

G. A. HENTY



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G. A. Henty

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Chapter 1: The Wreck on the Devon Coast.

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It was a Stormy morning in the month of May, 1572; and the fishermen of the little village of Westport, situate about five miles from Plymouth, clustered in the public house of the place; and discussed, not the storm, for that was a common topic, but the fact that Master Francis Drake, whose ships lay now at Plymouth, was visiting the Squire of Treadwood, had passed through the village over night, and might go through it again, today. There was not one of the hardy fishermen there but would gladly have joined Drake's expedition, for marvellous tales had been told of the great booty which he, and other well-known captains, had already obtained from the Dons on the Spanish Main. The number, however, who could go was limited, and even of these the seafaring men were but a small proportion; for in those days, although a certain number of sailors were required to trim the sails and navigate the ship, the strength of the company were the fighting men, who were soldiers by trade, and fought on board ship as if on land.

Captain Drake was accompanied by many men of good Devon blood, for that county was then ahead of all England in its enterprise, and its seamanship; and no captain of name or repute ever had any difficulty in getting together a band of adventurers, from the sturdy population of her shores.

"I went over myself, last week," said a finely-built young sailor, "and I prayed the captain, on my knees, to take me

on board; but he said the tale had been full, long ago; and that so many were the applicants that Master Drake and himself had sworn a great oath, that they would take none beyond those already engaged."

"Aye! I would have gone myself," said a grizzly, weatherbeaten old sailor, "if they would have had me. There was Will Trelawney, who went on such another expedition as this, and came back with more bags of Spanish dollars than he could carry. Truly they are a gold mine, these Western seas; but even better than getting gold is the thrashing of those haughty Spaniards, who seem to look upon themselves as gods, and on all others as fit only to clean their worships' boots."

"They cannot fight neither, can they?" asked a young sailor.

"They can fight, boy, and have fought as well as we could; but, somehow, they cannot stand against us, in those seas. Whether it is that the curse of the poor natives, whom they kill, enslave, and ill treat in every way, rises against them, and takes away their courage and their nerve; but certain is it that, when our little craft lay alongside their big galleons, fight as they will, the battle is as good as over. Nothing less than four to one, at the very least, has any chance against our buccaneers."

"They ill treat those that fall into their hands, do they not?"

"Ay, do they!" said the old sailor. "They tear off their flesh with hot pincers, wrench out their nails, and play all sorts of devil's games; and then, at last, they burn what is left of them in the marketplaces. I have heard tell of fearsome tales, lad; but the Spaniards outwit themselves. Were our men to have fair treatment as prisoners of war, it may be that the Spaniards would often be able to hold their own

against us; but the knowledge that, if we are taken, this horrible fate is certain to be ours, makes our men fight with a desperate fury; and never to give in, as long as one is left. This it is that accounts for the wonderful victories which we have gained there. He would be a coward, indeed, who would not fight with thumbscrews and a bonfire behind him."

"It is said that the queen and her ministers favor, though not openly, these adventures."

"She cannot do it openly," said the old man, "for here in Europe we are at peace with Spain--worse luck."

"How is it, then, that if we are at peace here, we can be at war in the Indian Seas?"

"That is more than I can tell thee, lad. I guess the queen's writ runs not so far as that; and while her majesty's commands must be obeyed, and the Spanish flag suffered to pass unchallenged, on these seas; on the Spanish main there are none to keep the peace, and the Don and the Englishman go at each other's throats, as a thing of nature."

"The storm is rising, methinks. It is not often I have heard the wind howl more loudly. It is well that the adventurers have not yet started. It would be bad for any craft caught in the Channel, today."

As he spoke, he looked from the casement. Several people were seen hurrying towards the beach.

"Something is the matter, lads; maybe a ship is driving on the rocks, even now."

Seizing their hats and cloaks, the party sallied out, and hurried down to the shore. There they saw a large ship, driving in before the wind into the bay. She was making every effort that seamanship could suggest, to beat clear of the head; but the sailors saw, at once, that her case was hopeless.

"She will go on the Black Shoal, to a certainty," the old sailor said; "and then, may God have mercy on their souls."

"Can we do nothing to help them?" a woman standing near asked.

