

CORAL ISLAND



Robert Michael Ballantyne

Coral Island

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Chapter 1 - Beginning

Roving has always been, and still is, my ruling passion, the joy of my heart, the very sunshine of my existence. In childhood, in boyhood, and in man's estate I have been a rover; not a mere rambler among the woody glens and upon the hill-tops of my own native land, but an enthusiastic rover throughout the length and breadth of the wide, wide world.

It was a wild, black night of howling storm, the night on which I was born on the foaming bosom of the broad Atlantic Ocean. My father was a sea-captain; my grandfather was a sea-captain; my great-grandfather had been a marine. Nobody could tell positively what occupation his father had followed; but my dear mother used to assert that he had been a midshipman, whose grandfather, on the mother's side, had been an admiral in the Royal Navy. At any rate, we knew that as far back as our family could be traced, it had been intimately connected with the great watery waste. Indeed, this was the case on both sides of the house; for my mother always went to sea with my father on his long voyages, and so spent the greater part of her life upon the water.

Thus it was, I suppose, that I came to inherit a roving disposition. Soon after I was born, my father, being old, retired from a seafaring life, purchased a small cottage in a fishing village on the west coast of England, and settled down to spend the evening of his life on the shores of that sea which had for so many years been his home. It was not long after this that I began to show the roving spirit that dwelt within me. For some time past my infant legs had been gaining strength, so that I came to be dissatisfied with rubbing the skin off my chubby knees by walking on them, and made many attempts to stand up and walk like a man—

all of which attempts, however, resulted in my sitting down violently and in sudden surprise. One day I took advantage of my dear mother's absence to make another effort; and, to my joy, I actually succeeded in reaching the doorstep, over which I tumbled into a pool of muddy water that lay before my father's cottage door. Ah, how vividly I remember the horror of my poor mother when she found me sweltering in the mud amongst a group of cackling ducks, and the tenderness with which she stripped off my dripping clothes and washed my dirty little body! From this time forth my rambles became more frequent and, as I grew older, more distant, until at last I had wandered far and near on the shore and in the woods around our humble dwelling, and did not rest content until my father bound me apprentice to a coasting-vessel and let me go to sea.

For some years I was happy in visiting the seaports, and in coasting along the shores, of my native land. My Christian name was Ralph; and my comrades added to this the name of Rover, in consequence of the passion which I always evinced for travelling. Rover was not my real name; but as I never received any other, I came at last to answer to it as naturally as to my proper name. And as it is not a bad one, I see no good reason why I should not introduce myself to the reader as Ralph Rover. My shipmates were kind, good-natured fellows, and they and I got on very well together. They did, indeed, very frequently make game of and banter me, but not unkindly; and I overheard them sometimes saying that Ralph Rover was a "queer, old-fashioned fellow." This, I must confess, surprised me much; and I pondered the saying long, but could come at no satisfactory conclusion as to that wherein my old-fashionedness lay. It is true I was a quiet lad, and seldom spoke except when spoken to. Moreover, I never could understand the jokes of my companions even when they were explained to me, which dulness in apprehension occasioned me much grief. However, I tried to make up for it by smiling and looking

pleased when I observed that they were laughing at some witticism which I had failed to detect. I was also very fond of inquiring into the nature of things and their causes, and often fell into fits of abstraction while thus engaged in my mind. But in all this I saw nothing that did not seem to be exceedingly natural, and could by no means understand why my comrades should call me "an old-fashioned fellow." Now, while engaged in the coasting trade I fell in with many seamen who had travelled to almost every quarter of the globe; and I freely confess that my heart glowed ardently within me as they recounted their wild adventures in foreign lands—the dreadful storms they had weathered, the appalling dangers they had escaped, the wonderful creatures they had seen both on the land and in the sea, and the interesting lands and strange people they had visited. But of all the places of which they told me, none captivated and charmed my imagination so much as the Coral Islands of the Southern Seas. They told me of thousands of beautiful, fertile islands that had been formed by a small creature called the coral insect, where summer reigned nearly all the year round, where the trees were laden with a constant harvest of luxuriant fruit, where the climate was almost perpetually delightful; yet where, strange to say, men were wild, bloodthirsty savages, excepting in those favoured isles to which the Gospel of our Saviour had been conveyed. These exciting accounts had so great an effect upon my mind that, when I reached the age of fifteen, I resolved to make a voyage to the South Seas. I had no little difficulty, at first, in prevailing on my dear parents to let me go; but when I urged on my father that he would never have become a great captain had he remained in the coasting trade, he saw the truth of what I said and gave his consent. My dear mother, seeing that my father had made up his mind, no longer offered opposition to my wishes. "But, oh Ralph!" she said on the day I bade her adieu, "come back soon to us, my dear boy; for we are

getting old now, Ralph, and may not have many years to live.”

