots of them over there.«

»I know it, sir.«

»And we have been flying from them for two days.«

»I suspected that too. But I suppose yonder one is Tahi,« remarked the sailor, turning to the Indian, and extending his hand. »I feel myself proud to make your acquaintance, sir; you're a brave noble gentleman, sir. If I said anything disrespectful just now, I'm sorry.«

Tahi grinning, showed his white teeth, evidently much amused and flattered.

The boys stood amazed.

»Why how did you know about Tahi?« they cried, simultaneously.

»Ah, that's tellings,« remarked Jack Milward. »But if you be wery anxious to know, over yonder's pootier lips to inform you than mine.«

They turned in the direction he had pointed, and could scarcely believe their eyes, when they saw Stella advancing towards them from the trees.

»Stella safe!« cried our hero, rushing to meet her.

»George, all of you safe!« she exclaimed in answer, as, carried away by her feelings, she fell on the boy's neck.

Recovering herself immediately, she drew back blushing, and looking more beautiful than ever.

Warmly she greeted Ned and Artie, and pressed Tahi's dark fingers between hers.

»Oh, how thankful to Heaven I am you are here! that you are not hurt!« she exclaimed.

»The first thing at dawn, Mr. Milward was going to see if he could find or aid you. Oh, do, do tell me, how you managed to escape those fearful savages.«

»First Stella, let us know how you escaped. We are also full of curiosity to learn how Jack Milward and we could have been wrecked on this island, yet never have come across each other before.«

»We did,« said the old sailor; »and a pooty fright I got. It was all through Mr, Jim. I mean Mr, Tahi there. Here, like in England, we often take our friends for our enemies, and our enemies for our friends. For we are with all our boasted wisdom, Mister George, but like blind puppies, and would be nothing if Providence didn't guide us.«

»Suppose we talk of that another time,« broke in Ned, who didn't care for anything approaching a homily. »We want to know how you escaped the wreck, Milward, and Stella those brutes.«

»And Master Ned, we a course wants to know how you escaped,« said the old sailor. »But it allers been my motter through life, and I hope it'll continue so— »Ladies first.« Therefore if Miss Stella will be so good as to commence, and not stop up the gangway, we'll sit down and listen. I 'spect none of us cares just at present to sleep.«

»Not now,« said Artie, and so Stella began her story.

CHAPTER XXX.

STELLA'S STORY—JACK TELLS HIS ADVENTURES— AN UNPLEASANT INTERRUPTION—THE ISLAND ON FIRE!

The little party—as Stella began her story—took their places in a circle, and a strange scene they presented—the three lads with their torn and worn clothes; the dark-skinned Indian; Jack Milward, with leaves fastened all over him, and the long, black, grizzled hair growing from his chin, while the young beautiful girl was seated trustfully by the rough old fellow's side.

Stella, as the reader may guess, had very little to tell.

She related how she had been pursued by the Indian chief, How Jack Milward had saved her, but how on beholding him in his strange attire, she had fainted from terror.

»When I came to, I was nearly losing my wits again on perceiving the strange face bending over me,« she said, »but they were recalled by hearing myself addressed by a kind voice, in my own tongue. It bade me not fear, that I was safe from those murderous-looking Jim Crows, and,« added Stella, placing her hand fondly on the old salt's, »that they shouldn't harm me while Jack Milward had a leg to stand upon.«

»My very words, dearie,« said Jack, softly patting the girl's fingers with his big brown paw; »and Jack Milward meant 'em too. Then you told me all that had happened and who were your companions in the island, and I recognised 'em as the youngsters of our ship, the poor ›VIXEN.‹ Then I made you comfortable, and next day went to the island to look for your friends, but could see nor hear nothing but savages, so came back to you, my birdie, purposing to start again to-morrow, when, lo and behold, Heaven has sent to us them as we sought!«

»But, Jack,« remarked our hero; »you are telling the fag end of your story first. We want to learn how you saved yourself when the ›Vixen‹ was wrecked, Did any others escape«

»No, Master George. I fear there's small hope of that,« replied the old sailor, sadly shaking his head; »all the boats were swam or stove in but yours, The rest of our comrades, Heaven have mercy on their souls, went down, down to Davy Jones's Locker.«

»How, then, did you escape!« inquired Ned.

»I'll tell you,« said Jack. »When the waves washed away the boat you were in, Master George, the poor ›Vixen‹ heeled so terribly over, that each had to look to his own safety, though there was precious little hope of that.

»The look I did manage to throw overboard showed me the boat in the trough of a sea, with a precious big wave a-toppling down into it.

»I gave you up for lost. I fancied you'd be swamped as sure as a gun, and that's just all I could do, for the waves were a-whirling and a-swirling, washing the poor ›Vixen‹ from stem to stern.

»One big billow came, and before I could claw hold of even a leg of him, I saw Master Ned carried over the side.

»Then like a black flash something went after him.

»It was that there brave dog.

»He wasn't washed over. He went over just of his own accord, as if he had asked himself, »Can I do any good here!« and answered prompt as a cap'en gives his orders, »No.«

»Well, as I say, each had to look for himself, for the ¢ Vixen' was getting water logged, and was doomed for the bottom, that was sartin.

»Near where I stood was a bit o' a mast, jiggling, and banging on the deck like a drum stick, being tied by the rigging to the ship.

»So I outs with my knife, cuts it clear, and, as well as I could, fastened myself to it, clinging as tight as grim death was a-clinging to me.

»I was only just in time. Down came a wave, the ›Vixen‹ rolled and pitched bows forward, then down she went, and I with her.

»The waters rushed in my ears.

»I commended myself to Heaven, and shut my eyes to meet death, when, whish, I was up on the top of the waves again.

»Yet, my lads, you don't know 'how often during that night, I wished I hadn't come up, but had gone down like my mates.

»For I was beat black and blue among the breakers, so beaten that I lost my senses.

»When I came to, the night had passed, It was dawn.

»The ocean was like a bit o' glass, and I was a-floating on it as quiet as a babby in its cradle.

»Looking round I saw nothing but this here island, for I must have drifted some way.

»It looked small enough on the precious big ocean, but I should have regarded a square yard o' land as a blessin', I can tell you, so I begins to swim, and in a few minutes had dragged myself up among the trees, when, having thanked God for my safety,« said the old sailor, reverently, »I dropped down dead asleep, and for how long that there slumber lasted, I can't tell.

»When I awoke, it was near evening, and I felt precious hungry, I can tell you. But there were bananas and bread-fruit enough to satisfy that.

»Then I began to think of examining where I was.

»I soon found that I had got upon a bit of an island, that appeared chopped off a bigger.

»Now the question to me was, whether the other was inhabited or not.

»Well, as the buffeting of the sea among the reefs had nearly torn my clothes to ribbons, I didn't think it necessary to remove them, so plunged in to swim over.

»You wouldn't have been so ready, Milward,« broke in Ned, »if you'd known there were sharks there.«

»Sharks!« ejaculated the old salt, his bronzed face losing colour. »Lor', Master Ned, you don't mean to say there are any of those lubbers in these here waters?«

»Oh, aren't there though, Tahi's killed two already.«

»Bless my portholes, I seem to feel the teeth of the brutes snapping about me,« cried Jack. »Well, I've something to thank Providence for, that's sartin. Why, I've been a-swimming over that there channel dozens of times, and with no more care than if I had been taking a bath in the Thames at Wapping.

»Well, Jack,« laughed our hero, »since you have come out of the danger without harm, go on with your story.«

»All right, Master George; only I shall never talk of swimming over that there strait without a cold shiver.«

Saying which, Jack Milward proceeded with his adventures.

That same evening he had visited the island, he had been scared away by the rumbling and shaking of the earth, which it will be remembered, had frightened the Niuans.

He guessed then that the islands were volcanic, which made him doubtful of the one's extent, and also whether it was inhabited.

He waited until the next evening, when he started on a second attempt of exploration.

The result was worse than the first.

The eruption of the volcano had and Jack Milward was so close that he had to use all his speed to escape a steam of burning lave.

»I suspect you did run, Milward.« said Artie,

»I suspect I did, Master Artie. I didn't go the pace of little chaps going to school, I can tell you. The hot ashes fell quickly round me, scorching and burning, till I thought my clothes would take fire, And so they would if they hadn't been wet.

»I do believe, even if I had know'd of them sharks, I should have plunged into the sea just the same.

»When I got to the island, I was so burnt and exhausted that I could do nothing but lie down, thankful the water was between me and the plaguy mountain,

»Well, this made me more than ever sure the island was a deserted one.

»Therefore, I was not in such haste to undertake another exploring expedition.

»However, a chap soon gets tired of his own comp'ny, and longs for excitement.

»So off I goes, one afternoon, determined to walk across the island.

»To my surprise, I found it larger than I had suspected, and, as I saw nothing alive but porkers, I was making up my mind to shift my quarters

to it, when I heard such an awful yell!

»At first I was about to take to my heels.

»But I thought I might take a peep at the lubbers, so I chooses a big tree, and up I into it, quicker than a youngster ordered to the masthead; and a pretty scene I saw.«

»You need not stop to describe it, Jack,« interrupted our hero. »We witnessed it also, and perhaps can tell more about it than you.«

»That's very likely, Master George, for a sight of those lubbers goes a precious long way. So down I slipped to the ground, and, as the Mericans say, made tracks back, thinking as the big island had such inhabitants, the smaller one would be pleasanter lodgings.«

»Do you know, Milward,« broke in Artie,« »that those Indians were having a cannibal feast?«

»Good Lor', my lad, you don't say so!« gasped the old sailor. »Well, they are worse than Lim Crows; and I'd like to see them all strung like black dolls over the doors of Marine Stores. Tell me all about it, my boy.«

»No, no,« interrupted our hero; »let Jack finish his story first, Ours shall come after.«

»Very well, Master George. Mine's soon over now,« pursued Jack.

»After what I had seen, I began to give up all hope that any of my mates had been saved, or if they had, they must have fallen into the clutches of those fiends.

»I tried to content myself where I was, and look out for a ship.

»When a day or two had elapsed, and I saw no signs of the Indians, I decided they could only inhabit the other side of the island, so got courage to visit the mainland again in the evening.

»Also, hoping some vessel might pass in the night, I selected a spot to light a beacon fire, that would not be seen at the opposite end of the island.«

»Tahi,« cried George, »now we have it. That was the mysterious light we saw that so alarmed us. We saw the faint glow of your beacon, Jack, and Tahi and I crossed the island to see if we could discover the cause, when we encountered a monster.«

»You mean me, Master George,« said the sailor, as the boy burst out laughing, »Well, in that light I daresay I did look a rum animal; but I know this, I only saw Mr. Tahi there.

»I didn't visit the mainland for a little while after that, when I'm blest if I didn't run over Mr. Tahi again.

»The next time I came, I saw another Indian, as Miss Stella told you, and that time I think I got the best of the matter. So there my adventures are at an end, lady and gentlemen.

Hardly had the words been uttered, than everyone sprang to their feet.

The air suddenly rung with the war-whoop of the Indians.

They were upon them once more.

Tahi, darting forward, drew aside the bushes and peered through.

Yes, in the dark, grey light, he could see that the opposite shore was lined with Indians-Niuans and Mangaian mingled.

Instinctively, Stella moved close to Jack Milward, who put his arm protectingly around her.

»Don't you fear, dearie,« our hero heard him say. »Those Jim Crows, were they double their number, shouldn't harm a gold hair of that pooty head.'

George thought it was quite right he should so encourage the poor girl, but he didn't clearly see how he could prevent it; though in the attempt, he and our hero would have laid down their lives.

But the Indians were more than ten times their number.

It was evident that the savages suspected the fugitives were on the smaller island, for several spears began to whistle through the trees, while it also was plain they intended to follow themselves, no difficult task to such swimmers, who made sharks no obstacle.

Indeed some of the black figures were seen already plunging into the water.

Each looked with inquiring alarm to the other, except Tahi.

His Indian stoicism even now was not disturbed.

Coming from the bushes, he said—

»The canoe; not stop wait Indians. Must go in canoe again.«

At the command all willingly went right about face, when Tahi, addressing Jack, said—

»Have you bed? Where you sleep?«

»I ain't got a bed. I slept in the trees.«

»And she?«

»Oh, I got a lot of dead leaves, Mr. Tahi, for her.«

»Where?«

The sailor pointed, and the Indian strode off in the direction under the trees.

»Jack,« whispered our hero, »go on with Stella. Get the canoe afloat, and she safe in it. If the worst comes to the worst, you take care of her.«

»All right, Mr. George. You're a right-down true-born British gentleman,« replied the old salt.

And the boy saw, as Jack went, he so shielded Stella's slight, graceful figure with his own broad, bulky one, that had any spear wandered that way, it could never have touched her.

Ned and Artie followed to help push off the canoe.

Our hero waited.

He would not move a step without Tahi though the spears came thicker and thicker, and the yells of the approaching swimmers nearer and nearer,

Reaching the couch of dried leaves, the Indian rapidly taking them up, flung them into the bushes.

Returning to the small opening where they had sat, he looked round to see if they had left any trace.

Roughening the short flattened grass with his spear, he then retreated to the path, George going first, Tahi walking backwards so as to return the boughs to their places, giving them a natural appearance.

Our hero had felt rather impatient of all this at first, but finally he recognised the wisdom of it.

As they reached the water, where the canoe was already afloat and the rest seated, a change in the shouts showed the savages were-landing on the other side.

»Quick,« said Tahi.

George was in before the word was spoken.

The Indian followed, and seizing one of the paddles, Jack already having the other, shot the canoe far from the shore.