"No, no," the sailor said; "we could not launch a boat, in the teeth of this tremendous sea. All we can do is to look out, and throw a line to any who may be washed ashore, on a spar, when she goes to pieces."

Presently a group of men, whose dress belonged to the upper class, moved down through the street to the beach.

"Aye! there is Mr. Trevelyan," said the sailor, "and the gentleman beside him is Captain Drake, himself."

The group moved on to where the fishermen were standing.

"Is there no hope," they asked, "of helping the ship?"

The seamen shook their heads.

"You will see for yourself, Master Drake, that no boat could live in such a sea as this."

"It could not put out from here," the Captain said; "but if they could lower one from the ship, it might live until it got into the breakers."

"Aye, aye," said a sailor; "but there is no lowering a boat from a ship which has begun to beat on the Black Shoal."

"Another minute and she will strike," the old sailor said.

All gazed intently at the ship. The whole population of the village were now on the shore, and were eager to render any assistance, if it were possible. In another minute or two, a general cry announced that the ship had struck. Rising high on a wave, she came down with a force which caused her mainmast at once to go over the side. Another lift on the next sea and then, high and fast, she was jammed on the rocks of the Black Shoal. The distance from shore was but

small, not more than three hundred yards, and the shouts of the sailors on board could be heard in the storm.

"Why does not one of them jump over, with a rope?" Captain Drake said, impatiently. "Are the men all cowards, or can none of them swim? It would be easy to swim from that ship to the shore, while it is next to impossible for anyone to make his way out, through these breakers.

"Is there no one who can reach her from here?" he said, looking round.

"No one among us, your honor," the old sailor said. "Few here can keep themselves up in the water, in a calm sea; but if man or boy could swim through that surf, it is the lad who is just coming down from behind us. The Otter, as we call him, for he seems to be able to live, in water, as well as on land."

The lad of whom they were speaking was a bright-faced boy, of some fifteen years of age. He was squarely built, and his dress differed a little from that of the fisher lads standing on the beach.

"Who is he?" asked Captain Drake.

"He is the son of the schoolmaster here, a learned man, and they do say one who was once wealthy. The lad himself would fain go to sea, but his father keeps him here. It is a pity, for he is a bold boy, and would make a fine sailor."

The Otter, as he had been called, had now come down to the beach; and, with his hands shading his eyes from the spray, sheets of which the wind carried along with blinding force, he gazed at the ship and the sea, with a steady intentness.

"I think I can get out to her," he said, to the fishermen.

"It is madness, boy," Captain Drake said. "There are few men, indeed, so far as I know, in these climes--I talk not of

the heathens of the Western Islands--who could swim through a breaking sea, like yonder."

"I think I can do it," the boy said, quietly. "I have been out in as heavy seas before, and if one does but choose one's time, and humor them a bit, the waves are not much to be feared, after all.

"Get me the light line," he said, to the sailors, "and I will be off, at once."

So saying, he carelessly threw off his clothes. The fishermen brought a light line. One end they fastened round his shoulders and, with a cheerful goodbye, he ran down to the water's edge.

The sea was breaking with tremendous violence, and the chance of the lad's getting out, through the breakers, appeared slight, indeed. He watched, however, quietly for three or four minutes, when a wave larger than usual broke on the beach. Following it out, he stood knee deep, till the next great wave advanced; then, with a plunge, he dived in beneath it. It seemed an age before he was again seen, and Captain Drake expressed his fear that his head must have been dashed against a rock, beneath the water.

But the men said:

"He dives like a duck, sir, and has often frightened us by the time he keeps under water. You will see, he will come up beyond the second line of waves."

It seemed an age, to the watchers, before a black spot appeared suddenly, beyond the foaming line of breakers. There was a general shout of "There he is!" But they had scarce time to note the position of the swimmer, when he again disappeared. Again and again he came up, each time rapidly decreasing the distance between himself and the shipwrecked vessel; and keeping his head above the waves for a few seconds, only, at each appearance.

The people in the vessel were watching the progress of the lad, with attention and interest even greater than was manifested by those on shore; and as he approached the ship, which already showed signs of breaking up, a line was thrown to him. He caught it, but instead of holding on and being lifted to the ship, he fastened the light rope which he had brought out to it, and made signs to them to haul.