I will not take up my readers’ time with a minute account of all that occurred before I took my final leave of my dear parents. Suffice it to say that my father placed me under the charge of an old messmate of his own, a merchant captain, who was on the point of sailing to the South Seas in his own ship, the Arrow. My mother gave me her blessing and a small Bible; and her last request was that I would never forget to read a chapter every day and say my prayers, which I promised, with tears in my eyes, that I would certainly do.

Soon afterwards I went on board the Arrow, which was a fine, large ship, and set sail for the islands of the Pacific Ocean.

Chapter 2 - The departure

It was a bright, beautiful, warm day when our ship spread her canvas to the breeze and sailed for the regions of the south. Oh, how my heart bounded with delight as I listened to the merry chorus of the sailors while they hauled at the ropes and got in the anchor! The captain shouted; the men ran to obey; the noble ship bent over to the breeze, and the shore gradually faded from my view; while I stood looking on, with a kind of feeling that the whole was a delightful dream.

The first thing that struck me as being different from anything I had yet seen during my short career on the sea, was the hoisting of the anchor on deck and lashing it firmly down with ropes, as if we had now bid adieu to the land for ever and would require its services no more.

“There, lass!” cried a broad-shouldered jack-tar, giving the fluke of the anchor a hearty slap with his hand after the housing was completed—“there, lass, take a good nap now, for we sha’n’t ask you to kiss the mud again for many a long day to come!”

And so it was. That anchor did not “kiss the mud” for many long days afterwards; and when at last it did, it was for the last time!

There were a number of boys in the ship, but two of them were my special favourites. Jack Martin was a tall, strapping, broad-shouldered youth of eighteen, with a handsome, good-humoured, firm face. He had had a good education, was clever and hearty and lion-like in his actions, but mild and quiet in disposition. Jack was a general favourite, and had a peculiar fondness for me. My other companion was Peterkin Gay. He was little, quick, funny, decidedly mischievous, and about fourteen years old.

But Peterkin's mischief was almost always harmless, else he could not have been so much beloved as he was.

"Hallo, youngster!" cried Jack Martin, giving me a slap on the shoulder the day I joined the ship, "come below and I'll show you your berth. You and I are to be messmates; and I think we shall be good friends, for I like the look o' you."

Jack was right. He and I, and Peterkin afterwards, became the best and staunchest friends that ever tossed together on the stormy waves.

I shall say little about the first part of our voyage. We had the usual amount of rough weather and calm; also we saw many strange fish rolling in the sea, and I was greatly delighted one day by seeing a shoal of flying-fish dart out of the water and skim through the air about a foot above the surface. They were pursued by dolphins, which feed on them; and one flying-fish, in its terror, flew over the ship, struck on the rigging, and fell upon the deck. Its wings were just fins elongated; and we found that they could never fly far at a time, and never mounted into the air like birds, but skimmed along the surface of the sea. Jack and I had it for dinner, and found it remarkably good.

When we approached Cape Horn, at the southern extremity of America, the weather became very cold and stormy, and the sailors began to tell stories about the furious gales and the dangers of that terrible cape.

"Cape Horn," said one, "is the most horrible headland I ever doubled. I've sailed round it twice already, and both times the ship was a'most blow'd out o' the water."

"I've been round it once," said another; "an' that time the sails were split, and the ropes frozen in the blocks so that they wouldn't work, and we was all but lost."

"An' I've been round it five times," cried a third; "an' every time was wuss than another, the gales was so tremendous!"

"And I've been round it, no times at all," cried Peterkin with an impudent wink in his eye, "an' that time I was blow'd

inside out!"

Nevertheless we passed the dreaded cape without much rough weather, and in the course of a few weeks afterwards were sailing gently, before a warm tropical breeze, over the Pacific Ocean. Thus we proceeded on our voyage—sometimes bounding merrily before a fair breeze; at other times floating calmly on the glassy wave and fishing for the curious inhabitants of the deep, all of which, although the sailors thought little of them, were strange, and interesting, and very wonderful to me.

At last we came among the Coral Islands of the Pacific; and I shall never forget the delight with which I gazed—when we chanced to pass one—at the pure white, dazzling shores, and the verdant palm-trees, which looked bright and beautiful in the sunshine. And often did we three long to be landed on one, imagining that we should certainly find perfect happiness there! Our wish was granted sooner than we expected.