»Quick,« he repeated again, »we 'scape Niuans. Yes, good; but to 'scape Niunans seeing canoe better.«

»Right you are, sir,« remarked Jack Milward, deferentially.»I see it ain't all book learning that gives wisdom. If those Jim Crows over there catches sight of us, they'll come after us directly they gets their boats; so take care of the helm, Master George, and here's a strong pull, a long pull, and a pull altogether.«

Swiftly, despite its freight, the light boat sprang over the waters, for the arms were willing and strong that urged it.

Already they were so far that the island was scarcely discernible, which assured them that they themselves could not be seen, when a faint glow appeared, like the moon rising in a fog.

Then a long spiral flame leaped into the air.

Tahi uttered a native ejaculation before he exclaimed—

»Quick, quick! no tire, further away; further yet. Much far, quick!«

»What is it, Tahi?« inquired Artie.

»The Niuans have set fire to the island!«

CHAPTER XXXI.

TAHI MAKES A PROPOSITION—IN HIDING—A FIGHT BETWEEN MAN AND DOG—SHARKS—THE ISLAND OF PINES.

If Tahi was Jack's superior ashore in Indian warfare, he was not so at sea.

There the old salt was on his own element.

No sooner did he understand the meaning of that spiral flame, and that it would be now impossible to return to the island after the savages had departed, than he said—

»Steer north-east, then die north, Master George. We've had enough of south. It's only waste of time, and elber grease. That big bonfire those Jim Crows are making will soon show them where we are, if we don't precious soon put the big island between us and them.«

The canoe was speedily brought round, and shot in the direction Jack Milward had advised.

The old sailor and Indian bent well to the oar, and it was soon evident that they would get beyond the radius of the fire, before the savages could perceive them.

When so far they felt safe, and slackened their pace to consider their next proceeding.

Should they make for some one of the bays of the large island, and find concealment among the caves?

The proposition was not received with much delight.

This succession of flights before some sixty Indians was not so amusing that any were anxious to have a repetition.

Nevertheless, it would not do to let dawn find them where they were.

»Tahi, what do you think we ought to de?« inquired our hero.

»Get to Tahi's land, if possible, Misser George,« he answered; »it take time, and will be danger. Not more danger, though, than keeping on island hiding from Niuans.«

The idea of going to »Tahi's land.« somehow seemed to give the boys exceeding pleasure.

They returned an unanimous »Yes, yes.«

»What say you, Jack? English ships stop sometimes at Tahi's land, you know. And Tahi's tribe would be friends to us.«

»Oh Mister George, I allus foller one motter that's to go with the majority, so one, two three, and off, I say, or, if dawn comes, those gents over there may yet get a squint at us.«

This was true, and relieving each other, they rowed on all through the night.

Soon Tahi told them, as day began to break on the horizon, that the danger no longer rested in being seen from the island they were leaving, which now was almost a speck in the distance, but from the islands they were approaching.

Indeed, as the morning light began to creep and quiver over the water, the islands, which the lads had often watched from the look-out, were close under their bows, as Jack remarked.

The nearest to them was small, with the vegetation growing in a splendid tangle of beautiful broad leaves and gorgeous flowers, so far down to the water's edge that the waves broke beneath them.

This was all the better for the little crew, who were able to shoot the canoe beneath and drag it upon land without any danger of its being seen from the water did any other canoe pass.

It was Tahi's advice that they should rest during the day in concealment, only proceeding at night, when there was less, if any, danger of falling in with, or being seen by, the inhabitants of the islands, whom the Indian declared to be very warlike and hostile to each other.

The place was well adapted for their purpose, and, after they had satisfied their hunger with the fruit of the trees that shadowed them, they gladly laid down to sleep, Tahi warning them that they had better not kick enough to roll off, as he'd seen one or two sharks lying at the bottom of the water among the corals, who seemed rather in want of a meal.

Upon which Jack Milward scrambled further up the grass with a face as long as a spoon.

»Bless my portholes!« he ejaculated; »but, Mr. Tahi, I don't know which to prefer—the Jim Crow niggers or these sharks.«

»I don't see that we need fall into the clutches of either, Jack,« laughed our hero, who was finding a couch of softest grass in the safest spot for Stella, »if you don't snore too loud.«

»If I do, Master George, you'd better gag me before you wake me; and don't do the latter with a pinch, or I shall believe it's one of them there blessed sharks, and shall roar like a bull.«

»We'll recollect. But who's to keep watch?«

»I will,« said Jack.

Tahi desired to, but the old sailor seemed to hold it a point of honour that he should take the first.

»We'll all take it in turns, Mr. Tahi. It shall be all fair, depend upon it.«

»What watch shall Faith keep?« smiled Stella.

»Why, the dog-watch, of course, miss,« grinned Jack.

»It's my opinion, then,« laughed George, »that it will begin and end with ours.«

»Ah, then he'll take a dog-sleep instead of a dog-watch,« said Jack; »one eye shut, t'other open. Now, lad, just you commence to snooze, or I shall have to wake you up before you've gone to sleep.«

Jack's bull having elicited a laugh, that Tahi had to check, all but Jack laid themselves down and were soon wrapped in slumber.

Jack sat up to watch as he had said.

He looked at the bushes, at the water beginning to flash golden with some light among the bushes that dipped in the tide.

But who's to keep

Then he hummed »Rule Britannia« rather out of tune.

Then he began to feel the day growing hot and the silence oppressive.

»This ain't a bit like a watch,« he muttered. »If I'd only got a deck beneath my trotters, and could stump up and down, it would be very different.«

He looked around.

It was not pleasant to keep awake and see others sleeping so comfortably.

He looked at Faith, and though he wasn't asleep, he was blinking drowsily.

Jack watched his blinking until it got infectious.

He imitated it, and at last when he closed his eyes he forgot to open them.

Thus an hour passed in silence.

The only sound was the rippling sea.

Then there came another.

Some kind of animal, man or beast, was gliding towards the unsuspecting sleepers.

But our hero had been right regarding Faith.

His head was at once erect, his bright, sagacious eyes turned in the direction of the rustling noise.

Then he gave a low, warning growl, and a short, sharp bark which brought all the sleepers to their feet, awake.

Between the bushes appeared the head and shoulders of a crouching Indian, who, with fierce eyes, was glaring at them.

Even as they rose alarmed and in confusion, he aimed his spear.

Before it quite left his grasp, Faith had prevented its proving fatal, as it would have done, by diverting its aim,

With a swift and graceful spring he leaped upon the enemy, and his strong, white teeth were gripped in the savage's throat.

A fierce struggle between man and dog ensued; and before the others could take any part, the two rolled down the slope towards the water.

George uttered a cry of terror, and his cheek turned pale.

»Faith—he will be in the water. The shark—the shark! Help Tahi—help—help both!«

And he ran quickly, madly forward, as if to share his favourite's peril.

Not only Tahi, but all rushed to the rescue of the dog and man.

For a moment, however, it seemed impossible to save either.

They were on the very edge of the water, and in a second they would have been in, when simultaneously, Tahi and George sprang forward.

The former caught the animal's coat, the latter his tail; Faith being nearest.

At this summary proceeding, the dog instinctively let go his grip, and the savage dropped back.

»Oh come, black nigger as you are,« cried Jack; »I can't see you perish like that. Give us your flipper.«

He extended his hand.

The savage seized it with an evil grin, and plucked the old sailor towards him, at the same time aiming a deadly blow at him with a small club he carried in his belt.

In a minute it would have been all over with poor Jack.

But our hero, Ned, and Artie grasping hold of him, pulled him back in time, while Tahi, with his club, dealt the fiendish savage a heavy blow.

The savage dropped into the water before he could recover himself, and something flashed through the golden, sparkling sea.

The Indian uttered one sharp yell of agony, struggled one brief second, and then disappeared.

A moment later a pool of blood spread over the sparkling waters where he had gone down.

The lads and Stella, with Jack, recoiled in horror, seized, too, by a deadly sickness.

Tahi, however, remarked, very philosophically-

»If shark hungry, shark got him meal.«

»Oh Tahi!« cried Stella, her beautiful eyes full of tears, »how can you speak like that?«

»Why not, Missy Stella?« he responded, »If shark not kill Indian, Indian, bad man, and kill us.«

»The varmint would have killed me if he could, that's sartin,« exclaimed Jack Milward, with a creepy shiver. »I was as near in as possible when them sharks would have had two courses instead of one.«

»They might Jack, have had three,« said our hero, as he flung his arms round, his dog. »This dear old fellow had nearly gone too, in his brave

defence of us.«

No one had much inclination to sleep after the above occurrence, for it was naturally a question as to how many Indians besides the one killed were in their vicinity.

At any moment they might be surprised and massacred.

Tahi took it upon himself to decide this, and armed with spear and club, glided away among the bushes to reconnoitre.

He was gone nearly an hour, which the others passed in some anxiety.

At the end of that time they heard the bushes parting, and knew by Faith's friendly wag of the tail that it was Tahi.

Soon he appeared, when he told them the island was indeed inhabited by a rather considerable tribe, who were of a ferocious, warlike nature.

As, however, their dwellings were all on the other side of the island, there would be little fear, if they kept where they were, of being discovered, save by single savages, for which emergency they must be on their guard.

He assured them that the peril they ran was not half what it would be, if they took to the canoe and seek to continue their journey.

They soon found this was the case, for, as the day advanced, several canoes paddled by, having at the bows a staff about sixteen feet in length, with a rudely-carved hideous head at the top.

On the staff were a few red feathers and a string of beads, while round it was wrapped a roll of native cloth.

Tahi said that these were idols, whose soul the feathers and beads were considered to represent.

»What,« whispered they Ned, »do they carry their idols about with them?«

»On fishing excursions,« answered Tahi, »when they make offerings to it.«

Ned burst into a low laugh.

»Make offerings to that thing,« he exclaimed.

»Why, it's just like a scarecrow we put up in cornfields in England.«

Tahi did not catch the meaning.

He looked from one to the other inquiringly, then said—

»Scare-crow, brother of Jim Crow, eh?«

It was well the canoes had gone well out of hearing, or their occupants must have heard the burst of hearty merriment that followed this speech.

The day passed slowly and anxiously, for at any moment peril might, they knew, come upon them.

But they dared not leave their hiding-place until quite dark, for they could plainly perceive Indians on the island which faced them.

Aware that they might have to row all night, they divided the remainder of the time into two watches; Tahi, George, and Artie taking the first, the other three the last.

It was during this that our hero, lifting his head, which had been drooped on his breast reflectively, was struck by the expression on the Indian's face.

He, too, was occupied in thought, but his eyes were fixed, gazing far away through the bushes over the sea.

A look of intense happiness was on his dark face.

George paused a moment, and then, leaning forward and placing his hand on the other's, said—

»Tahi, you are glad you are going to your friends.«

»Ah, yes, yes!« broke forth the Indian, while the tears, leaping from his eyes, rolled down his cheeks. »Tahi going home; Tahi see friends, his wife, his children. Ah, Tahi so pleased!«

And the poor fellow, who had troubled no one with his own secret grief, fairly wept from very joy at the prospect of beholding his dear ones again.

George, knowing what comfort it gives persons to talk of those they love, asked Tahi about his wife and children, and in turn told him of his mother.

»If Tahi can manage it, Misser George,« said the grateful fellow, »you shall see her again. Ship sure pass, Tahi do anything for you, Misser George.«

So they whiled away the time until they laid down and the others watched.

When Jack awakened them, darkness was over the waters, and Tahi thought with safety they might start,

Carefully they launched the canoe, very carefully indeed they got in, for they vividly remembered, the sharks, and then noiselessly pulled away from the shore.

Refreshed by their long rest, they sent the canoe well along, and soon the islands dropped out of view beneath the bright horizon.

For seven hours they rowed incessantly.

Then Tahi, looking over his shoulder, gave a delighted cry.

They were close to a tiny island crested with stately pines.

»Is this your island, Tahi?« asked Stella-

»No, but Tahi's island close by. This is land got only pines, but Tahi's close. We rest here though, eh? Wait till day light. Go to Tahi's island in daylight, All asleep now.«

This proposition was naturally to.

The canoe was run ashore on the island of pines, safely secured, and then, all thankfully laid down in security, to rest until the morrow.

The little party did not know how long they had slept, however, when they were awakened by a hubbub of voices, and all but Tahi started with alarm to their feet.

CHAPTER XXXII.

PALOLO—THEIR RECEPTION AT SAMOA—THE DECLARATION OF WAR.

As they heard the voices, their consternation was by no means lessened when they perceived the sea swarming with canoes full of chattering savages.

Their fright, however, was speedily calmed by the Indian.

He was expressing his delight in a somewhat extravagant manner, while he exclaimed—

»Ah, the Palolo, the Palolo! Good, good!«

»What do you mean, Tahiti?« asked our hero.

»Palolo worm, come up from bottom of sea. Indians catch Palolo. Good to eat.«

»You nasty reptile!« cried Jack, who was more emphatic than polite.

Stay, Milward,« said George; »every nation has its peculiarities. The Australians eat a kind of maggot they take out of the trees, Chinese eat puppy dogs, Tahiti's people eat palolo, and the English——«

»Well, the English, Master George?«

»Eels and congers, the snakes of the water.«

»Oh Master George! you don't mean to compare eels with worms and puppy dogs?«

»Why not?«

»Well, if you do, the French mounseers beat us in eating frogs and snails.«

»As to the frogs, yes, Jack,« persisted our hero, laughing; »but what say you to periwinkles and whelks?«

»Why, Master George, that you've got the best of me,« said Jack.