"Fasten a thicker rope to it," he shouted, "and they will haul it in, from the shore."

It would have been no easy matter to get on board the ship; so, having done his work, the lad turned to make his way back to the shore.

A thick rope was fastened, at once, by those of the crew who still remained on the deck of the vessel, to the lighter one; and those on shore began to pull it rapidly in; but, ere the knotted joint reached the shore, a cry from all gathered on the beach showed that the brave attempt of the Otter had been useless. A tremendous sea had struck the ship, and in a moment it broke up; and a number of floating fragments, alone, showed where a fine vessel had, a few minutes before, floated on the sea.

The lad paused in his course towards the shore and, looking round, endeavored to face the driving wind and spray; in hopes that he might see, among the fragments of the wreck, some one to whom his assistance might be of use. For a time, he could see no signs of a human being among the floating masses of wreck; and indeed, he was obliged to use great caution in keeping away from these, as a blow from any of the larger spars might have been fatal.

Presently, close to him, he heard a short muffled bark; and, looking round, saw a large dog with a child in its mouth. The animal, which was of the mastiff breed, appeared already exhausted. The Otter looked hastily round

and, seeing a piece of wreck of suitable size, he seized it, and with some difficulty succeeded in bringing it close to the dog. Fortunately the spar was a portion of one of the yards, and still had a quantity of rope connected to it. He now took hold of the child's clothes, the dog readily yielding up the treasure he had carried, seeing that the newcomer was likely to afford better assistance than himself.

In a few moments the child was fastened to the spar, and the Otter began steadily to push it towards the shore; the dog swimming alongside, evidently much relieved at getting rid of his burden. When he neared the line of breakers the lad waved his hand, as a sign to them to prepare to rush forward, and lend a hand, when the spar approached. He then paddled forward quietly and, keeping just outside the line of the breakers, waved to those on shore to throw, if possible, a rope. Several attempts were made to hurl a stone, fastened to the end of a light line, within his reach.

After many failures, he at last caught the line. This he fastened to the spar, and signaled to those on shore to pull it in; then, side by side with the dog, he followed. Looking round behind him, he watched a great breaker rolling in and, as before, dived as it passed over his head, and rode forward on the swell towards the shore.

Then there was a desperate struggle. At one moment his feet touched the ground, at another he was hauled back and tossed into the whirling sea; sometimes almost losing his consciousness, but ever keeping his head cool, and striving steadily to make progress. Several times he was dashed against the beach with great force, and it was his knowledge that the only safe way of approaching shore, through a heavy surf, is to keep sideways to the waves, and allow them to roll one over and over, that he escaped death--for, had he advanced straight towards the shore, the force of

the waves would have rolled him heels-over-head, and would almost certainly have broken his neck.

At last, just as consciousness was leaving him, and he thought that he could struggle no more, a hand grasped his arm. The fishermen, joining hand in hand, had gone down into the surf; and after many ineffectual efforts, had at last seized him, as a retiring wave was carrying him out again, for the fifth time.

With the consciousness of rescue all feeling left him, and it was some minutes before he recovered his senses. His first question was for the safety of the child on the spar, and he was glad to hear that it had come to shore without hurt. The dog, too, had been rolled up the beach, and seized before taken off again, but had broken one of its legs.

The Otter was soon on his feet again and, saying, "I must make my way home, they will be alarmed about me," was about to turn away, when a group of gentlemen standing near advanced.

"You are a fine lad," one of them said to him. "A fine lad, and an honor to the south of Devonshire. My name is Francis Drake, and if there be aught that I can do for you, now or hereafter, I shall be glad, indeed, to do my utmost for so gallant a youth as yourself."

"Oh, sir!" the boy exclaimed, his cheek flushing with excitement. "If you are Master Francis Drake, will you let me join your ship, for the voyage to the Indies?"

"Ah! my boy," the gentleman said, "you have asked the only thing, perhaps, which I should feel obliged to refuse you. Already we have more than our number, and to avoid the importunity of the many who wish to go, or of my powerful friends who desired to place sons or relations in my charge, I have been obliged to swear that I would take no other sailor, in addition to those already shipped.