One night, soon after we entered the tropics, an awful storm burst upon our ship. The first squall of wind carried away two of our masts, and left only the foremast standing. Even this, however, was more than enough, for we did not dare to hoist a rag of sail on it. For five days the tempest raged in all its fury. Everything was swept off the decks, except one small boat. The steersman was lashed to the wheel lest he should be washed away, and we all gave ourselves up for lost. The captain said that he had no idea where we were, as we had been blown far out of our course; and we feared much that we might get among the dangerous coral reefs which are so numerous in the Pacific. At daybreak on the sixth morning of the gale we saw land ahead; it was an island encircled by a reef of coral, on which the waves broke in fury. There was calm water within this reef, but we could see only one narrow opening into it. For this opening we steered; but ere we reached it a tremendous wave broke on our stern, tore the rudder

completely off, and left us at the mercy of the winds and waves.

“It’s all over with us now, lads!” said the captain to the men. “Get the boat ready to launch; we shall be on the rocks in less than half-an-hour.”

The men obeyed in gloomy silence, for they felt that there was little hope of so small a boat living in such a sea.

“Come, boys,” said Jack Martin, in a grave tone, to me and Peterkin, as we stood on the quarter-deck awaiting our fate—“come, boys; we three shall stick together. You see it is impossible that the little boat can reach the shore, crowded with men. It will be sure to upset, so I mean rather to trust myself to a large oar. I see through the telescope that the ship will strike at the tail of the reef, where the waves break into the quiet water inside; so if we manage to cling to the oar till it is driven over the breakers, we may perhaps gain the shore. What say you? Will you join me?”

We gladly agreed to follow Jack, for he inspired us with confidence—although I could perceive, by the sad tone of his voice, that he had little hope; and indeed, when I looked at the white waves that lashed the reef and boiled against the rocks as if in fury, I felt that there was but a step between us and death. My heart sank within me; but at that moment my thoughts turned to my beloved mother, and I remembered those words, which were among the last that she said to me: “Ralph, my dearest child, always remember, in the hour of danger, to look to your Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. He alone is both able and willing to save your body and your soul.” So I felt much comforted when I thought thereon.

The ship was now very near the rocks. The men were ready with the boat, and the captain beside them giving orders, when a tremendous wave came towards us. We three ran towards the bow to lay hold of our oar, and had barely reached it when the wave fell on the deck with a crash like thunder. At the same moment the ship struck; the foremast

broke off close to the deck and went over the side, carrying the boat and men along with it. Our oar got entangled with the wreck, and Jack seized an axe to cut it free; but owing to the motion of the ship, he missed the cordage and struck the axe deep into the oar. Another wave, however, washed it clear of the wreck. We all seized hold of it, and the next instant we were struggling in the wild sea. The last thing I saw was the boat whirling in the surf, and all the sailors tossed into the foaming waves. Then I became insensible.

On recovering from my swoon I found myself lying on a bank of soft grass, under shelter of an overhanging rock, with Peterkin on his knees by my side, tenderly bathing my temples with water, and endeavouring to stop the blood that flowed from a wound in my forehead.

Chapter 3 - The Coral Island

There is a strange and peculiar sensation experienced in recovering from a state of insensibility which is almost indescribable: a sort of dreamy, confused consciousness; a half-waking, half-sleeping condition, accompanied with a feeling of weariness, which, however, is by no means disagreeable. As I slowly recovered, and heard the voice of Peterkin inquiring whether I felt better, I thought that I must have overslept myself, and should be sent to the masthead for being lazy; but before I could leap up in haste, the thought seemed to vanish suddenly away, and I fancied that I must have been ill. Then a balmy breeze fanned my cheek; and I thought of home, and the garden at the back of my father's cottage with its luxuriant flowers, and the sweet-scented honeysuckle that my dear mother trained so carefully upon the trellised porch. But the roaring of the surf put these delightful thoughts to flight, and I was back again at sea, watching the dolphins and the flying-fish, and reefing topsails off the wild and stormy Cape Horn. Gradually the roar of the surf became louder and more distinct. I thought of being wrecked far, far away from my native land, and slowly opened my eyes to meet those of my companion Jack, who, with a look of intense anxiety, was gazing into my face.

"Speak to us, my dear Ralph!" whispered Jack tenderly. "Are you better now?"

I smiled and looked up, saying, "Better! Why, what do you mean, Jack? I'm quite well."

"Then what are you shamming for, and frightening us in this way?" said Peterkin, smiling through his tears; for the poor boy had been really under the impression that I was dying.

I now raised myself on my elbow, and putting my hand to my forehead, found that it had been cut pretty severely, and that I had lost a good deal of blood.

“Come, come, Ralph,” said Jack, pressing me gently backward, “lie down, my boy; you’re not right yet. Wet your lips with this water; it’s cool and clear as crystal. I got it from a spring close at hand. There, now, don’t say a word—hold your tongue,” he said, seeing me about to speak. “I’ll tell you all about it, but you must not utter a syllable till you have rested well.”