It must now have been about four in the morning when the noise and excitement increased to an alarming extent.

There were frequent collisions of the canoes, the outriggers of which got perpetually entangled.

But their owners were far too intent upon their sport to heed.

The whole sea was alive with the annelids varying in length from an inch to a yard long, and displaying every conceivable colour as they twisted and wriggled on the surface, from which, scrambling and pushing, the savages scooped them up into baskets, which Tahi said were made for the purpose.

»Do these worms come up like this often?« asked George.

»Oh, no, no. Old men know by sun, moon, and stars when palolo come,« said Tahi. »In Little Palolo and Great Palolo. Then Indian go out early in canoe to watch for him come up.«

»What's Little Palolo and Great Palolo?« questioned Ned.

»Months when palolo appear. October when palolo seen, November when they swarm, Four in the morning they come up; at eight palolo all gone again, vanished until next morning.«

For the benefit of our readers who would like the information, we may say that the palolo is flattish, about the sixth of an inch in width, and formed of a number of segments.

An entire specimen has never been secured, while very rarely indeed is a head found, so delicate and fragile is this annelid.

The colour is green, with one black dot in the centre of each segment.

»And are those your friends, Tahi!« asked Artie.

»Yes, they Tahi's tribe,« smiled the Indian, joyfully.

»Then why do we not go to them, if they will be kind to us?« queried Stella

»Spoil catching palolo,« replied the Indian, gravely. »Samoan surprised to see white face, and Inglis girl in canoe. Leave off catching palolo. Wait, We go d'rectly, Missie Stella.«

»Do they cook them, Tahi?«

»Yes—beautiful. Wrap 'em up in breadfruit leaves. Bake 'em in ovens. Delicious. You have some.«

»Jack Milward won't, thankee,« broke in the old sailor. »Weevily biscuit ain't nice, but it's better than those coiling, wriggly things, for you can knock the weevils out.«

Following Tahi's advice, they waited until the palolo fishing was nearly over, when indeed to their surprise, they saw the annelid dissolve

as it were, and vanish out of sight.

Directly this occurred, the boats, with their curious freight, began to paddle to the shore.

Tahi at once shoved off the canoe, and when they were all in, shot it from the shadow of the island, towards the savage flotilla.

In an instant, every canoe halted, and then, with an uproar of jabbering, came rowing swiftly towards them.:

In a few minutes, that of our little party was surrounded.

Even had not Tahi's assurance of a friendly greeting from the Samoans quieted Stella's fear, their aspect would immediately have done so.

They chatted and leaned forward with eager questioning curiosity; but their manner was the reverse of warlike, being most gentle and kind.

They were chiefly of gigantic stature, and well-made, while their hair, unlike the negro races, was not woolly, but long, straight, at times even wavy.

Our hero and the rest knew that they were questioning Tahi. '

Abruptly, the Indian rising up and looking round, addressed some words to them, and in an instant it appeared he was recognised by them.

The Indians shouted with delight, and the air echoed with the name of Tahi.

The Indian glanced with justifiable pride at his companions.

»See, Tahi at home, now. Tahi is the son of their chief,« answered the Indian, drawing his tall figure erect.

»Then,« whispered Jack to Stella, »if we've got such a friend at court as the chief's son we may reckon things is goin' very square with us.«

The only personage who seemed to object to the savages was Faith.

He had shown his recognition of their arrival by growls like internal thunder.

But no sooner did they set up their cheer, on learning who Tahi was, than jumping up, his front paws on the gunwale, he poured into them a volley of sharp, angry barks.

Stella, fearful it might anger the savages, threw her fair arms round the dog to draw him back.

The movement brought every eye upon her, and again the chattering arose; beauty and golden hair having, it was apparent, forcibly struck them.

Tahi, resting his hand on Faith's head, again addressed his tribe, and briefly told them all in regard to their life on the island; his capture by the Niuans, and his rescue by our hero.

An appeal to the Samoan's hospitality is rarely made in vain.

Each immediately seemed to regard himself as a host, called upon to do the honours of the island.

They addressed words to Jack and the rest, which, Tahi translating said signified thus- His brothers were delighted, and bade them welcome to their land.

Tahi put their answer in the Samoan tongue; and then the canoes made for the shore.

But one or two had already carried the news thither, that the chief's son, whom all had given up for dead, had arrived with some whiteface companions, and the strand was soon crowded by old men, women, and children.

»Lor', now! but only look at them there girls, Master George,« exclaimed Jack Milward. »Why, they're dressed up grander than any sailors' sweethearts.

»They look very pretty and picturesque,« answered our hero. »Don't they, Stella?«

They indeed did, for in this »nation of gentlemen,« as these people have been described, owing to their hospitality, affection, honesty, and courteousness, there was nothing revolting.

The girls wore a petticoat of a kind of stuff, or mat, made from the dracœna leaves, their short hair was brushed back and powdered with a reddish purple hue, while in it were entwined the scarlet flowers of the hibiscus.

Their joy at the return of the chief's son, and their desire to offer hospitality to the strangers, made them almost forget the palolos.

They divided, however, into two parties; the one attending to the canoes, the others acting as Tahi and his friends' escort.

On proceeding up the shore, they soon came in sight of the village.

Jack Milward, on beholding it, whispered to our hero—

»Well, I'm blest, if these 'ere ain't the rummiest people I ever comed acroes. They eat them nasty worms, and they lives under musherrooms.«

The houses certainly had something of that effect, the three centre poles, to which those of the rafters were fixed at one end, being five and twenty feet high, while the other end was brought down to poles only about four feet high.

The thatch was composed of leaves of the sugar cane, nailed to reeds with spikes, mads of the ribs of the cocoa-nut leaf.

Walls there were none.

When night came, blinds of plaited cocoa-nut leaves were let down in their place.

The floor beneath was strewn with fine gravel, on which mats were placed.

Most of the houses were empty, the people having gone down to the palolo.

Passing them, Tahi proceeded rapidly towards one of larger and handsomer dimensions and aspect than the others.

Before he reached it, however, messengers had already taken the news to the old chief, who now came forth in full dress to meet his son and his friends.

On his head he wore a crown of tall, splendid feathers, making his height appear gigantic, and his aspect warlike, while a flowing robe, termed lava-lava, made of bark cloth, was gathered round the waist in folds, and reached to the ankles.

Behind him came a female in a beautifully dyed petticoat, more priceless than silk or satin.

She wore in her hair a coronet of nautilus shell and scarlet hibiscus, and about her smooth red-brown throat, a necklace of red and yellow flowers.

By her side ran a little child, while he carried another in her arms.

They were Tahi's wife and children.

When the poor fellow saw them, he could hardly contain his joy.

Springing forward with a cry, he began bestowing upon his father and them the most rapturous caresses, which they returned, for they had believed him gone from them for ever.

The scene was really touching, and instinctively our hero and the rest, stood back not to disturb this happy meeting.

But in a little while, Tahi came running to fetch them.

Tears were yet in his eyes, and the poor fellow seemed hardly able to control himself.

Leading them to the old chief, whose name was Paunga, he introduced them one after the other, and George saw that Paunga and Tahi's wife spoke words of admiration of Stella.

Then entering the house, they sat down on the mats, when the chief said, addressing his people-

»The strangers, the friends of Paunga, are hungry. They have been good and kind to Paunga's son, Tahi the warrior; see to it.«

Instantly several of the men, who were standing outside the house, hurried away.

Then Paunga bade Tahi tell him his and his companions' story, which he had not yet heard.

On learning that our hero had saved Tahi, possibly from being cooked and eaten, he sprang up and caressed the boy with such signs of gratitude, that they could not be mistaken.

He called him a brave, a chief, and then addressed the people outside in George's praise, to which they responded by shouts.

After resuming his seat, he bade Tahi proceed.

Though our hero's party could not understand a word said, they knew when the Indian recounted the narrative of the ship on fire and rescue of Stella, by every eye being fixed on her, while, timidly, yet with evident delight, Tahi's wife drew dusky hand down her silky hair.

The Indian had not preceeded much further than this when there was a great commotion in the crowd.

Despite the presence of the chief, murmurs arose.

Questions seemed to be eagerly asked.

Stella, who could not quite get over her fear of the people surrounding her, drew closer to our hero and Jack Milward.

Suddenly the crowd swayed open, and a savage darting through, prostrated himself before the chief; then springing to his feet, his tall figure drawn erect, he commenced a harangue, evidently conveying startling news by the effect it produced.

The chief and the rest arose.

The greatest interest was displayed in the words of the newcomer, so much that even the white strangers were forgotten.

Then the chief made answer, drawing himself also erect, and speaking with dignity and defiance.

»What do you think it is, Jack?« asked our hero, in a whisper.

»Lor', Master George, how could I tell? They are such rum critters, these 'ere, yet from that old party's expression and the way he moves his arms, I should say he's in the humour for a fight, and ready to take 'em one down t'other come on. He's a brave-looking old chap at any rate.

At this moment Paunga turning, addressed the Samoans outside.

They heard his words in silence, then uttering the war-whoop of the tribe, shook the weapons they were carrying in the air.

»You are right, Jack,« said our hero, »they have evidently received an insult or a challenge.

»Which the old gentleman and his warriors are perfectly ready to answer. Well, I do think we are the most unfortunate people, us six—for we'll not leave out Faith—on the face of this blessed earth.«

»Yes, indeed,« said Ned. »If they're going to war, we may still fall into the hands of those horrible niggers that we've been flying from for days.«

»Hush!« remarked Stella, »here comes Tahi. He will soon tell us.«

The Indian had indeed separated himself from the crowd of gesticulating, excited savages, and was coming towards them.

His countenance was concerned, but his dark eyes were proud and defiant.

»What Is it, Tahi?« asked George. »Something has happened, has it not?«

»Yes,« answered the Indian. »Tahi has returned in time to prove himself a brave. Manono has proclaimed the people of Aana rebels; so Aana will fight.«

CHAPTER XXXIII.

PREPARATIONS FOR WAR—NED FORMS AN EVIL PLOT—TANGATA.

Tahi led his friends to his own house, which he gave entirely up to them, and where, notwithstanding the sudden confusion and war preparations going on, very speedily a sumptuous repast was served by the hospitable Samoans, consisting of pork, fish, yams, taro, bananas, plaintains, a pudding made of bananas, with cocoa-nut juice poured over them and baked, and, lastly, the, to the Samoans, delicate and much-beloved palolo, wrapped in bread-fruit leaves.

To Tahi's surprise, not one of them would touch the latter.

They, however, made a hearty meal from the rest, during which the Indian explained to them the cause of the approaching war.

It proved, much to the hearers' relief, so far as their own safety was concerned, to be a civil one.

It appeared that the island of Apolo, which they were on, was divided into three districts.

Each of these was ruled over by a chief, the »malo,« or political supremacy, being to the one most powerful and prosperous. This supremacy for some while had belonged to the chief of the Manono district.

But Aana, having much prospered under the teaching of the missionaries, and made greater commerce with cocoa-nut oil, had been gradually growing in importance, to the jealousy of the chiefs of Manono.

The ill-feeling had been brought to a head by one of the chief men of Aana taking to his home a discarded wife of a Manono chief.

This is considered the gravest of offences, and it was eagerly seized as an opportunity of declaring war against the Aanas.

Tahi was greatly excited, for he had been a prisoner, bound by the enemy's cords, and he must wipe out the stain.

He must prove himself »toa,« that is brave.

When Tahi left them, as he was obliged to do, for Paunga was summoning all the chiefs, Jack said —

»I wonder how this civil war of these Jim Crows will affect us?«

»I should not think much, if we keep out of the range of their spears,« answered Ned, promptly. »Tahi says all the Samoans are friendly to the English, so it doesn't matter much whether we fall into the Manonoes' hands or not.«

»Doesn't it, though,« broke in Artie. »I'd sooner have Tahi's party win, and I hope the Aanas will give the others a good thrashing.«

»So do I, Master Artie,« said Jack Milward. »Let's allus stick to our friends if our friends stick to us.«

Ned made no answer.

He was lying on a mat, his elbow on the ground, his head on his hand, and seemingly in thought.

He was so, yet his glance furtively rested on our hero, who sat talking to Stella.

Tahi's wife had given her one of their native coronets and a hibiscus necklace.

George had helped her to put them on, and they were laughing at her Samoan attire, which made her look very pretty.

In their danger and flight from the Niuanas, Ned, who was by no means brave, had forgotten his jealousy.

But no sooner did he begin to feel himself safe than it returned in full force.

If possible, he hated George more than ever, and he began to hate Stella too, because she liked our hero.

In bitterness he had marked the deference shown to the latter by all.

The praises of the chief Paunga had been to him like wormwood, but all this was nothing to his jealousy at the affection which plainly subsisted between Stella and George.

Even if in the coming war the Manonoes were victorious, Ned saw that they would be in no danger and in all probability would soon be taken off by some European ship.

In that case Stella would speedily be united to her father, and it would be upon George all the praise and gratitude would be bestowed.

It was this which had made him for so long thoughtful and silent now, The expected war had put new ideas in his head, and he was seeking to plan them out.

His plot was no other than to have Stella carried off by the enemy during the confusion of battle.

All through the day the preparations for the engagement proceeded rapidly.

Tahi visited them as often as he could, and from him they learned that the encounter was to take place on the morrow.

»Tahi,« said Ned, on one occasion, »are the Aanas the only ones who talk English?«

»No, Misser George; Manonoes speak well, some,« was the answer, »Chief Tangata speak English good.«

»Who is he?« asked Artie.