"You are, however, young," he said, as he marked the change in the boy's face; "and I promise you that if I come back, and again sail on an expedition like that on which I now start, that you shall be one of my crew. What is your name, lad? I hear them call you Otter, and truly the beast is no better swimmer than you are."

"My name, sir, is Ned Hearne. My father is the schoolmaster here."

"Will he consent, think you, to your taking to a seafaring life?"

"Methinks he will, sir. He knows that my heart is set upon it, for he hath often said if I loved my lessons with one-tenth of the love I bear for the sea, I should make a good scholar, and be a credit to him."

"I will not forget you, lad. Trust me, and when you hear of my return, fail not to send a reminder, and to claim a place in my next adventure."

Ned Hearne, delighted at the assurance, ran off at full speed to the cottage where his father resided, at the end of the village. The dominie, who was an old man, wore the huge tortoise-shell rimmed spectacles of the time.

"Wet again," he said, as his son burst into the room in which he was sitting, studying a Greek tome. "Truly thou earnest the name of which thou art so proud, Otter, hardly. What tempted thee to go into the water, on a day like this?"

Ned briefly explained what had taken place. The story was no unusual one, for this was the third time that he had swum out to vessels on the rocks between Westport and Plymouth. Then he related to his father how Captain Francis Drake had spoken to him, and praised him, and how he had promised that, on his next trip to the West Indies, he would take him with him.

"I would not have you count too much upon that," the dominie said, dryly. "It is like, indeed, that he may never come back from this hare-brain adventure; and if he brings home his skin safe, he will, methinks, have had enough of burning in the sun, and fighting the Spaniards."

"But hath he not already made two or three voyages thither, Father?" the boy asked.

"That is true enough," said his father; "but from what I gather, these were mere trips to spy out the land. This affair on which he starts now will be, I wot, a very different matter."

"How is it, Father," the boy said on the following morning, resuming the conversation from the point which they were at when he went up to change his wet clothes, the day before, "that when England is at peace with Spain, our sailors and the Spanish do fight bloodily, in the West Indies?"

"That, my son, is a point upon which the Roman law telleth us nothing. I have, in my shelves, some very learned treatises on war; but in none do I find mention of a state of things in which two powers, at peace at home, do fight desperately at the extreme end of the earth."

"But, Father, do you think it not lawful to kill the Spaniard, and to take the treasures which he robbeth from the poor heathen of the West?"

"I know not about lawful, my son, but I see no warrant whatsoever for it; and as for heathen, indeed, it appears to me that the attacks upon him do touch, very closely, upon piracy upon the high seas. However, as the country in general appeareth to approve of it, and as it is said that the queen's most gracious majesty doth gladly hear of the beating of the Spaniards, in those seas, it becometh not me to question the rights of the case."

"At any rate, Father, you would not object when the time comes for me to sail with Mr. Francis Drake?"

"No, my boy; thou hast never shown any aptitude whatever for learning. Thou canst read and write, but beyond that thy knowledge runneth not. Your mind seems to be set on the water, and when you are not in it you are on it. Therefore it appears, to me, to be flying in the face of Providence to try to keep you on shore. Had your poor mother lived, it would have been a different thing. Her mind was set upon your becoming a clerk; but there, one might as well try to make a silk purse from the ear of a sow. But I tell you again, count not too much upon this promise. It may be years before Mr. Francis Drake may be in a position to keep it."

Had Ned Hearne watched for Captain Drake's second voyage, he would, indeed, as his father had said, have waited long. Three days after the conversation, however, a horseman from Plymouth rode into the little village, and inquired for the house of Master Hearne. Being directed thither, he rode up in haste to the gate.

"Here is a letter!" he cried, "for the son of the schoolmaster, who goes by the name of the Otter."

"I am he," Ned cried. "What is it, and who can have written to me?"

"It is a letter from His Honor, the Worshipful Mr. Francis Drake."

Seizing the letter, Ned broke the seal, read a few lines, threw his cap into the air with a shout of joy, and rushed in to his father.