“Oh, don’t stop him from speaking, Jack!” said Peterkin, who, now that his fears for my safety were removed, busied himself in erecting a shelter of broken branches in order to protect me from the wind—which, however, was almost unnecessary, for the rock beside which I had been laid completely broke the force of the gale. “Let him speak, Jack; it’s a comfort to hear that he’s alive after lying there stiff and white and sulky for a whole hour, just like an Egyptian mummy.—Never saw such a fellow as you are, Ralph—always up to mischief. You’ve almost knocked out all my teeth and more than half-choked me, and now you go shamming dead! It’s very wicked of you, indeed it is.”

While Peterkin ran on in this style my faculties became quite clear again, and I began to understand my position. “What do you mean by saying I half-choked you, Peterkin?” said I.

“What do I mean? Is English not your mother-tongue? or do you want me to repeat it in French by way of making it clearer? Don’t you remember?”

“I remember nothing,” said I, interrupting him, “after we were thrown into the sea.”

“Hush, Peterkin!” said Jack; “you’re exciting Ralph with your nonsense.—I’ll explain it to you. You recollect that, after the ship struck, we three sprang over the bow into the sea? Well, I noticed that the oar struck your head and gave you that cut on the brow which nearly stunned you, so that

you grasped Peterkin round the neck without knowing apparently what you were about. In doing so, you pushed the telescope—which you clung to as if it had been your life—against Peterkin’s mouth—”

“Pushed it against his mouth!” interrupted Peterkin; “say crammed it down his throat! Why, there’s a distinct mark of the brass rim on the back of my gullet at this moment!”

“Well, well, be that as it may,” continued Jack, “you clung to him, Ralph, till I feared you really would choke him. But I saw that he had a good hold of the oar; so I exerted myself to the utmost to push you towards the shore, which we luckily reached without much trouble, for the water inside the reef is quite calm.”

“But the captain and crew, what of them?” I inquired anxiously.

Jack shook his head.

“Are they lost?”

“No, they are not lost, I hope; but, I fear, there is not much chance of their being saved. The ship struck at the very tail of the island on which we are cast. When the boat was tossed into the sea it fortunately did not upset, although it shipped a good deal of water, and all the men managed to scramble into it; but before they could get the oars out, the gale carried them past the point and away to leeward of the island. After we landed I saw them endeavouring to pull towards us; but as they had only one pair of oars out of the eight that belonged to the boat, and as the wind was blowing right in their teeth, they gradually lost ground. Then I saw them put about and hoist some sort of sail—a blanket, I fancy, for it was too small for the boat—and in half-an-hour they were out of sight.”

“Poor fellows!” I murmured sorrowfully.

“But the more I think about it I’ve better hope of them,” continued Jack in a more cheerful tone. “You see, Ralph, I’ve read a great deal about these South Sea Islands, and I know that in many places they are scattered about in

thousands over the sea, so they're almost sure to fall in with one of them before long."

"I'm sure I hope so," said Peterkin earnestly. "But what has become of the wreck, Jack? I saw you clambering up the rocks there while I was watching Ralph. Did you say she had gone to pieces?"

"No, she has not gone to pieces; but she has gone to the bottom," replied Jack. "As I said before, she struck on the tail of the island and stove in her bow; but the next breaker swung her clear, and she floated away to leeward. The poor fellows in the boat made a hard struggle to reach her, but long before they came near her she filled and went down. It was after she had foundered that I saw them trying to pull to the island."

There was a long silence after Jack had ceased speaking, and I have no doubt that each was revolving in his mind our extraordinary position. For my part, I cannot say that my reflections were very agreeable. I knew that we were on an island, for Jack had said so; but whether it was inhabited or not, I did not know. If it should be inhabited, I felt certain, from all I had heard of South Sea Islanders, that we should be roasted alive and eaten. If it should turn out to be uninhabited, I fancied that we should be starved to death. "Oh," thought I, "if the ship had only struck on the rocks we might have done pretty well, for we could have obtained provisions from her, and tools to enable us to build a shelter; but now—alas! alas! we are lost!" These last words I uttered aloud in my distress.

"Lost, Ralph!" exclaimed Jack, while a smile overspread his hearty countenance. "Saved, you should have said. Your cogitations seem to have taken a wrong road, and led you to a wrong conclusion."

"Do you know what conclusion I have come to?" said Peterkin. "I have made up my mind that it's capital—first-rate—the best thing that ever happened to us, and the most splendid prospect that ever lay before three jolly young

tars. We've got an island all to ourselves. We'll take possession in the name of the king. We'll go and enter the service of its black inhabitants. Of course we'll rise, naturally, to the top of affairs: white men always do in savage countries. You shall be king, Jack; Ralph, prime minister; and I shall be—"

"The court-jester," interrupted Jack.

"No," retorted Peterkin; "I'll have no title at all. I shall merely accept a highly responsible situation under government; for you see, Jack, I'm fond of having an enormous salary and nothing to do."