»A chief of Manono, not greatest, biggest chief. He bad man; greedily, cruel, bad. Marry wife for the mats and other things she brings him, then say,«Go! Tangata, like you no more. Tangata like new wife with more mats, more things.» »Ah,« and the Indian shook his head, »Tangata bad man!«

Ned; man ask many more questions, and a strange smile settled on his features when he once more lapsed into his moody silence.

When night came the mosquito curtains which were attached to the centre post were let down, dividing the room into separate sleeping places.

All retired to rest, the outer blinds were lowered, and silence fell over Aana.

All in Tahi's house seemed to sleep,

Ned, however, had no inclination to.

Directly he knew the rest slumbered, he rolled slowly towards the blind, which he had placed himself near, slipped under it, and found himself in the open air.

For a space he laid still to see if his absence had been noticed.

Everything remaining quiet he rose without noise, and hastened cautiously away.

He had made inquiries so minutely from Tahi, and so acute does the mind grow in the performance of evil, that he had no need to hesitate regarding his route.

Save wild boars there was no danger to apprehend, and he proceeded almost at a run, when free of the village.

The moon, but a crescent, yet illumined the splendid vegetation around him, so that he hardly felt fear or loneliness.

What was Ned Conyers's plan?

It seemed a wild one, whatever it was.

Evidently it held great power over him, to have made one of his nature brave these solitudes in the night alone.

For some while he had proceeded, and the Manono villages were in sight, when he leaped back with a cry of terror.

An Indian had sprang up from the ground as it seemed, right in his path.

He was of gigantic stature, and an evil countenance.

In his hand he brandished a club, more than three feet long, and flattened and carved at the top.

Ned's style of dress apparently caused him to hesitate before dealing a blow, if he had so intended.

The boy seized the opportunity, and, his voice slightly tremulous, uttered the words he had decided in his mind to utter, as he came along.

»Tangata—English friend. I want Tangata.«

The herculean savage lowered his weapon.

»I am Tangata,« he answered, in really good English, »What English want?«

»I have come from Aana.«

»Ah! They shall die by Tangata's spear,« cried the savage.

»Tangata wants revenge«

»Tangata will have it,« was the response.

»Tangata shall, So will I, for I, too, would have revenge.«

»You? On Aana?«

»No, on white faces.«

»Where«

»The white faces, friends of Aana, Tangata likes wealth. Will Tangata listen to me? Will he help me?«

»Tangata will listen,« was the calm answer.

The two sitting down, Ned began by relating who he was, and his father's riches and position.

Then he briefly recounted the adventures in the island, finally their arrival at Palolo.

»What would you have of Tangata« asked the savage.

»His help. In the fight to-morrow let him descend on the village, and carry off the white faces. Aana taken Tangata's wife; Tangata take chief's friends. Tangata will be revenged!«

»Ah!« said the savage.

Ned went on—

»When Tangata comes, white faces fight. Tangata's club no white face can withstand. Tangata stun them; carry off white girl, I try to rescue her; Tangata make me prisoner, too. Fly to other island; safe—concealed. Wait for English ship; captain pay Tangata big ransom for his prisoners; English girl's father pay high ransom. Tangata rich. Aana's chief angry; Tangata revenged?«

The savage had listened intently, an evil gleam in his dark eyes.

He had known much of the English and their riches.

He put many questions, made the necessary arrangements for the attack and abduction, and after that he arose, as a sign the interview was over.

Ned, doing the same, stole back to Aana.

His black heart was full of joy at his success, though ever and again a fear would seize him at the daring step he had taken.

Why had he taken it?

To separate Stella from George; to force her to rely upon him.

And there was a vague hope within him that the club of Tangata might rid him of his rival entirely.

By the time he got back to Tahi's house, where his companions were, it wanted an hour of dawn.

To his surprise and consternation, he saw two figures approaching the same place from an opposite direction.

He hid behind a large magnolia, and soon recognised Tahi and Jack Milward.

They were talking intently.

Suddenly stopping, they turned, with their backs to the house.

Tahi's arm was extended, as if describing something to the sailor, and Ned took advantage of this to dart to the house.

In a few minutes he had crept under the blind, and panting, lay down in his place.

Almost directly after he heard Jack Milward enter and lie down too.

What could have taken him abroad?

What had he been saying to the Indian?

In a very little while Ned knew and secretly rejoiced, for the one he most dreaded in the carrying out of his plan was the old tar, and it happened that he was to be removed from them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

JACK VOLUNTEERS—THE SHIP ON THE HORIZON— TANGATA—STELLA IS CARRIED OFF.

Before Jack Milward had entered the merchant service he had been in the fo'cas'le of a man-of-war, and had seen much fighting.

Thinking of this, and aware of the benefit disciplined men have over savages, he had consulted with Tahi, and had offered his services, which were accepted.

This is what pleased Ned, as it took the sailor out of the way.

Our hero offered his services likewise; but the old tar would not hear of it.

»No, no, Master George,« he said. »You see, we ain't at war with the Manonoes. It wouldn't do.«

»But you're going, Jack«

»Only to give advice, lad. Don't you believe for a minute I'm going to risk my precious body to be made a target for these niggers' spears, nor my head a hanvil for 'em to beat their clubs on, let alone to be clutched hold on by such gloves as Tahi's got. My Davy! have you secn 'em, Master George!«

»No, Jack; I should like to.«

»Well, I'll tell you what they are like. They are gauntlets, with the inside set with rows of shark's teeth, set back'ards like a cat's tongue, so that when they claws hold of a chap, the more he tugs to git away the tighter he fixes on, while the precious teeth are so strong that they can rip up a man.«

»What an awful weapon, Jack.«

»Yes; it ain't pleasant.«

»Still, Jack, I'd like to go; I'd like to see something of the fight,« persisted our hero.

»No, Master George. I daresay you would; but don't think of yourself, but of your poor mother at home, and of taking care of Miss Stella here.«

These last two arguments settled it.

Our hero ceased to plead, and soon after, quitting the house, they watched the assembling of the Aana warriors.

They were a fine race, and, if disciplined, would have made a fine army.

But as it was each man fought on his own account, without any thought of his fellow, and advanced or retired as he chose.

All had on their grandest dress, while their weapons were the spear and the formidable club.

Despite the want of order they made a good array as they marched off to the fight, each wearing a white shell round his neck to distinguish them—as it was a civil war—from the Manonoes.

With them went most of the women, to attend upon their relatives if wounded, or to supply them with provisions.

When the three lads and Stella were alone they sat for some while talking.

Then Ned, who spoke very rapidly this morning, and seemed strangely active, proposed they should go down to the shore, as the battle between the Aanas and their enemies was to take place inland.

Inactivity was growing irksome to all, so they readily consented.

As they went chatting gaily Ned fell a little back.

He was growing restless, nervous, for he felt if Tangata kept his word, the hour now was near at hand.

Moving in an opposite direction to the war party, they came to a pretty secluded bay within fifty paces of the village.

Here, after examining the shells and seaweeds, which proved similar to those on their own island, they sat down and began to talk of their better chances of once again seeing home.

Ned still kept slightly apart, and simulating drowsiness, laid on the sand, with a broad plantain-leaf over his face.

The fact was, he dreaded to speak, for fear that the nervous tremor pervading his whole body might be detected in his voice.

His whole mind was occupied with one thought.

Would Tangata come?

Any regret which Ned had before felt had been obliterated by burning jealousy. He heard Stella saying how pleased her father would be to see George, and how she longed to know his mother, who must come and visit them for a long, long time.

She didn't ask Ned, for the simple reason that Ned kept aloof, while Artie was quite content and happy to lie on the sand, his chin resting on his hands, and looking into Stella's beautiful eyes.

Our hero's glance was fixed very much in the same direction, which accounted for Stella's being the first to see what she did.

Suddenly the lads saw her eyes dilate, the colour mount then, fly to her cheek.

Then she sprang up with a great cry.

»Look — look!« she almost shrieked; »a ship—a ship!«

In a second, trembling and half-fearful that she had been deceived by the white wing of some bird, the boys leaped to their feet.

With what feelings Ned did so it is not easy to say.

Hey had no time to ask himself whether he was sorry or glad.

There was no doubt in the others.

Though it was but a white, gleaming speck in the distance, the sailor boys recognised. that it was indeed a ship, and no bird's wing flashing in the sun.

They forgot all about the savages.

They shouted—they capered—they cried for joy.

Ned joined in the delight, though his eyes, often turned to the side of the bay, where presently above the low rock appeared the plumed head of a savage.

It was Tangata.

As the Manonoan looked on the scene, something seemed to fascinate his gaze.

It was Stella.

Save Ned, all were too absorbed to notice this new arrival.

Had they, they would have felt no fear, for the Samoans all look alike, and Tangata wore a white shell round his neck.

Thus they would have taken him, as those who followed, and were similarly adorned, for their friends the Aanas.

Soon Tangata raised his gigantic figure above the rock.

Three of his tribe also appeared. Then they leaped on the sand.

A second after, like a whirlwind, the Manono chief had descended upon the little group.

Hardly had they time to turn—hardly had they paused to wonder whether they came as friends or foes, than the question was determined by Tangata. Like an eagle he swooped upon the girl, raised her in his powerful arms, and bore her back to the rocks.

Stella shrieked in terror.

»Save me, George, save me« she cried.

He did not need her pleading voice to urge him to the effort.

»Artie—Ned!« he cried, as he darted forward. »Help—help! Save her, Faith! Faith seize him!«

Regardless of his size in comparison to the giant's, our hero sprang at the chief, but a blow from one of the savages felled him to the sand.

Not only he, but brave Faith met a similar reception.

Ned, for the sake of appearances, dashed forward and seized the chief as had been arranged.

The next movement would be, he expected, that a savage should grip him by the arm, and drag him off a prisoner.

But, instead of this, Tangata raising his club, struck him down as he had done the rest.

Then he sped back with his men, bore the shrieking girl over the rocks, and disappeared.

Poor Artie had been so terrified at the fate of his companions, that he dared not come within range of those terrible clubs.

Still, no sooner did the Manonoes retreat than he followed.

As they vanished on the one side, Artie crawled up the other.

On reaching the top, to his terror and pain, he saw that the savages with Stella, had got into a canoe which had been waiting, and were rowing rapidly from the island.

As he filled the air with his cries and ran back to the others, he perceived several Aana women and old men hastening to the spot.

Artie went first to George.

The blows had evidently not been intended to be heavy, for the lad was already recovering, and after the application of water, the three came back to consciousness.

Our hero's first words were of Stella, and with tears Artie told all he knew.

His heart was rent with agony and he dashed to the rocks followed by the rest.

He soon saw that Artie's words were correct, for the canoe was disappearing round the neighbouring headland.

»What shall we do?—What can we do!« cried poor George, distractedly. »Oh, if Tahi were only here. I don't care about the fight. I will fetch him. No,« he added, abruptly, »we will get a canoe and pursue.«

This new affliction made them forget for a while even the ship; but as they turned, however, it recurred to them, and they looked in the direction. But the ship was gone.

How keen would have been this disappointment a brief space ago, but now it affected them but slightly, for their thoughts were of Stella.

»We could not leave her,« cried George, »were there a dozen ships.«

»No,« said Artie. »But if the ship comes, would it not help us? I'm sure it would if it were an English one.«

»Oh Artie, that's true. Of course it would. Why didn't it come! It may yet—it may only be tacking. But let's get a canoe.«

Though the Aanas who had assembled could not understand their talk, yet, they had seen enough to quite comprehend what had occurred.

By their gesticulations it was evident they were infuriated at what had happened, for it was a stain upon their good breeding and hospitality.

»No Samoan, no,« ejaculated one, shaking his head emphatically.

»Yes,« persisted George, as vehemently, »yes, Samoan.«

»Not Aanas,« remarked the savage.

»Yes, Aanas,« answered George, by signs showing they had worn the white shell round their necks.

The savage addressed his fellows, who listened, and violently shook their heads,

Then all cried—

»No Aanas—No Aanas.«

They divined our hero's resolve, however, to pursue, and almost as angry as the boy, eagerly moved to the canoes.

Soon, two were pushed off, that in which was George taking the lead.

Ned sat, a white terror on his face, in the second.

He was repentant now, and could not help thinking of poor Stella's terrible position, of which he was the cause, though he tried to fix the blame upon George.

And he looked over his shoulder at the flushed, anxious face of the young fellow in the foremost boat,

»But for him, she would be here,« he muttered. »What if Tangata should speak?«

The idea made him hot and cold—made him, for his own safety, hope that the chief might not be taken.

It did not appear he would be, for when the canoes shot round the headland, not a sign of Tangata's was to be seen.

There was, as far as they could perceive, not a speck on the surface of the water.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE RETURN OF THE WAR PARTY—VICTORY— SEARCH FOR STELLA—DEATH OF TANGATA— STELLA GONE.

Though our hero was very loth to put the canoe back, yet, he saw that it would do no good to keep rowing about, so with a dull pain at his heart, he returned to the Island.

The evening was coming on when the sound of shouts anda hubbub told that the Aanas were returning.

Even the lads could tell by the sound that they had been victorious.

Soon they burst upon the sight; jubilant, exultant.

First came Paunga, surrounded by his warriors, nearly every one of whom bore a gory head upon his spear.

The rest with the women followed.

The chief taking his place with the people about him, one by one the warriors with their trophy, marched before Paunga, to publicly receive his thanks and praise.

This was the proudest moment of a Samoan hero!

First came Tahi.