"Father," he said, "Captain Drake has written to acquaint me that one of the boys in his ship has been taken ill, and cannot go; and that it has pleased him to appoint me to go in his place; and that I am to be at Plymouth in three days,

at the utmost, bringing with me what gear I may require for the expedition."

The schoolmaster was a little taken aback at this sudden prospect of departure, but he had always been wholly indulgent to his son, and it was not in his nature to refuse to allow him to avail himself of an opportunity which appeared to be an excellent one. The danger of these expeditions was, no doubt, very great; but the spoils were in proportion, and there was not a boy or man of the seafaring population of Devon who would not gladly have gone with the adventurous captains.

Chapter 2: Friends and Foes.

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Three days after the receipt of the letter, Ned Hearne stood with his bundle on the quay at Plymouth. Near him lay a large rowboat from the ships, waiting to take off the last comers. A little way behind, Captain Francis Drake and his brother, Captain John Drake, talked with the notable people of Plymouth, who had come down to bid them farewell; the more since this was a holiday, being Whitsun Eve, the 24th May, and all in the town who could spare time had made their way down to the Hove to watch the departure of the expedition; for none could say how famous this might become, or how great deeds would be accomplished by the two little craft lying there. Each looker on thought to himself that it might be that, to the end of his life, he should tell his children and his children's children, with pride, "I saw Mr. Drake start for his great voyage."

Small, indeed, did the fleet appear, in comparison to the work which it had to do. It was composed of but two vessels. The first, the Pacha, of seventy tons, carrying forty-seven men and boys, was commanded by Captain Francis Drake himself. By her side was the Swanne, of twenty-five tons, carrying twenty-six men and boys, and commanded by Captain John Drake. This was truly but a small affair to undertake so great a voyage.

In those days the Spaniards were masters of the whole of South America, and of the Isles of the West Indies. They had many very large towns full of troops, and great fleets armed to carry the treasure which was collected there to Spain. It

did seem almost like an act of madness that two vessels, which by the side of those of the Spaniards were mere cockleshells, manned in all by less than eighty men, should attempt to enter a region where they would be regarded, and rightly, as enemies, and where the hand of every man would be against them.

Captain Drake and his men thought little of these things. The success which had attended their predecessors had inspired the English sailors with a belief in their own invincibility, when opposed to the Spaniards. They looked, to a certain extent, upon their mission as a crusade. In those days England had a horror of Popery, and Spain was the mainstay and supporter of this religion. The escape which England had had of having Popery forced upon it, during the reign of Mary, by her spouse, Philip of Spain, had been a narrow one; and even now, it was by no means certain that Spain would not, sooner or later, endeavor to carry out the pretensions of the late queen's husband. Then, too, terrible tales had come of the sufferings of the Indians at the hands of the Spaniards; and it was certain that the English sailors who had fallen into the hands of Spain had been put to death, with horrible cruelty. Thus, then, the English sailors regarded the Spaniards as the enemy of their country, as the enemy of their religion, and as the enemy of humanity. Besides which, it cannot be denied that they viewed them as rich men, well worth plundering; and although, when it came to fighting, it is probable that hatred overbore the thought of gain, it is certain that the desire for gold was, in itself, the main incentive to those who sailed upon these expeditions.

Amid the cheers of the townsfolk the boats pushed off, Mr. Francis Drake and his brother waving their plumed hats to the burghers of Plymouth, and the sailors giving a hurrah,

as they bent to the oars. Ned Hearne, who had received a kind word of greeting from Mr. Drake, had taken his place in the bow of one of the boats, lost in admiration at the scene; and at the thought that he was one of this band of heroes, who were going out to fight the Spaniards, and to return laden with countless treasure wrested from them. At the thought his eyes sparkled, his blood seemed to dance through his veins.

The western main, in those days, was a name almost of enchantment. Such strange tales had been brought home, by the voyagers who had navigated those seas, of the wonderful trees, the bright birds, the beauties of nature, the gold and silver, and the abundance of all precious things, that it was the dream of every youngster on the seaboard some day to penetrate to these charmed regions. A week since, and the realization of the dream had appeared beyond his wildest hopes. Now, almost with the suddenness of a transformation scene, this had changed; and there was he on his way out to the Swanne, a part of the expedition itself. It was to the Swanne that he had been allotted, for it was on board that ship that the boy whose place he was to take had been seized with illness.