"But suppose there are no natives?"

"Then we'll build a charming villa, and plant a lovely garden round it, stuck all full of the most splendiferous tropical flowers; and we'll farm the land, plant, sow, reap, eat, sleep, and be merry."

"But to be serious," said Jack, assuming a grave expression of countenance—which, I observed, always had the effect of checking Peterkin's disposition to make fun of everything—"we are really in rather an uncomfortable position. If this is a desert island, we shall have to live very much like the wild beasts; for we have not a tool of any kind—not even a knife."

"Yes, we have that," said Peterkin, fumbling in his trousers pocket, from which he drew forth a small penknife with only one blade, and that was broken.

"Well, that's better than nothing.—But come," said Jack, rising; "we are wasting our time in talking instead of doing.—You seem well enough to walk now, Ralph.—Let us see what we have got in our pockets; and then let us climb some hill and ascertain what sort of island we have been cast upon, for, whether good or bad, it seems likely to be our home for some time to come."

Chapter 4 - We examine into our personal property, and make a happy discovery

We now seated ourselves upon a rock, and began to examine into our personal property. When we reached the shore after being wrecked, my companions had taken off part of their clothes and spread them out in the sun to dry; for although the gale was raging fiercely, there was not a single cloud in the bright sky. They had also stripped off most part of my wet clothes and spread them also on the rocks. Having resumed our garments, we now searched all our pockets with the utmost care, and laid their contents out on a flat stone before us; and now that our minds were fully alive to our condition, it was with no little anxiety that we turned our several pockets inside out in order that nothing might escape us. When all was collected together, we found that our worldly goods consisted of the following articles:

First, a small penknife with a single blade, broken off about the middle and very rusty, besides having two or three notches on its edge. (Peterkin said of this, with his usual pleasantry, that it would do for a saw as well as a knife, which was a great advantage.) Second, an old German-silver pencil-case without any lead in it. Third, a piece of whip-cord about six yards long. Fourth, a sailmaker's needle of a small size. Fifth, a ship's telescope, which I happened to have in my hand at the time the ship struck, and which I had clung to firmly all the time I was in the water; indeed, it was with difficulty that Jack got it out of my grasp when I was lying insensible on the shore. I cannot understand why I kept such a firm hold of this telescope. They say that a drowning man will clutch at a straw.

Perhaps it may have been some such feeling in me, for I did not know that it was in my hand at the time we were wrecked. However, we felt some pleasure in having it with us now—although we did not see that it could be of much use to us, as the glass at the small end was broken to pieces. Our sixth article was a brass ring which Jack always wore on his little finger. I never understood why he wore it; for Jack was not vain of his appearance, and did not seem to care for ornaments of any kind. Peterkin said, “it was in memory of the girl he left behind him!” But as he never spoke of this girl to either of us, I am inclined to think that Peterkin was either jesting or mistaken. In addition to these articles, we had a little bit of tinder and the clothes on our backs. These last were as follows:

Each of us had on a pair of stout canvas trousers and a pair of sailors’ thick shoes. Jack wore a red flannel shirt, a blue jacket, and a red Kilmarnock bonnet or nightcap, besides a pair of worsted socks, and a cotton pocket-handkerchief with sixteen portraits of Lord Nelson printed on it and a union-jack in the middle. Peterkin had on a striped flannel shirt—which he wore outside his trousers and belted round his waist, after the manner of a tunic—and a round black straw hat. He had no jacket, having thrown it off just before we were cast into the sea; but this was not of much consequence, as the climate of the island proved to be extremely mild—so much so, indeed, that Jack and I often preferred to go about without our jackets. Peterkin had also a pair of white cotton socks and a blue handkerchief with white spots all over it. My own costume consisted of a blue flannel shirt, a blue jacket, a black cap, and a pair of worsted socks, besides the shoes and canvas trousers already mentioned. This was all we had, and besides these things we had nothing else; but when we thought of the danger from which we had escaped, and how much worse off we might have been had the ship struck on the reef during the night, we felt very thankful that we were

possessed of so much, although, I must confess, we sometimes wished that we had had a little more.

While we were examining these things and talking about them, Jack suddenly started and exclaimed:

“The oar! We have forgotten the oar!”

“What good will that do us?” said Peterkin. “There’s wood enough on the island to make a thousand oars.”

“Ay, lad,” replied Jack; “but there’s a bit of hoop-iron at the end of it, and that may be of much use to us.”