An Aana carried the head of the chief he had slain before him, while Tahi, flung round his club, threw it in the air, caught it, and orming a warlike dance, shouted—

»Ou te man Tangata! Oute man Tangata![»I have my man! I have my man!«]«

»Toa, toa, toa!« shouted the women— (»Bravo, bravo, bravo.«)

Then Tahi paused before the chief, who praised him for the prowess he had shown.

The young chief listened with a proud, dignified mien, though his form vibrated with happiness.

Then he passed on to make room for the rest.

The lads had stood back, feeling that, however imperative their own affairs were, they had no right to interrupt so important a ceremony as that they were witnessing.

But no sooner had Tahi moved to the side than our hero could not refrain from running to him.

His face showed the Indian that something had happened before he heard his words,

First in consternation, then in indignation, he listened to the recital.

»Missie Stella gone—carried away!« he cried. »An Aana do this! He shall die. Tahi's spear shall pierce his heart. Stay—stay. Wait, Misser George—wait. All Samoa help you.«

Comforted by this assurance, the lads watched the scene.

When the victorious chiefs had passed, the conquered ones appeared, carrying firewood, stones, and bamboo, to show their abject humility.

The stones were emblematical of the material with which an oven is built, the wood represented the fire, the bamboo the sacrificial knife.

The whole signified that the owners merited to be roasted like pigs.

These emblems they laid at the feet of Paunga, who had to decide their fate.

Had he refused to pardon them, they would have been beaten to death with clubs, but Paunga was as generous as his son, and bidding the conquered chiefs arise, he told them to return home.

This clemency was received with shouts of approval.

Then the vanquished, kissing the chief's feet, presented him with mats, bark, cloth, food, and similar property.

No sooner was this ceremony, termed Ifonga, concluded, than Tahi sprang into the circle, and in a warlike attitude began vehemently to address the assembled Samoans.

»I 'spect he's just telling of 'em all about it,« remarked Jack Mil whe, much to his amusement had been reckoned among the chiefs, and had received his share of Paunga's praise for his services, which indeed had in advice been very valuable, and who later, had heard our hero's account of Stella's abduction with the rage of a true British tar.

It was no doubt that he was right, for soon every eye was turned on the English faces.

Clubs and spears were shaken, and several chiefs stepping forth, seemed to take up Tahī's harangue with equal indignation.

Among them even were several of the Manonoes.

All Samoa, indeed, made the punishing this breach of hospitality theirs.

Soon Tahī called George forward, and questioned him.

When he described the Indians as wearing the white shell, they shouted fiercely—

»Aana, Aana!«

Paunga, making a sign for silence, spoke, and the chiefs of Aana were paraded before the lads.

George shook his head.

Then he described the leader of the abducting party, Tahī translating his words.

Hardly had he proceeded half way in his description of the savage's Herculean proportions, than the Manonoes, uttering a shout, cried—

»Tangata, Tangata!«

Ned shivered as he heard the name, and noted the ferocity with which it was uttered.

If Tangata were captured, and confessed!

He prayed he might not be.

»Ah,« cried Tahī, »Tangata—bad chief. He no fight. He cheat, deceive. He carry away Inglis girl. He coward, he no toa.«

The Manono chiefs took up the cry—

»Tangata no toa!«

Then all became confusion.

Paunga gave orders for the whole island to be searched, and a dozen different parties set out.

Tahī formed his own party, with which of course went Ned, George, and Jack.

Ned would have liked to have stopped behind, but he dared not.

All through the night the island was searched, for it was believed that Tangata had landed with his prisoner at one of the bays, but not a trace could be discovered of him or Stella.

Our hero was distracted, while Jack vowed vengeance upon every man if harm came to the young girl.

Morning was breaking, when the several parties came in to announce their ill success.

»Oh Tahī,« cried our hero, to whom the night had been perpetual torture; »is all hope dead, then?«

»No, Misser Geo: Tangata not on island. Tahī have idea — Tangata on other island, where he think none touch him.«

»Do you mean the little island of pines we were on, Tahī!«

»No, that too near Tahī shore,«

Again forming his party, he proceeded to the shore.

Launching three canoes, which were speedily filled, Tahī having in his George, Ned, Artie, and the old sailor shot away in the direction Artie said Tangata had taken.

The rising sun was making the Pacific one surface as it were of shimmering, molten gold, through which the canoes dashed, breaking the tiny waves into thousands of diamond springs with their prows.

The scene was lovely, but none in the canoes heeded it.

As to George and Jack, their eyes were strained towards the horizon, to catch first sight of the island to which Tahī was making.

It was not long before it appeared rising up like a dark speck, then like an immense bouquet of green foliage.

Soon the island was plainly in view, crowned by stately pines, based by broad-leaved tropical plants, full of glorious bloom.

Stopping the canoes, the savages peered into the trees, and, rising in the prow, Tahī burling his spear among the trees, uttering his war-cry.

»Where is the pig Tangata? Let him come forth to his death,« he shouted. »Tangata is a coward. He shall be carried like a pig to the oven. All the women of Aana and Manono shall jeer at him. He shall be a mock for the children. Moso shall consume him. Let him come forth if he dare, or the Aanss shall hunt him and slay him like a pig.«

The contempt, defiance, and menace had the desired effect.

To George's delight and Ned's alarm, Tangata sprang from the pines into view.

Brandishing his club, he hurled insults at those in the canoes.

»Tangata fears no banana-eating Aana. All are pigs. They shall be roasted. Approach, son of a pig. You shall die by my spear.«

The reply was a volley of those weapons.

With most dexterous skill Tangata warded them all off.

Some even he caught in his hand, and, rearing his gigantic figure, he hurled at them a laugh of scorn.

After retreating partly to the protection of the trees, he flung back their with aim and mocking words.

It was evident that the Aanas must at once attack.

Tangata was only to be overcome by numbers.

Tahi, commanding George and his companions to take no coming contest, ordered the canoes the shot forward to the shore.

No sooner did the prows of the three simultaneously on the beach than, eager for renown and the praise of capturing the head of the chief as a trophy, a youth sprang out and darted towards the foe.

Tahi's warning to return came too late.

With one bound Tangata, whose hands were armed with those terrible gauntlets, had caught the youth.

Before the lad could offer resistance, the giant had flung him across his knee, and bending him, broke his back.[This is a fact.]

Throwing the quivering body down, he turned upon another, who, infuriated, was advancing with upraised club.

Swift as light he was upon him, and the fearful gauntlets hooked him fast.

Then Tangata, dragging his victim, stepped back among the pines.

There casting the me on his face, he placed one foot in the of his back, seized the head, and violently bent the poor wretch upward so as to break his spine.

A yell of rage broke from the Aanas, and their spears again darted through the air.

But Tangata seemed to have a charmed life.

Several struck him, but he plucked them forth, flinging them back with words of scorn.

He was like a tiger at bay.

Suddenly Tahi strode in advance, and poised his spear.

Tangata prepared his club to ward off the weapon.

»banana-eating pig,« he shouted.

»Die, boaster,« cried Tahi, as the spear left his hand.

The herculean savage was in the very act of striking the weapon harmless, when his arms were seized from behind, and Tahi's spear plung'd, quivering, deep into his heart.

Tangata dropped back dead without a groan.

Ned uttered a sharp cry.

George and Jack thought it was occasioned by excitement.

It was joy.

There was no one now to tell of the evil he had planned.

On the Aanas rushing forward, they found that those who had caught the Maunono chief from behind were his own followers, who had quarrelled with Tangata for what he had done, and had refused to have anything to do with him.

They now, throwing themselves on the ground, surrendered themselves Tahi's prisoners.

»The white-faced English girl!« cried the Indian. »Speak, or Tahi's spear shall drink your life.«

The Manonoes could not tell him.

When they had discovered Tangata's intent, they had reasoned with him, and then had refused to row the boat.

But his threats to drown the girl if they did not obey, and his mighty strength, had forced them to comply.

On reaching the island, however, he had bidden them go to the other side, and on penalty of their life remain there.

They had done so until night, then they had stolen back purposing to secure the canoe, return to Apolo, and give information of what had occurred.

On reaching the spot, however, they found the canoe had been removed.

At first they had believed Tangata had left the island with the girl, abandoning them, but going a little further they had seen the chief pacing to and fro beneath the pines.

He was fully armed, and not daring to approach, as, on landing, he had captured their weapons, they had crept back to the other side.

There they had remained until aroused by Tahi's war-whoop, when they had hastened to the spot in time to perform the service which has been described.

»But Stella, where is she, Tahi!« cried George, on the above being interpreted into English. »What has happened to her? Where can she be?«

»We find out, Misser George, very soon, All search.«

The island was small, in fact not quite a mile round.

Every inch therefore of it was speedily ransacked, but not a trace of Stella, or the canoe was to be found.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOW TANGATA ASKED STELLA TO BE HIS SQUAW — BTELLA'S STRATAGEM—LIFELESS IN THE CANOE.

On finding herself in the canoe, and that her friends had, as she believed, been killed in trying to effect her rescue, Stella's senses forsook her.

She only recovered when Tangata raised her in his arms.

Looking round she saw that they were being landed on an island.

But not Apolo.

That knowledge nearly deprived her again of consciousness, only her terror was too great.

Grasping her tightly in his strong arms, Tangata gave apparently imperative orders to his three followers, and she saw them move off and disappear among the bushes.

»Why,« she asked herself, »had they gone!«

Raising her voice she pleaded to them for help, but after one dghnee, they hastened on at Tangata's command.

Then the chief, springing into the bush, bore her in an opposite direction.

The poor girl was trembling violently, but her mind grown more collected.

She saw she was helpless, or rather she had no one but herself to rely upon; but suddenly her eyes fell on spears Tangata had taken the rest.

If she could but get one!

Just then the chief stopped and put Stella on the ground.

Swiftly, as Stella's feet touched the grass she sprang forward, caught one of the spears from Tangata, and then leaped back on the defensive.

Grasping the spear, she tried to express by her glance, that she would either use it on him, if he advanced, or on herself.

She did not think if she spoke he would understand her.

The savage's eyes glowed as he regarded the defiant beautiful girl, with her golden hair falling over her shoulders.

To Stella's astonishment he addressed her in her own tongue.

»Why does the white girl raise the spear against Tangata! Tangata no hurt white girl. Tangata love her.«

»Tangata is wicked,« said Stella, »to take me from my friends. If Tangata had been one, he would have left me at Apolo.«

»No, Tangata loves white girl. Her hair is as the sun's rays. Tangata would make her his squaw. He will give her mats, beads. Tangata will not ask for them as with other squaw. He will give white girl all.«

»No, the white girl cannot be Tangata's squaw. She is English, and if Tangata hurts her, English ships will come and fight Manonoes.«

The savage uttered a laugh.

»English not know where white girl is. White girl is Tangata's. She is prisoner. White girl cannot escape.«

He strode towards her as he spoke.

Stella moved further back, and pressed the spear point to her heart.

»If Tangata touch her,« she said, her beautiful eyes dilated with indignation and terror; »white girl will die. White girl is no Samoan woman.«

Surprised, the chief halted.

He saw, savage as he was, that Stella was determined, and he had no wish to see her die.

Her beauty had touched him.

»Why will not white girl listen to Tangata? Tangata great chief, and loves her.«

An idea struck Stella.

She knew to resist the savage long by defiance would be impossible, and resolved upon a stratagem.

»The white girl knows Tangata is a great chief,« she answered. »His love does the white girl honour. But she is English, and she must be wooed. Tangata must woo her as English chief would woo.«

»How English chief woo his squaw?«

»He says he loves her; then he lets English girl have time to think. White girl never answer at once. If so, she is not noble. She is not worthy

a t chief's love. English chief would scorn her—is English chief braver than Manono chief«

Tangata reflected.

The words seemed difficult for him to grasp.

He looked at the girl, and though her heart was trembling, she met his gaze calmly.

»How long English chief give time to think?« he asked.

»Three days, sometimes seven,« she answered; »I ask of Tangata only till the sun sets and rises.«

»Till the sun brings light over the darkness?« queried the savage.

»Yes.«

»Then will white girl be Tangata's squaw?«

»Why not?« answered Stella, evasively; »is the chief really rich? Will he give many mats, many beads?«

»He give all, all he has.«

»That is good. Do not let him anger the white girl, or she will die, and her people will be revenged on Tangata. Let Tangata be her people's friend. It shall be well for him, he shall be rich, rich, Let the white girl think; she is daughter to English chief.«

»She shall think, until dawn,« answered the savage; »where Tangata go?«

»There,« said Stella, pointing to the bush, then with proud contempt as she drew up her slight figure—»Tangata can watch the daughter of a white chief, if he pleases.«

Tangata did not say he would not; he only bent his head and retired.

Stella, though half dead with fear, quietly sat down, keeping however, her hand on the spear.

Though she pretended not to, she kept a sharp watch on Tangata.

He, too, had sat down some little distance off, but where he could plainly see her.

Sometimes getting up he paced to and fro.

At others he came near and peered at her through the bushes.

Stella showed no sign of uneasiness.

Once, seeing him looking, she beckoned and forced herself to say—

»I am hungry. Will Tangata me food?«

The chief instantly departed, and speedily returned with some of the tropical fruits.

The girl thanked him, and seeming to smile with pleasure, picked out some of the finest, and handed them to the chief.

They ate the fruit, as it were, er, the chief breaking a cocoa-nut, that she might drink the milk.

Stella, frightened whether she was doing right, yet feeling she was, compelled herself to converse with the savage.

She asked him several questions about Apolo, and told him about her own land.

When night approached she told Tangata he must go, she was weary.

»To-morrow!« queried the savage.

»To-morrow, Tangata shall have my reply,« she smiled.