Although but twenty-five tons in burden, the Swanne made a far greater show than would be made by a craft of that size in the present day. The ships of the time lay but lightly on the water, while their hulls were carried up to a prodigious height; and it is not too much to say that the portion of the Swanne, above water, was fully as large as the hull which we see of a merchantman of four times her tonnage. Still, even so, it was but a tiny craft to cross the Atlantic, and former voyages had been generally made in larger ships.

Mr. Francis Drake, however, knew what he was about. He considered that large ships required large crews to be left behind to defend them, that they drew more water, and were less handy; and he resolved, in this expedition, he would do no small part of his work with pinnaces and rowboats; and of these he had three fine craft, now lying in pieces in his hold, ready to fit together on arriving in the Indies.

As they neared the ships the two boats separated, and Ned soon found himself alongside of the Swanne. A ladder hung at her side, and up this Ned followed his captain; for in those days the strict etiquette that the highest goes last had not been instituted.

"Master Holyoake," said Mr. John Drake, to a big and powerful-looking man standing near, "this is the new lad, whose skill in swimming, and whose courage, I told you of yesternight. He will, I doubt not, be found as willing as he is brave; and I trust that you will put him in the way of learning his business as a sailor. It is his first voyage. He comes on board a green hand, but I doubt not that, ere the voyage be finished, he will have become a smart young sailor."

"I will put him through," John Holyoake, sailing master of the ship, replied; for in those days the sailing master was the navigator of the ship, and the captain was as often as not a soldier, who knew nothing whatever about seamanship. The one sailed the ship, the other fought it; and the admirals were, in those days, more frequently known as generals, and held that position on shore.

As Ned looked round the deck, he thought that he had never seen a finer set of sailors. All were picked men, hardy and experienced, and for the most part young. Some had made previous voyages to the West Indies, but the greater

portion were new to that country. They looked the men on whom a captain could rely, to the last. Tall and stalwart, bronzed with the sun, and with a reckless and fearless expression about them, which boded ill to any foes upon whom they might fall.

Although Ned had never been to sea on a long voyage, he had sailed too often in the fishing boats of his native village to have any qualm of seasickness, or to feel in any degree like a new hand. He was, therefore, at once assigned to a place and duty.

An hour later the admiral, as Mr. Francis Drake was called, fired a gun, the two vessels hoisted their broad sails and turned their heads from shore, and the crews of both ships gave a parting cheer, as they turned their faces to the south.

As Ned was not in the slightest degree either homesick or seasick, he at once fell to work, laughing and joking with the other boys, of whom there were three on board. He found that their duties consisted of bearing messages, of hauling any rope to which they were told to fix themselves, and in receiving, with as good a face as might be, the various orders, to say nothing of the various kicks, which might be bestowed upon them by all on board. At the same time their cheerful countenances showed that these things which, when told, sounded a little terrible, were in truth in no way serious.

Ned was first shown where he was to sling his hammock, and how; where he was to get his food; and under whose orders he was specially to consider himself; the master, for the present, taking him under his own charge. For the next ten days, as the vessel sailed calmly along, with a favoring wind, Ned had learned all the names of the ropes and sails, and their uses; could climb aloft, and do his share of the

work of the ship; and if not yet a skilled sailor, was at least on the high road to become one. The master was pleased at his willingness and eagerness to oblige, and he soon became a great favorite of his.

Between the four boys on the ship a good feeling existed. All had been chosen as a special favor, upon the recommendation of one or other of those in authority. Each of them had made up his mind that, one of these days, he, too, would command an expedition to the West Indies. Each thought of the glory which he would attain; and although, in the hearts of many of the elder men in the expedition, the substantial benefits to be reaped stood higher than any ideas of glory or honor; to the lads, at least, pecuniary gain exercised no inducement whatever. They burned to see the strange country, and to gain some of the credit and glory which would, if the voyage was successful, attach to each member of the crew. All were full of fun, and took what came to them, in the way of work, so good temperedly and cheerfully, that the men soon ceased to give them work for work's sake.