“Very true,” said I; “let us go fetch it.” And with that we all three rose and hastened down to the beach. I still felt a little weak from loss of blood, so that my companions soon began to leave me behind; but Jack perceived this, and, with his usual considerate good-nature, turned back to help me. This was now the first time that I had looked well about me since landing, as the spot where I had been laid was covered with thick bushes, which almost hid the country from our view. As we now emerged from among these and walked down the sandy beach together, I cast my eyes about, and truly my heart glowed within me and my spirits rose at the beautiful prospect which I beheld on every side. The gale had suddenly died away, just as if it had blown furiously till it dashed our ship upon the rocks, and had nothing more to do after accomplishing that. The island on which we stood was hilly, and covered almost everywhere with the most beautiful and richly coloured trees, bushes, and shrubs, none of which I knew the names of at that time—except, indeed, the cocoa-nut palms, which I recognised at once from the many pictures that I had seen of them before I left home. A sandy beach of dazzling whiteness lined this bright-green shore, and upon it there fell a gentle ripple of the sea. This last astonished me much, for I recollected that at home the sea used to fall in huge billows on the shore long after a storm had subsided. But on casting my glance out to sea the cause became apparent. About a mile distant from the shore I saw the great billows

of the ocean rolling like a green wall, and falling with a long, loud roar upon a low coral reef, where they were dashed into white foam and flung up in clouds of spray. This spray sometimes flew exceedingly high, and every here and there a beautiful rainbow was formed for a moment among the falling drops. We afterwards found that this coral reef extended quite round the island, and formed a natural breakwater to it. Beyond this, the sea rose and tossed violently from the effects of the storm; but between the reef and the shore it was as calm and as smooth as a pond.

My heart was filled with more delight than I can express at sight of so many glorious objects, and my thoughts turned suddenly to the contemplation of the Creator of them all. I mention this the more gladly, because at that time, I am ashamed to say, I very seldom thought of my Creator, although I was constantly surrounded by the most beautiful and wonderful of His works. I observed, from the expression of my companion's countenance, that he too derived much joy from the splendid scenery, which was all the more agreeable to us after our long voyage on the salt sea. There the breeze was fresh and cold; but here it was delightfully mild, and when a puff blew off the land it came laden with the most exquisite perfume that can be imagined. While we thus gazed we were startled by a loud "Huzza!" from Peterkin, and on looking towards the edge of the sea we saw him capering and jumping about like a monkey, and ever and anon tugging with all his might at something that lay upon the shore.

"What an odd fellow he is, to be sure!" said Jack, taking me by the arm and hurrying forward. "Come, let us hasten to see what it is."

"Here it is, boys—hurrah! Come along! Just what we want!" cried Peterkin as we drew near, still tugging with all his power. "First-rate; just the very ticket!"

I need scarcely say to my readers that my companion Peterkin was in the habit of using very remarkable and

peculiar phrases. And I am free to confess that I did not well understand the meaning of some of them—such, for instance, as “the very ticket;” but I think it my duty to recount everything relating to my adventures with a strict regard to truthfulness in as far as my memory serves me, so I write, as nearly as possible, the exact words that my companions spoke. I often asked Peterkin to explain what he meant by “ticket,” but he always answered me by going into fits of laughter. However, by observing the occasions on which he used it, I came to understand that it meant to show that something was remarkably good or fortunate.

On coming up we found that Peterkin was vainly endeavouring to pull the axe out of the oar into which, it will be remembered, Jack struck it while endeavouring to cut away the cordage among which it had become entangled at the bow of the ship. Fortunately for us, the axe had remained fast in the oar, and even now all Peterkin’s strength could not draw it out of the cut.

“Ah, that is capital indeed!” cried Jack, at the same time giving the axe a wrench that plucked it out of the tough wood. “How fortunate this is! It will be of more value to us than a hundred knives, and the edge is quite new and sharp.”

“I’ll answer for the toughness of the handle, at any rate!” cried Peterkin; “my arms are nearly pulled out of the sockets. But see here, our luck is great. There is iron on the blade.” He pointed to a piece of hoop-iron as he spoke, which had been nailed round the blade of the oar to prevent it from splitting.

This also was a fortunate discovery. Jack went down on his knees, and with the edge of the axe began carefully to force out the nails. But as they were firmly fixed in, and the operation blunted our axe, we carried the oar up with us to the place where we had left the rest of our things, intending to burn the wood away from the iron at a more convenient time.

“Now, lads,” said Jack after we had laid it on the stone which contained our little all, “I propose that we should go to the tail of the island, where the ship struck, which is only a quarter of a mile off; and see if anything else has been thrown ashore. I don’t expect anything, but it is well to see. When we get back here it will be time to have our supper and prepare our beds.”

“Agreed!” cried Peterkin and I together, as, indeed, we would have agreed to any proposal that Jack made; for, besides his being older and much stronger and taller than either of us, he was a very clever fellow, and, I think, would have induced people much older than himself to choose him for their leader, especially if they required to be led on a bold enterprise.