When the chief withdrew she saw him crouch among the bushes and watch her.

Stella resolved not to appear to see him, but set about removing his doubts.

Tahi's wife had given the girl a lava-lava, which she had wrapped round her when Tangata had carried her off.

Rising she moved back by the trees, where the drooping ferns formed a kind of caropy.

Shaking out the lava-lava, Stella laid down on the grass, and drew it over her,

She so arranged it that some of the boughs gave it support, while, unobserved she could watch Tangata.

The latter had drawn further off now, and sitting down, seemed to be dozing.

But Stella knew he was watching her even as she was watching him.

Every nerve quivered with suppressed excitement, as the girl waited for the night to carry out her plan.

This was no less than to steal away in the dark, reach the canoe, and put to sea.

George had taught her to row; and she was far readier to face the dangers of the Pacific than Tangata's love.

From him she had learned that the island was deserted, save for their five selves, and hence she was aware that did she once get away, they had no means to pursue.

And so until darkness shut Tangata from her view, she watched and saw that he did not move!

CHAPTER XXXVII.

DRIFTING AWAY.

Stella waited half-an-hour as far as she could judge, and had nearly summoned sufficient courage to put her plan into practice, when to her alarm she heard the savage approach.

Calming her voice, she said—

»What does Tangata want? Is he not a chief and man of honour? Would he have the white girl kill herself?«

»No. Tangata would know that the white chief's daughter is safe.«

»She thanks Tangata. If danger come she will call him; but she is thinking—thinking of Tangata's home.«

»Tangata will call the white girl squaw at dawn; ugh!«

»Why not?«

The savage retired.

Stella could see his form retreat, and then the darkness covered it.

But she knew the light-coloured lava-lava revealed her position to him.

This is what she wished—what she had planned for.

Waiting until the savage must have resumed his place, she determined to hesitate no longer.

No moment could be more fitting, as it was not likely Tangata would visit her again yet.

Noiselessly, with that caution which only such terrible danger can make ible, Stella slid back from under the lava-lava, leaving it hanging on the ferns.

Of course, it fell in as her form quitted it; but that would not be apparent to the savage.

Then creeping, drawing her body along, she glided through the pine trunks.

After a few yards she paused, listening,

There was not a sound, and, advancing, she ventured to rise to her feet, and beheld through the trees, that which filled her soul with joy—

the phosphorescent gleam of the ocean!

She was not as far from it as she had expected, and if she could only reach the shore, she could easily trace her way to the canoe.

The distance was not fifty paces, yet it took her a full quarter of an hour.

She did it at last, however, and in safety.

Then trembling, anxious, she made her way round the tiny shore; for in these islands there is scarcely any ebb and flow of tide.

She reached the canoe at last, and, with trembling hands she loosened the prow, and with all the strength the hope of escape gave, pushed it into the water.

When it was afloat she scrambled in, regardless of getting wet, seized the paddles, dropped their blades silently in the sea, and pulled from the land.

When she had got about fifty yards distance, she knew she could no longer be seen by the savage, and she plied the oars therefore with less caution.

Just then a savage yell came to her through the still night over the waters,

It was from Tangata, who had discovered she had escaped him.

With her heart rapidly beating she rowed quicker, then she burst into a hysterical laugh of triumph.

The savages had no canoe and could not pursue her.

She was safe.

All through the dark night she rowed until exhausted by her exertions, her head drooped forward. The oars fell from her nerveless hands into the sea and floated away.

The canoe was drifted by the tide—whither?

Oh, that morning would come!

When it did the sun shone down on the poor girl, lying unconscious in the bottom of that solitary canoe.

Not an island, even as a speck on the horizon, was to be seen,

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE SHIP—STELLA'S RESCUE—FAREWELL TO TAHI —A BLACK CLOUD—HO FOR ENGLAND.

The alarm of our Crusoes may be imagined when they found that Stella had gone.

Had she been murdered?

This Tahi at once negatived, for had she been, what further need would there have existed for Tangata to have remained on the island?

Would he not have quietly returned to Apolo, to make it appear he had had no hand in what had happened?

»Why did he not do so as it was?« said Jack.

»Because he had no boat,« replied Tahi, »It gone.«

»Where could it have gone« queried George.

When the old sailor slapping his leg cried—

»I see all now, I understand, Mr, Tahi is right, Miss Stella escaped in the canoe.«

The words produced instant relief.

But our hero said quickly—

»But it was so large, How could she row it alone, Jack?«

»Why, lad, there's no knowing what a girl of spirit will or can do, when she's escaping from such a savage brute as the Jim Crow yonder. My only fear is because the night was so awful dark. How would the poor lass know which way to steer? If she started all fair, I suspect she'd soon lose her reckoning,«

»Why we none of us seem long out of one danger before we are in another!« remarked Artie, lugubriously.

Indeed the young boy had been cryin about Stella; he couldn't help it.

Even Ned was moved, though he kept silent.

For the first time something like repentance was stealing into his heart.

»If you are correct, Tahi,« exclaimed George; »and it is certain Stella is not here, she must be yet on the ocean. We may find her, for Heaven,

the night has been a calm one.«

To search the vast surface of the Pacific in the neighbourhood of the islands was the course determined on.

One canoe with the prisoners was despatched back to Apolo, that watch for Stella's canoe might be kept along the coast, and then others might join the search.

The Indian issued the orders, and showed so keen an interest that tears stood in our hero's eyes, and pressing his hand he said—

»Tahi, you are a friend indeed.«

Then they hurried to the two other boats.

Hardly had they got in and pushed off, than a sound came over the waters that made every English heart thrill with a wild delight.

It was the boom of a gun.

Jack Milward gave such a bound that he nearly capsized the canoe.

»A ship, a ship!« he cried; »I don't know many languages, but that was the lips of an English gun speaking, or I'm a Dutchman.«

»A ship, a ship!« echoed the lads. »It must have been the one we saw on the horizon before Stella was carried away.«

»It will help us to find her,« exclaimed our hero; »pull lads, pull!«

Didn't they pull!

All was excitement.

The English hearts beat almost to suffocation.

Were they really to be saved at last?

Were they to see dear old England, home, and friends again?

The gun had sounded from the other side of the island.

Eagerly they shot the canoes round, and then a great cry arose from every English throat.

For in that full morning sunlight they beheld a splendid ship under full canvas—what a lovely sight it was!—bearing down upon them.

Surrendering their oars to the natives, Jack and the three lads standing up, waved their hands and cheered with the whole force of their lungs, while the Aanas grinned as if their heads would come in halves.

The ship had heard and saw them.

Slightly tacking, she changed her course, to meet them.

On she came nearer—nearer.

Now they saw the Union Jack at her mizen, and gave it a cheer.

Our hero thought of the one Stella had made them, and cried with emotion—»Oh, that dear Stella were here at this joyous moment.«

»Never mind, lad,« answered Jack; »they're staunch British hearts on board that boat, I'll warrant, and they'll help us to search this blessed ocean.

Nearer yet came the ship, her bows cleaving the dancing billows, and now they could see people, people with English faces, leaning over the bulwarks watching them.

Presently she was hove to, looking grandly down upon them—ropes were thrown over.

And soon, very soon, feeling they could hug and kiss the tarry ropes, the English boys and Jack were clambering up the side.

»My stars,« cried Jack, as he stamped his

feet once more on a ship's deck, this gives my heart such a twister, that I feel as if I could cry like a woman.«

The officers and passengers, also the crew, had gathered round to look at our Crusoes, wondering—questioning.

How bad they got there? Who were they?

»Oh, it's a long story,« broke in George; »and we thank you so much for eaving us. But there is no time now to tell you anything. We want your help, There is a young lady in great peril—«

He was interrupted by one of the passengers.

He was a tall, handsome, middle-aged man, with dark, pleasant eyes.

Placing his hand kindly on the boy's shoulder, he said—

»You are the young hero, George Merridew. I am sure of that. You are Jack, you are Tahi, you Ned, you Artie, See, I know you all.«

Those he named started in mute surprise.

»You know us, sir,« said George.

»By name — by description. I am Mr. Larivière, Stella's father. This ship I chartered to search for her.«

»Then pray, pray,« cried Artie, »don't delay any longer, sir. Stella is in a canoe alone on the ocean.«

»No, thank Heaven, my dear boy,« answered Mr Larivière; »she was, but is not now. Only an hoar ago we came upon her in the canoe; insensible; and thank Heaven«—he reverently raised his hat—« we saved her. She is now below, poor child, asleep.«

»Stella here!« they cried, then gave a loud »Hip, hip, hurrah.«

»She is below, asleep,« proceeded Mr. Larivière; »but first she told me of you., where you were, and prayed me to fetch you. She would not rest until she knew the ship was under sail for Apolo. Particularly she wished me to thank this fine fellow, Tahi.«

And he held his hand frankly to the Indian.

»Now,« he proceeded, »you must come down into the cabin and tell your adventures.«

All their cares removed by the knowledge that Stella was safe, they gladly descended, and the cabin was pretty full of listeners, while many of the crew crowded round the skylight.

It appeared that on the news of the nonarrival of the »Nevada« and its supposed loss, Mr. Larivière, knowing the numbers of islands that studded the Pacific, refused to surrender hopes of his child's safety.

He resolved to charter a ship and go in search of her.

That very morning they were bearing away from the islands to visit another group, when the look-out had noticed something floating on the surface of the ocean.

Approaching it, they discovered it to be a canoe, apparently abandoned.

Approaching nearer they had sent off a boat, with Mr. Larivière in it, who, to his joy and surprise, had discovered in the canoe his own child, insensible.

Carrying her back to the ship, in which, fortunately was a doctor, they soon restored Stella to consciousness.

Her joy, however, at beholding her father leaning over her, caused her again to faint, but when she came to, and learned all, her instant prayer was that her friends should also be saved.

On being assured this would be seen to, she laid wearily back, and by the doctor's advice, was left to rest.

Having learned this, the boys told their adventures, which occupied them until they reached Apolo.

As they concluded, the doctor, who had left the cabin for a few minutes, returned.

His face was grave.

Mr. Larivière perceived it, and anxiously demanded the cause.

»There is nothing to occasion great anxiety,« answered the doctor; »but Miss Larivière, I regret to say, has brain fever, and It will be advisable to get out of this tropical heat as soon as possible.«

Such news created an effect on all.

Naturally Mr. Larivière desired to start at once, but he felt he could not until he had landed on Apolo and publicly thanked Tahi and the Aanas.

Therefore the boats were lowered, and they put off for the shore.

All the Aanas were assembled to receive them, Paunga in the centre surrounded by his warriors.

Tahi acted as interpreter, and a big ceremony took place, when Mr. Larivière, sending back the boats for a quantity of stuffs, trinkets, and ornaments, presented them to Tahi as the friend of his daughter and her companions.

Then the necessity for their leaving was explained.

Where upon, Paunga ordered the best fruits the island could procure to be sent on board for Stella, with a handsome lava-lava.

After that came the hour of parting.

Our Crusoes could not leave their dear Tahi without considerable emotion.

»Oh, do come too—do—do—Tahi—come to England,« cried Artie.

»No,« smiled the Indian, »Tahi sorry to lose you; but he love his own land as you love yours. Tahi has his wife, his children—and—Tahi is the

chief of his People.«

»You are right, Tahiti,« said our hero, warmly embracing him; »but we will never, never forget you, dear, dear friend.«

They each gave him a remembrance, and he also gave each of them one.

To George he gave his spear.

»Good-bey, sir«, said Jack, grasping his hand. »You are a toad indeed, and a jolly brick. If ever you should be Wapping way, I shall be proud and happy to act as your host.«

More speeches were made, for they seemed unable to tear themselves away.

But the remembrance of Stella urged them, and finally they got into the boats.

But they did not cease then waving their adieux and cheering.

No, not even until the ship set sail and carried them out of sight and hearing.

Before that, however, the gun fired a salute, and the men manned the shrouds in honour to the island.

The Crusoes were really on their way to England at last.

Our hero, turning, found Mr. Larivière had gone below, but in a very short space he came again on deck.

He looked very troubled.

»How is Miss Larivière, sir?« asked our hero, eagerly.

»I grieve to say, my young friend,« answered the father, »that within the last half-hour the fever has taken a most unfavourable turn, and—and the doctor can not be answerable for the result.«

Ned turned away.

A sob burst from him.

At this supreme moment of happiness Stella was suffering, might be dying, and he was the cause.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

DEATH'S SHADOW — NED'S REPENTANCE — HOMEWARD BOUND—»MY SON!«

It was long before the delirium to which Stella had succumbed left her.

During this period a cloud hung over the ship »Esperance.«

The joy our Crusoes would have felt in their return to England was sadly damped by their fair companion's danger.

Only Faith was admitted to the sick room besides Mr. Larivière and the doctor.

He would lie at the foot of the bed, his nose between his paws and his beautiful eyes saddened.

He seemed aware, as were they all, that Stella's little hand could no longer caress his glossy coat, and that he must make no noise, for he never raised his voice even to a growl within the girl's hearing.

Mr. Larivière was oppressed with anxiety, and, as may well be supposed, the lads were hardly less so.

All the crew sympathised, for it was known the only hope for Stella was to get into the cooler latitudes.

It was not, indeed, until the »Esperance« had doubled Cape Horn that it was announced Stella had come back to her senses,

»Will she live?« asked our hero of Mr. Larivière, eagerly, as he heard the news.

The doctor cannot yet say,« was the answer. »He states that after what my darling had already gone through, the shock of being captured by Tangata has so seriously affected her nervous system that, though the fever has abated, she may prove too weak to rally.«

And so days sped on.