They were, too, a strong and well-built group of boys. Ned was by a full year the youngest, and by nigh a head the shortest of them; but his broad shoulders and sturdy build, and the strength acquired by long practice in swimming and rowing, made him their equal.

There were, however, no quarrels among them, and their strength they agreed to use in alliance, if need be, should any of the crew make a dead set at one or other of them; for even in an expedition like this there must be some brutal, as well as many brave men. There were assuredly two or three, at least, of those on board the Swanne who might well be called brutal. They were for the most part old hands, who had lived on board ship half their lives, had taken part in the

slave traffic of Captain Hawkins, and in the buccaneering exploits of the earlier commanders. To them the voyage was one in which the lust of gold was the sole stimulant; and, accustomed to deeds of bloodshed, what feelings they ever had had become utterly blunted, and they needed but the power to become despotic and brutal masters.

The chief among these was Giles Taunton, the armorer. He was a swarthy ruffian, who hid, beneath the guise of a jovial bonhomie, a cruel and unfeeling nature. He was ever ready to cuff and beat the boys, on the smallest provocation.

They soon gathered together, in a sort of defensive league, against their common oppressors. All four were high-spirited lads. The other three, indeed, were sons of men of substance in Devon, whose fathers had lent funds to Captain Drake for the carrying out of his great enterprise. They therefore looked but ill on the kicks and curses which, occasionally, fell to their lot.

One day they gathered together round the bowsprit, and talked over what they should do. Gerald Summers, the eldest of the party, proposed that they should go in a body to Captain Drake, and complain of the tyranny to which they were subject. After some talk, however, all agreed that such a course as this would lower them in the estimation of the men, and that it would be better to put up with the ill treatment than, to get the name of tell tales.

Ned then said to the others:

"It seems to me that, if we do but hold together, we need not be afraid of this big bully. If we all declare to each other and swear that, the first time he strikes one of us, we will all set upon him; my faith on it, we shall be able to master him, big as he is. We are all of good size, and in two years will think ourselves men; therefore it would be shame, indeed, if

the four of us could not master one, however big and sturdy he may be."

After much consultation, it was agreed that this course should be adopted; and the next day, as Reuben Gale was passing by Giles, he turned round and struck him on the head with a broom. The boy gave a long whistle, and in a moment, to the astonishment of the armorer, the other three lads rushed up, and at once assailed him with fury. Astonished at such an attack, he struck out at them with many strange oaths. Gerald he knocked down, but Ned leaped on his back from behind, and the other two, closing with him, rolled him on to the deck; then, despite of his efforts, they pummeled him until his face was swollen and bruised, and his eyes nearly closed.

Some of the men of his own sort, standing by, would fain have interfered; but the better disposed of the crew, who had seen, with disgust, the conduct of the armorer and his mates to the boys, held them back, and said that none should come between.

Just as the boys drew off, and allowed the furious armorer to rise to his feet, Captain John Drake, attracted by the unusual noise, came from his cabin.

"What is this?" he asked.

"These young wild cats have leapt upon me," said Giles Taunton furiously, "and have beaten me nigh to death. But I will have my turn. They will see, and bitterly shall they have cause to regret what they have done."

"We have been driven almost weary of our lives, sir, with the foul and rough conduct of this man, and of some of his mates," Gerald said. "We did not like to come to tell you of it, and to gain the name of carry tales; but we had resolved among ourselves at last that, whoever struck one of us, the whole should set upon him. Today we have carried it out,

and we have shown Giles Taunton that we are more than a match for one man, at any rate."

"Four good-sized dogs, if they are well managed," said Captain John Drake, "will pull down a lion; and the best thing that the lion can do is to leave them alone."

"I am sorry to hear, Master Taunton, that you have chosen to mistreat these lads; who are, indeed, the sons of worthy men, and are not the common kind of ship boys. I am sure that my brother would not brook such conduct, and I warn you that, if any complaint again on this head reaches me, I shall lay it before him."

With angry mutterings, the armorer went below.