Now as we hastened along the white beach, which shone so brightly in the rays of the setting sun that our eyes were quite dazzled by its glare, it suddenly came into Peterkin’s head that we had nothing to eat except the wild berries which grew in profusion at our feet.

“What shall we do, Jack?” said he with a rueful look. “Perhaps they may be poisonous!”

“No fear,” replied Jack confidently. “I have observed that a few of them are not unlike some of the berries that grow wild on our own native hills. Besides, I saw one or two strange birds eating them just a few minutes ago, and what won’t kill the birds won’t kill us. But look up there, Peterkin,” continued Jack, pointing to the branched head of a cocoa-nut palm. “There are nuts for us in all stages.”

“So there are!” cried Peterkin, who, being of a very unobservant nature, had been too much taken up with other things to notice anything so high above his head as the fruit of a palm-tree. But whatever faults my young comrade had, he could not be blamed for want of activity or animal spirits. Indeed, the nuts had scarcely been pointed out to him when he bounded up the tall stem of the tree

like a squirrel, and in a few minutes returned with three nuts, each as large as a man's fist.

"You had better keep them till we return," said Jack. "Let us finish our work before eating."

"So be it, captain; go ahead!" cried Peterkin, thrusting the nuts into his trousers pocket. "In fact, I don't want to eat just now; but I would give a good deal for a drink. Oh, that I could find a spring! but I don't see the smallest sign of one hereabouts. I say, Jack, how does it happen that you seem to be up to everything? You have told us the names of half-a-dozen trees already, and yet you say that you were never in the South Seas before."

"I'm not up to everything, Peterkin, as you'll find out ere long," replied Jack with a smile; "but I have been a great reader of books of travel and adventure all my life, and that has put me up to a good many things that you are, perhaps, not acquainted with."

"Oh, Jack, that's all humbug! If you begin to lay everything to the credit of books, I'll quite lose my opinion of you," cried Peterkin with a look of contempt. "I've seen a lot o' fellows that were always poring over books, and when they came to try to do anything, they were no better than baboons!"

"You are quite right," retorted Jack; "and I have seen a lot of fellows, who never looked into books at all, who knew nothing about anything except the things they had actually seen, and very little they knew even about these. Indeed, some were so ignorant that they did not know that coconuts grew on cocoa-nut trees!"

I could not refrain from laughing at this rebuke, for there was much truth in it as to Peterkin's ignorance.

"Humph! maybe you're right," answered Peterkin; "but I would not give tuppence for a man of books if he had nothing else in him."

"Neither would I," said Jack; "but that's no reason why you should run books down, or think less of me for having read

them. Suppose, now, Peterkin, that you wanted to build a ship, and I were to give you a long and particular account of the way to do it, would not that be very useful?"

"No doubt of it," said Peterkin, laughing.

"And suppose I were to write the account in a letter instead of telling you in words, would that be less useful?"

"Well—no, perhaps not."

"Well, suppose I were to print it and send it to you in the form of a book, would it not be as good and useful as ever?"

"Oh, bother! Jack, you're a philosopher, and that's worse than anything!" cried Peterkin with a look of pretended horror.

"Very well, Peterkin, we shall see," returned Jack, halting under the shade of a cocoa-nut tree. "You said you were thirsty just a minute ago. Now jump up that tree and bring down a nut—not a ripe one; bring a green, unripe one."

Peterkin looked surprised, but seeing that Jack was in earnest, he obeyed.

"Now cut a hole in it with your penknife and clap it to your mouth, old fellow," said Jack.

Peterkin did as he was directed, and we both burst into uncontrollable laughter at the changes that instantly passed over his expressive countenance. No sooner had he put the nut to his mouth, and thrown back his head in order to catch what came out of it, than his eyes opened to twice their ordinary size with astonishment, while his throat moved vigorously in the act of swallowing. Then a smile and a look of intense delight overspread his face, except, indeed, the mouth, which, being firmly fixed to the hole in the nut, could not take part in the expression; but he endeavoured to make up for this by winking at us excessively with his right eye. At length he stopped, and drawing a long breath, exclaimed:

"Nectar! perfect nectar!—I say, Jack, you're a Briton—the best fellow I ever met in my life—Only taste that!" said he, turning to me and holding the nut to my mouth. I

immediately drank, and certainly I was much surprised at the delightful liquid that flowed copiously down my throat. It was extremely cool, and had a sweet taste, mingled with acid; in fact, it was the likeliest thing to lemonade I ever tasted, and was most grateful and refreshing. I handed the nut to Jack, who, after tasting it, said, "Now, Peterkin, you unbeliever! I never saw or tasted a cocoa-nut in my life before, except those sold in shops at home; but I once read that the green nuts contain that stuff; and you see it is true."

"And, pray," asked Peterkin, "what sort of 'stuff' does the ripe nut contain?"