The »Esperance« cruised about, not caring to enter the tropics.

One morning, turning her head, Stella said to her father, who was seated in the cabin with her—

»Papa, I want to see Ned Conyers.«

»Why my love?« interrogated her parent surprised.

»Only because I wish to,« she smiled. »You will not refuse me?«

»Refuse you? My love, I could refuse you nothing,« said Mr. Larivière, kissing her pale cheek. »I'll fetch the lad.«

»First, papa, tell me, is it not possible I may die? Do not cry, dearest papa. I feel so weak that I fancy I may never recover, and I do so wish to know.«

Mastering his emotion, Mr. Larivière answered—

»My Stella, you have been very ill; but while there is life there is hope.«

»Ah, do I not know it? Trust me, papa. I have no fear of death. If Heaven thinks it best I should go, I will not complain. And it is likely Heaven will think it best, is it not?«

»My child, we are in Heaven's hands.«

»Yes, papa; that is enough. Now please send Ned. Let him come in alone.«

Quitting the cabin, Mr. Larivière went in search of Ned.

He found him with the other two on deck and when he stated Stella's request the lad's face glowed with delight.

He could not refrain from casting a triumphant glance at our hero,

Poor George looked as he felt, surprised.

A bitter pang shot through his heart.

Even now, there was more grieved disappointment in the sensation than jealousy.

But there was envy too (he could not help it) in his eyes as he watched Ned descend the stairs, and disappear into Stella's cabin.

He had never felt more wretched in his life.

Tears even sprang to his eyes, and going to the side he leaned over, that they should not seen.

He knew he loved Stella better than any one else on earth, but it seemed that she did not love him.

Ah, if our hero could only have known what was passing on the other side of that cabin-door.

The reader must be permitted to.

On its closing upon Ned, and his finding himself alone with Stella, who, supported by pillows, sat with her lovely hair cut to short golden curls around her pretty head, he hastened towards her couch, saying—

»Oh Stella, I am so, so glad you are better!«

But the girl raising her white thin hand checked him.

»Ned, I am not better,« she said, with a glance of sad reproach. »It is possible, papa and the doctor say, that I may die.«

»Oh Stella!« and he began to tremble.

»Yes, so in case I should, I wanted to see you Ned; to say, knowing you were aware who was the cause of my illness—that—I forgive you.«

And she held out her little hand.

»Stella!« cried Ned, as pale as a ghost, and overwhelmed by conscious guilt.

»Yes, during the night I was in Tangata's power, he told me all,« she answered. »So, I wish to say I forgive you. I should not like to die at enmity with anyone.«

The boy, uttering a cry, dropped on his knees, covering his face with his hands.

»Oh Stella, I never meant that you should have been hurt—never—never.«

»I know, Tangata told me. Told me how he had deceived you. »But way, Ned, did you act so at all?«

»Because— because,« he blurted forth; »I was jealous of Merridew. He took the lead in everything, and I—I wanted to do you a service too.«

»An, see to what jealousy has led you, Ned, and brought me,« sighed the girl, »I may never see England. The sea may be my grave.«

»Oh Stella, don't talk like that: you must—you shall live, Oh,« and Ned wrung his hands, »what can I do for you?«

»To cure me, nothing!« answered Stella, gently. »But you can do much to make me happy.

»What?« he asked, eagerly.

»Curb your temper, pray to be good, and, oh, do not be jealous of others. Try always to do that which is right and best; and, while you will

then learn what true happiness is, you will have your good qualities also spoken of and praised even as George's.«

»Do you think so, Stella?«

»I am sure. In this world let us always think the kindest of everyone, not the worst.«

»I will try Stella, indeed I will!« said the boy, bowing down his face on the coverlet.

»Oh, thank you, Ned, thank you so much for that promise!« cried the sick girl, in delight.

»And you will forgive me, Stella?«

»I had done so before you came in!«

»And, and,« proceeded Ned; »you will live for—for my sake—you will not let your death rest on my conscience for ever?«

»Oh, poor Ned,« said the girl, resting her wasted hand on his; »that would be terrible. Oh, no—no! Oh, I do pray now to live. I never thought of that. Poor—poor Ned, I will try to live, for your sake.«

The tears were rolling down her cheeks.

She was shaken by a violent emotion, caused by a Christian pity for the lad.

»Heaven, oh kind Heaven,« she cried, prayerfully; »or this cause let me live.«

Ned raising his eyes at the plaintive accents, saw the girl's face grow as pale as death, her eyes close and her head fall on her shoulder.

Alarmed, fearful she was dying he sprang up, and rushed to the door for assistance.

Then as Mr. Larivière ran in with the doctor, he went into the other cabin.

Here George found him five minutes later, kneeling on the ground, his face buried on one of the couches, sobbing as if his heart would break.

Instantly forgetting all jealousy in compassion for the other's suffering he approached and placed his hand on his shoulder.

»What is it, Ned!« he asked, »What is the matter?«

»Oh Merridew,« answered the boy; »she is an angel. That's just what she is, and if she could ever care for me, which she couldn't, I'm not

worthy of her. God bless her, and let her live.«

And Ned did what he had never sincerely done since he had quitted his mother's knee, prayed with all the full intensity of his heart

Did Heaven hear his and Stella's supplication?

Surely yes, for from that hour the girl's health began to improve.

Soon she was able to come on deck, when the »Esperance« turned her bows homeward, and they were really bounding across the waves to England at last.

The conclusion of that voyage was very joyous to every one.

But what pen can describe our Crusoes and Jack Milward's delight when they sighted Lizard Point, and sailed up the Channel?

On reaching Plymouth our voyagers for Mr. Larivière persisted in putting George on shore, for his mother's sake.

»I think, my dear boy,« he said, »that every moment you delay, is a moment more of grief to her that you may make happy.«

Our hero did not need pressing.

Indeed his heart craved to see his sweet kind mother, and dear old Amble-side.

Besides, the parting was not to be for long, as Mr. Larivière promised himself to visit Amble-side in a few days, assured, he added smiling, that the change would do Stella good.

»You are right, papa,« laughed his daughter. »I shall settle down nowhere until I have made the acquaintance of Mrs. Merridew.«

So George shook hands, saying farewell for a short time to his friends, sprang into the boat that had been lowered, and was rowed ashore.

At Plymouth he took the first train to the Junction, where he booked on to Amble-side, for a railway went right to the place now, so he would have no need of Dick's waggon, though much he hoped to see the kindly old fellow himself.

It was near sunset when he walked up the well-known country road, with Faith trotting at his heels.

That is, when the sagacious animal was not snuffing first at this side then that of the wayside grass, for he knew the place quite as well as George.

»Why,« cried the latter, joyously, half aloud, »It hasn't changed a bit. There's the inn, and the trough for the horses. There's Farmer Spikins, and there's the pretty cottage and garden of my dear old nurse.«

As that came in sight, it seemed like home, indeed, and he increased his to a run.

Halting, however, as he reached the boundary hedge, he reflected.

»But I must be careful. They all think me dead, so if I come suddenly upon the poor old woman, the shock might kill her.«

The cottage-door was closed, the window curtain partly drawn.

»Perhaps she is out,« he reflected; »I'll just take a peep in and see.«

Softly opening the gate he entered the garden, and crept to the cottage.

To reach the window he had to pass the door, and as he did so the latter was pulled wide, and his old nurse appeared at it.

She had on her arm a market basket, and on her nose her spectacles, which no sooner turned in the direction of our hero, than uttering aloud shriek, she dropped in a heap, basket and all, on the floor.

George sprang to her, and exclaimed, as he helped her finally to rise, and sit on a chair-

»Be calm, dear nurse. Yes, yes, it is I. Of course you thought me dead, drowned. But I wasn't you see. I've been wrecked on an island like Robinson Crusoe. There, you are better now. Don't cry.«

»Oh, I can't help it, Master George. Heaven bless this day,« exclaimed the old woman, swaying her body backwards and forwards, then flinging her arms about his neck. »Oh, yes; dear, dear me! It is you, you yourself my own brave boy, who went to win a fortune for your sweet mother, and have come back.«

»Not with the fortune, nurse,« laughed our hero; »but I've heaps to tell you when I've seen mother. How is she, nurse?«

»Not any great things, my dear boy; oh Heaven bless your face! How could she be? But she never would believe in your death. No, that she wouldn't. She said Heaven had told her you would come back to her, and not a morsel of crape would she put on.«

»I am glad of that; but, dear nurse, I want you to go up and break the news to her.«

»That will I, Master George. But what's that?«

»Faith, I fear, capering about your flowers, nurse. He's so glad to get home, you see.«

But before the name had escaped his lips, a lady, with extended arms, rushed into the cottage.

»I knew it—I knew it!« she exclaimed; »did I not tell you so? He was not dead! He would come back, I knew it, my boy—my darling boy!«

And the mother and son were in each other's arms.

The old nurse clapped her hands, and Faith capered about the three as if he knew well the secret joy of their hearts.

The delight of Mrs. Merridew and George at their reunion was great indeed.

Neither cared, nor even thought that our hero had returned poorer than he had started. They were more content at possessing each other than if they had had worlds of wealth.

Clasping her dear boy's hand in hers, eagerly, breathlessly, the mother listened to his marvellous adventures.

At times her gentle heart thrilled with horror, though at others she smiled.

She wished she had seen Tahi, to thank him; but she had the chance of seeing Ned, Artie, and Jack, and she was resolved that she would.

Above all, she must know Stella personally, for she loved her already.

So the hours slipped away until an hour after midnight was struck by the clock.

»Good gracious, how late!« exclaimed Mrs. Merridew, smiling, »How quickly time has passed, George. But hark!« she added, abruptly; »what noise is that?«

The silence of quiet Amble-side had been suddenly broken—a dull murmuring sound like the distant roll of summer thunder sweeping through the air.

Unlike thunder the sound which George and his mother heard did not die away.

Our hero springing to the window, threw it wide open.

Then the sound became more distinct, and he knew that it was composed of voices and the tramp of feet.

Soon some labourers ran past the garden gate.

»What's the matter?« called George.

»Graatholm 'All's a fire,« was the response shouted back.

»Grantholm Hall?« repeated our hero, to his mother; »why, that's Sir John Randail's?«

»Yes, my boy,« answered Mrs. Merridew, a trifle bitterly; »and I feel, should haws now been yours, as it ought to have been your dear father's, if every one had had their rights.«

»Oh, nonsense, mother dear,« laughed George; »who lives there now«

»Mr. Harmon.«

»What, not the owner?«

»The owner? No, George, he's as rich already as he can be—an old bachelor. He doesn't care about the hall a bit, and lets Mr. Harmon live there merely for keeping the place in order.«

The shouts had now increased.

The cry, »Fire, fire!« rent the still night air.

People were hurrying past.

»Mother,« said our hero, »never mind want Harmon's done, if evil to us or no. At such a moment every hand who can pass a bucket is useful. I will go. I shouldn't like the old place to be burnt. Think how often as a little chap have played there!«

»You're a good brave boy;« exclaimed Mrs. Merridew, warmly embracing him. »Go, I would never prevent your performing a Christian action. Only, my dear, do not get in danger.«

Our hero, fondly kissing her, ran off, and had soon joined the others proceeding swiftly up the country road to the hall.

When it came in sight, it was seen that the entire left wing was in a blaze.

Flames were bursting from many of the windows.

Masses of heavy black smoke were rushing into the lurid heavens.

The carriage gates had been flung wide, and darting through with the rest, our hero had in a few seconds joined the crowd congregated on the lawn before the flaming building.

In the open space under the walls, the little country engine was hard at work.

A cordon of men with willing hands were passing the buckets.

But it was soon apparent that the supply of water was not sufficient to save the wing, though it might check the fire's progress.

Then the question passed quickly round.

»Are all the people out?«

»Is any one in the left wing!«

The half-glad servants were interrogated as to where Mr. Harmon was.

The question was soon awfully answered.

Still in the burning building!

Impossible!

He must have heard the noise, the cries.

They could not have failed to arouse him from sleep, however sound.

»No!« gasped his pale, terrified confidential servant, »For the last few months, since Mr. Harmon has been ill, and so depressed like, he always has taken opiates before he went to bed!«

»Then,« said a fireman; »he's done for. I fear we can't help him.«:

»At least an effort might be made?« cried George, who had thrust his way to the front.

»Right you are,« said the fireman. »Which is his window?«

Eagerly it was pointed out.

The fire had not reached it, though smoke and flame were darting out beneath,

The blind remained lowered.

»He can't be there?« said the fireman.

»He is, he is!« cried the valet.

Taking up a stone, the fireman flung it at the window.

The broken glass fell with a crash.

Yet no sign.

»I think we are losing valuable time,« broke in our hero impatiently.
»Why not place the ladder, and go up and see? Soon the flames beneath will prevent us.«

»That's true—hurrah!« shouted the crowd.

»It isn't them as has got to go up,« said the fireman, beneath his breath.

The ladder, however, was placed.

It just reached the window.

But the flames beneath darted about it like forked tongues.

Nevertheless the fireman made the attempt: once, twice, thrice,

But, onee, twice, thrice, he was beaten back.

It's impossible!« he exclaimed.

And with a quivering shudder, the crowd consented.

But our hero was not of the same opinion.

He determined Mr. Harmon should be saved.

His life on the island had taught him how much better and valuable deeds are than words.

Having procured a long rope, he rapidly twisted it round his body.

Then as the fireman was beaten back for the third time, he sprang forward, before anyone could dime his intent, and darted up the ladder.