"We have earned a bitter foe," Ned said to his friends, "and we had best keep our eyes well open. There is very little of the lion about Master Taunton. He is strong, indeed; but if it be true that the lion has a noble heart, and fights his foes openly, methinks he resembles rather the tiger, who is prone to leap suddenly upon his enemies."

"Yes, indeed, he looked dark enough," Gerald said, "as he went below; and if looks could have killed us, we should not be standing here alive, at present."

"It is not force that we need fear now, but that he will do us some foul turn; at all events, we are now forewarned, and if he plays us a scurvy trick it will be our own faults."

For several days the voyage went on quietly, and without adventure. They passed at a distance the Portuguese Isle of Madeira, lying like a cloud on the sea. The weather now had become warm and very fair, a steady wind blew, and the two barks kept along at a good pace.

All sorts of creatures, strange to the boys, were to be seen in the sea. Sometimes there was a spout of a distant whale. Thousands of flying fish darted from the water, driven thence by the pursuit of their enemies beneath; while

huge flocks of gulls and other birds hovered over the sea, chasing the flying fish, or pouncing down upon the shoals of small fry; whose splashings whitened the surface of the water, as if a sandbank had laid below it.

Gradually, as the time went on, the heat increased. Many of the crew found themselves unable to sleep below, for in those days there was but little thought of ventilation. The boys were among these, for the heat and the confinement were, to them, especially irksome.

One day the wind had fallen almost to a calm, and the small boat had been lowered, to enable the carpenter to do some repair to the ship's side, where a seam leaked somewhat, when the waves were high. When night came on, and all was quiet, Ned proposed to the others that they should slip down the rope over the stern into the boat which was towing behind; where they could sleep undisturbed by the tramp of the sentry, or the call to pull at ropes and trim sails.

The idea was considered a capital one, and the boys slid down into the boat; where, taking up their quarters as comfortably as they could, they, after a short chat, curled themselves up and were soon sound asleep, intending to be on board again, with the earliest gleam of morn.



When they awoke, however, it was with a start and a cry. The sun was already high, but there were no signs whatever of the ship; they floated, alone, in the mid-ocean. With blank amazement they looked at each other.

"This is a stroke of misfortune, indeed," Gerald said. "We have lost the ship, and I fear our lives, as well.

"What do you say, Otter?"

For the lad's nickname had come on board ship with him, and he was generally known by it.

"It seems to me," said Ned, "that our friend the armorer has done us this bad turn. I am sure that the rope was well tied, for I was the first who slipped down it, and I looked at the knot well, before I went over the side and trusted my weight to it. He must have seen us, and as soon as he thought we were fairly asleep must have loosened the knot and cast us adrift. What on earth is to be done, now?"

"I should think," Gerald said, "that it will not be long before the ship comes back for us. The boat is sure to be missed, in the morning, for the carpenter will be wanting it to go over the side. We, too, will be missed, for the captain

will be wanting his flagon of wine, soon after the day has dawned."

"But think you," Tom Tressilis said, "that the captain will turn back on his voyage, for us?"

"Of that I think there is no doubt," Gerald said; "the only question is as to the finding us, but I should say that of that there is little fear; the wind is light, the ship was not making fast through the water, and will not be more than fifty miles, at most, away, when she turns on her heel and comes to look for us. I expect that Master Taunton knew, well enough, that we should be picked up again; but he guessed that the admiral would not be pleased at losing a day, by our freak, and that the matter is not likely to improve the favor in which we may stand with him and his brother."

"It is going to be a terrible hot day," Ned said, "and with the sun above our heads and no shade, and not so much as a drop of water, the sooner we are picked up the more pleasant it will be, even if we all get a touch of the rope's end for our exploit."

All day the boys watched anxiously. Once they saw the two vessels sailing backward on their track, but the current had drifted the boat, and the ships passed fully eight miles away to windward of them, and thus without seeing them. This caused the boys, courageous as they were, almost to despair.

"If," argued Gerald, "they pass us in the daylight, our chance is small, indeed, that they will find us at night. They will, doubtless, sail back till dusk; and then judge that they have missed us, or that we have in some way sunk; then, putting their heads to the west, they will continue their voyage.

"If we had oars, or a sail, we might make a shift to pull the boat into the track they are following, which would give