"A hollow kernel," answered Jack, "with a liquid like milk in it; but it does not satisfy thirst so well as hunger. It is very wholesome food, I believe."

"Meat and drink on the same tree!" cried Peterkin; "washing in the sea, lodging on the ground—and all for nothing! My dear boys, we're set up for life! It must be the ancient Paradise—hurrah!" and Peterkin tossed his straw hat in the air and ran along the beach, hallooing like a madman with delight.

We afterwards found, however, that these lovely islands were very unlike Paradise in many things. But more of this in its proper place.

We had now come to the point of rocks on which the ship had struck, but did not find a single article, although we searched carefully among the coral rocks, which at this place jutted out so far as nearly to join the reef that encircled the island. Just as we were about to return, however, we saw something black floating in a little cove that had escaped our observation. Running forward, we drew it from the water, and found it to be a long, thick, leather boot, such as fishermen at home wear; and a few paces farther on, we picked up its fellow. We at once recognised these as having belonged to our captain, for he had worn them during the whole of the storm in order to

guard his legs from the waves and spray that constantly washed over our decks. My first thought on seeing them was that our dear captain had been drowned; but Jack soon put my mind more at rest on that point by saying that if the captain had been drowned with the boots on, he would certainly have been washed ashore along with them, and that he had no doubt whatever he had kicked them off while in the sea that he might swim more easily.

Peterkin immediately put them on; but they were so large that, as Jack said, they would have done for boots, trousers, and vest too. I also tried them; but although I was long enough in the legs for them, they were much too large in the feet for me. So we handed them to Jack, who was anxious to make me keep them; but as they fitted his large limbs and feet as if they had been made for him, I would not hear of it, so he consented at last to use them. I may remark, however, that Jack did not use them often, as they were extremely heavy.

It was beginning to grow dark when we returned to our encampment; so we put off our visit to the top of a hill till next day, and employed the light that yet remained to us in cutting down a quantity of boughs and the broad leaves of a tree of which none of us knew the name. With these we erected a sort of rustic bower, in which we meant to pass the night. There was no absolute necessity for this, because the air of our island was so genial and balmy that we could have slept quite well without any shelter; but we were so little used to sleeping in the open air that we did not quite relish the idea of lying down without any covering over us. Besides, our bower would shelter us from the night-dews or rain, if any should happen to fall. Having strewed the floor with leaves and dry grass, we bethought ourselves of supper.

But it now occurred to us, for the first time, that we had no means of making a fire.

“Now, there’s a fix! What shall we do?” said Peterkin, while we both turned our eyes to Jack, to whom we always looked in our difficulties. Jack seemed not a little perplexed.

“There are flints enough, no doubt, on the beach,” said he; “but they are of no use at all without a steel. However, we must try.” So saying, he went to the beach, and soon returned with two flints. On one of these he placed the tinder, and endeavoured to ignite it; but it was with great difficulty that a very small spark was struck out of the flints, and the tinder, being a bad, hard piece, would not catch. He then tried the bit of hoop-iron, which would not strike fire at all; and after that the back of the axe, with no better success. During all these trials Peterkin sat with his hands in his pockets, gazing with a most melancholy visage at our comrade, his face growing longer and more miserable at each successive failure.

“Oh dear!” he sighed; “I would not care a button for the cooking of our victuals—perhaps they don’t need it—but it’s so dismal to eat one’s supper in the dark, and we have had such a capital day that it’s a pity to finish off in this glum style. Oh, I have it!” he cried, starting up: “the spy-glass—the big glass at the end is a burning-glass!”

“You forget that we have no sun,” said I.

Peterkin was silent. In his sudden recollection of the telescope he had quite overlooked the absence of the sun.

“Ah, boys, I’ve got it now!” exclaimed Jack, rising and cutting a branch from a neighbouring bush, which he stripped of its leaves. “I recollect seeing this done once at home. Hand me the bit of whip-cord.” With the cord and branch Jack soon formed a bow. Then he cut a piece about three inches long off the end of a dead branch, which he pointed at the two ends. Round this he passed the cord of the bow, and placed one end against his chest, which was protected from its point by a chip of wood; the other point he placed against the bit of tinder, and then began to saw vigorously with the bow, just as a blacksmith does with his

drill while boring a hole in a piece of iron. In a few seconds the tinder began to smoke; in less than a minute it caught fire; and in less than a quarter of an hour we were drinking our lemonade and eating cocoa-nuts round a fire that would have roasted an entire sheep, while the smoke, flames, and sparks flew up among the broad leaves of the overhanging palm-trees, and cast a warm glow upon our leafy bower.

That night the starry sky looked down through the gently rustling trees upon our slumbers, and the distant roaring of the surf upon the coral reef was our lullaby.