When the flames rushed round him he held his breath, and, aware he was going perhaps to save a fellow-being, he pressed swiftly on.

He was past the flames, scorched, burnt, but they were beneath.

The crowd shouted in a storm of applause.

They were mad, wild, excited enthusiasm.

Their cries of encouragement cheered the boy, and he sprang on.

Soon he had reached the window, flung it wide, and disappeared within the chamber.

It was as light as day from the fire, and he beheld at once Mr. Harmon.

He was half dressed, and was staggering about the room like's drunken man.

George saw by his vague sightless eyes that he was still under the influence of the opiate, and knew not what he was doing, though he kept gasping feebly—

»What is it? Save me—save me!«

»What is it? Save me—save me!« Don't fear,« said our hero, taking his arm. »It's all right, sir. You shall be saved! Only make haste down the ladder.«

Mr. Harmon seized hold of our hero tightly.

»Yes, yes. I'll do what you please. Save me—save me! How hot the floor is.«

It was indeed; the carpet was shrivelling, and the smoke was gushing through.

Quickly our hero dragged his companion to the window.

Their appearance was greeted by vociferous shouts and hurrahs.

»Now get on the ladder, sir. Quick—quick! Put your hand here, your foot there. Be steady.«

The air had revived Mr. Harmon, but George saw he was yet so stupefied that directly he let go of him he would fall.

Rapidly he placed a rope about the wretched man, under his arms.

Then he placed him on the ladder, bidding him descend.

Our hero gave him a push, and then, while he kept the rope steady in its, the steward shot down swiftly but safely through the flames, to the ground, where hands were ready to seize him.

The cheers were louder than ever, and then came an intense, eager pause.

Would the brave rescuer of another save himself?

Getting out of the window, George sat astride the ladder, and grasped it like a ship's mast.

He did not notice how the ladder bent, but slid swiftly down, when as he reached the flames, there was a snap, the ladder gave way beneath him, and he fell.

He was conscious of a violent concussion against the earth, and then he remembered no more.

CHAPTER XL.

THE REWARD OF A BRAVE ACTION—THE WILL FOUND—OLD FRIENDS AT THE HALL—FAREWELL.

George's injuries seemed but slight to him after the many perils he had gone through; indeed, it was not the first time that he had escaped being roasted alive.

»It seems pretty certain, mother,« he laughed, »that I must be born to be hanged, for I am not, it seems, to be drowned or burnt.«

»I trust, my brave boy, that you will suffer neither,« said Mrs. Merridew, »but live to a good old age, and die in your age like a Christian should. That you are a Christian is sure, for you have returned good for evil.«

»How, mother I«

»By saving Mr. Harmon, George, who was your father's enemy, therefore yours.«

»Oh, mother, that is surmise. Let us hope it was not so. But how is he?«

»Dying.«

»Dying? Poor fellow. Was he then burnt?«

»Not burnt; but the doctor says he has long been in ill health, and the shock has killed him. He lies almost like one paralysed, only he is quite sensible, and all he asks, my dear, is to see you, his preserver, when you are better-«

»Better,« cried George, springing up; »mother, dear, I'm well enough now. What are a few bruises and burns to the healthy?«

»Ah, but, my darling boy, wait.«

»Mother,« said George gravely, »there is one thing that never will wait, that is death. You say Mr. Harmon is dying. If I do not go at once, I may never see him, and you say he wants me. I should never forgive myself if I thought of my own trifling suffering now.«

»Heaven bless you, George. You teach me a lesson,« exclaimed Mrs. Merridew, embracing him.

Our hero, dressing hastily, repaired as quickly as he could to the neighbour's house to which the steward had been conveyed.

He lay on his back breathing with difficulty, but his eyes brightened with joy as George entered, and he cried—

»Ah, you have come at last. You are not hurt, praise Heaven. Come here, George Merridew, you have saved me from a horrible death, though die I must. Yet you risked your life for mine, and I cannot yield my soul into its Maker's hands without obtaining your pardon.«

»My pardon, Mr. Harmon! I have nothing to forgive.«

»Yes, you have, far more than you think, for you are the son of one whom I most grievously wronged.«

»My father!« said George, recalling his mother and Dick the waggoner's words.

»Yes; but do not interrupt. You may tell by my voice getting feebler and feebler, that have no time to waste.«

He paused a second, then motioned the doctor and the others in the room to approach.

»I want all to hear that they may be witnesses; and all of you knew Mr. Merridew and Sir John Randall? Well, Sir John Randall quarrelled, as you are aware, with Mr. Merridew on my account, and tore up a will in which he had left him five thousand pounds, and made no other, so that he might die intestate, and his next heir inherit. You know this?«

»Yes« answered the doctor for the rest.

»Well, then came the bank failure, and flight of the swindling directors, when Mr. Merridew bravely faced the trouble, and gave up every farthing he possessed to the defrauded creditors.

»They so pleased old Sir John that that very same day he made a will leaving everything he possessed to Mr. Merridew, saying, so honest a man deserved a handsome reward. He was eccentric in his ways, and he was arranging a secret surprise for his old friend, to assist him out of his difficulties, when he was seized by a fit and died.

»Aware that nobody knew about the will but myself, and hating Mr. Merridew for what he had said against me, I determined that he should never learn of its existence.

»Yet I didn't like to destroy it, in case Sir John Randall's successor should treat me shabbily; when I should have pretended to find it, and get a large reward from Mr. Merridew.«

»So you hid it?« broke in the doctor.

»I did!«

»Where!«

»In the old cabinet in my bedroom. If you open the left-hand second drawer, you will see at the far corner a mark like a piece of worm-eaten wood. When you press it, however, the false back will fall out. The will is behind.«

Mr. Harmon spoke the last words almost inarticulately.

The doctor hastened to give him a restorative.

After he had swallowed it, he said, extending his hand to George—

»Can you forgive me?«

Our hero pressed his hand.

»Yes, Mr. Harmon,« he replied. »May Heaven forgive you as sincerely as I do.«

»Thanks, thanks, Now I can die in peace.

His relaxed, and he turned his face to the wall.

The doctor motioned every one but the nurse to leave the room.

A quarter of an hour later he came out.

»It is all over,« he said. »At least, Mr. Merridew, you have enabled the unfortunate man to die comparatively happy. I hope your reward is to come. What say you, shall we go and see what chance there is of finding this self-same cabinet?«

»I am all impatience to do so, sir!«

»So am I,« laughed the good-natured doctor. »It's quite a romance. Let's be off.«

»Don't,« he added, abruptly, as they were proceeding to the hall; »don't be too sanguine, my dear boy. The entire flooring Mr. Harmon's bed-chamber I know fell in, and old furniture burns like tinder.«

»At times,« replied George; »but if it's of old oak it doesn't. I not break my heart, though, if it be gone. Those who are young are often the

better for having to make their way in the world. I only wish for this money for my mother's sake.«

»Well and bravely spoken, lad,« cried the doctor; »and I heartily trust the will may be found intact, as I see riches will not spoil you. But mercy on me, what a crowd!«

Indeed it was.

Already Mr. Harmon's confession had got whispered abroad, and the people who »always knew Sir John Randall had left such a will,« were collecting to watch the search.

There was the steward, Mr. Clapshaw, and Dick the waggoner.

And George's old nurse had managed to borrow a neighbour's arm, that she might be on the spot to congratulate her dear boy.

Of course none but the workmen of the salvage corps were allowed to help, but they hearing the case, speedily set to removing the heap of charred rubbish, under the doctor's direction.

The floor of Mr. Harmon's bedroom had been the last to fall in before the fire was got under, which gave the searchers hope of success.

But nearly an hour they worked. covered with dust, before they came upon any sign of the cabinet.

They had begun to fear it had been calcined into an unrecognisable heap, when the doctor, who through attending Mr. Harmon knew it well, gave a cry.

»Here it is! here it is! burnt, and blistered and wet, but the drawers seem perfect. Lend a hand, mates, lend a hand.«

With one or two heaves the charred remains of the old oak cabinet was raised into view.

George, unable to contain his impatience, caught the left-hand drawer and pulled it open.

It dropped to pieces in his grasp, and a folded parchment, slightly shrivelled, fell into his hands.

There was still legible writing upon it.

Eagerly the doctor leaned over the boy's shoulder to read.

»The last will and testament of Sir John Randall,« he cried aloud, »It is found; it is found!«

A cheer so loud and long that it might almost have been heard to the end of the county responded, and our hero, with a swelling heart, knew that he held that which made the land he stood upon his own.

To describe the congratulations with were showered upon him would be useless.

They were as sincere as hearty, but were so many and so long, that our hero was finally glad to escape to his quiet home with his delighted mother.

The next day they wrote to inform Sir John Randall's heir of what had occurred.

In due course a letter came in reply, stating that the writer was not so much surprised at hearing of the existence of a will as he had been on learning from Harmon there had been none made, as he knew that his relative, Sir John, had not intended anything save his title to be left to an old bachelor, who already had more than he could spend, which made the bequest like sending to Newcastle.

In conclusion, he wished the new heir every happiness in his estate.

Directly it was discovered there was to be no law-suit about the matter, George set workmen to rebuild the burnt wing.

He was very anxious to get it done, for secret reasons of his own,
Some said because he wanted to give a grand to his friends.

But George laughingly remarked he thought there had been house-warming enough for one season.

Certain it is, he kept the men working double time, so that six weeks later all the outside looked quite itself again, when George, as he stood on the terrace one afternoon, spied a carriage driving swiftly up the avenue.

His heart gave a big jump and he thought—

»No, it can't be.«

Then he caught sight of a sturdy figure, with an honest, bronzed, old face, seated in the rumble, and cried—

It is—it is dear old Jack! I can't be mistaken.«

Swiftly he ran to the steps, at which the carriage had drawn up, reaching them in time to help Stella to alight,

What a lot of hand-shaking and congratulations there were!

»I am here too, Master George,« said Jack Milward, as he swung himself down. »Mr. Larivière would insist upon my coming.«

»And by so doing has earned my deep gratitude,« said our hero, wringing the old tar's hand, »Ah, dear old Jack, I will not let you go again in a hurry.«

»Oh, but I must, sir; I'm due at my ship this day.«

»Never!« laughed George, »You must give the skipper warning.«

»And get another situation?«

»No, for it's already got. I'm building a yacht, Jack, and I want you to superintend the work, and afterwards to be its skipper.«

»What, me! Mr, George!«

»Yes, you, Jack, Do you object!«

»No; is it likely? Me a skipper. Hurrah! Well, sir, you're true blue and British born to the back bone. A yacht now. Well,« with a very loud wink, »I fancy I know who'll christen of her.«

»Miss Larivière, if she will do it that honour,« said George; »but you haven't asked its name, Jack.«

»Lor', as if there's any reason to do that, sir,« replied the tar, with a hitch at his waistband and another wink. »Them niggers over there didn't put my eyes out.«

»I shall be very happy and proud to christen the yacht, I'm sure,« smiled Stella.

»And can you guess its name, miss?« grinned Jack.

»No,« and she shook her pretty head, »but I know the name I should like best.«

»No,« and she r pretty »but I know the name I should like best.«

»What is that, dear Stella?™ said George, eagerly. »You shall name as well as christen it.«

»I meant ›Tahik.«

»Hurrah!« shouted Jack, his hat flying up the air.

»Hurrah!« echoed our hero, ›Tahik it shall be.«

And Tahik it was,

By this time Mrs. Merridew had come out, and George introduced his three friends.

She was charmed with Stella, upon whom she no sooner looked than she loved.

»Bat how is it we find you in so grand a place!« smiled Mr. Larivière, »They directed us here from the village.«

»It's a long story, sir,« answered our hero, »and as I'm sure all must need refreshment, I'll tell you while we are at luncheon; so, Jack, you must join us.«

»Lor', I, Master George?«

»Why, not?« laughed Stella, »I am sure it will not be the first time by many we have dined together.«

»That's true, miss; so for this once I'll consent to sit in respectable society.«

Not only was it respectable, but the happiest society that could be.

Mr. Larivière congratulated George on his acquisition of wealth, while Stella and Jack applauded him for his bravery in saving Mr. Harmon; at last our hero managed to creep away with Stella to show her the hall, with which she was delighted.

»It is beautiful; it is delightful I« she kept exclaiming. »What a splendid view! Oh, George, I am so happy it is yours! And, oh,« with a clap of her hands, »what a lovely conservatory! How pleased you must be!«

»There is only one thing that would make me more so,« said our hero, drawing nearer.

»What is that?« she inquired, looking up with raised brows.

»That one day, dear Stella,« he answered, taking her hand, »you will consent to become its mistress.«

A vivid blush dyed her pretty face, and averting her face she said faintly—

»Oh George, do—do you really mean that?«

»Yes, dearest Stella; I love you. Can you, do you think you could ever care for me?«

»Care for you, George! I never could honour and respect any one as I do you.«

»Ah, Stella, I want more than respect. Can you love me?«

She paused.

Then she lowered her face a little more as she whispered—

»Yes, dear George, I love you.«

Need our story be prolonged further than to say, not only did George help Artie on, so that he was classed as a first-class midshipman in a first-class berth, but hearing that temporary reverses had overcome Ned's father, he aided Ned on in the world also.

Once they all met at the hall, then each went their way in the world; but Jack, our hero, and Faith were never separated on earth.

Unlike them, however, we and our young readers must part.

The curtain must fold upon our story.

We put down our pen, as we trust our readers will these final pages with regret.

Nevertheless, we hope that even in the future they will keep a kind remembrance in their hearts for the **THREE BOY CRUSOES**.

[THE END.]

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