



CHAPTER I
CHAPTER II
CHAPTER III
CHAPTER IV
CHAPTER V
CHAPTER VI
CHAPTER VII
CHAPTER VIII
CHAPTER IX
CHAPTER X
CHAPTER XI
CHAPTER XII
CHAPTER XIII
CHAPTER XIV
CHAPTER XV
CHAPTER XVI
CHAPTER XVII
CHAPTER XVIII
CHAPTER XIX
CHAPTER XX
CHAPTER XXI
CHAPTER XXII
CHAPTER XXIII
CHAPTER XXIV
CHAPTER XXV
CHAPTER XXVI
CHAPTER XXVII
CHAPTER XXVIII
CHAPTER XXIX
CHAPTER XXX

CHAPTER XXXI
CHAPTER XXXII
CHAPTER XXXIII
CHAPTER XXXIV
CHAPTER XXXV
CHAPTER XXXVI

The Black Buccaneer, by Stephen W. Meader

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[Illustration: "If a man starts to haul on that line, I'll shoot him dead!" [See page 62.]]

THE BLACK BUCCANEER

BY

STEPHEN W. MEADER

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHOR

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FULL-PAGE ILLUSTRATIONS

"If a man starts to haul on that line, I'll shoot him dead!" *Frontispiece*

FACING PAGE

"Ho, ho, young woodcock, and how do ye like the company of Stede Bonnet's rovers?" 23

"Don't say a word--sh!--easy there--are you awake?" 143

A sudden red glare on the walls of the chasm 223

Job had bracketed his target 247

THE BLACK BUCCANEER

CHAPTER I

On the morning of the 15th of July, 1718, anyone who had been standing on the low rocks of the Penobscot bay shore might have seen a large, clumsy boat of hewn planking making its way out against the tide that set strongly up into the river mouth. She was loaded deep with a shifting, noisy cargo that lifted white noses and huddled broad, woolly backs--in fact, nothing less extraordinary than fifteen fat Southdown sheep and a sober-faced collie-dog. The crew of this remarkable craft consisted of a sinewy, bearded man of forty-five who minded sheet and tiller in the stern, and a boy of fourteen, tall and broad for his age, who was constantly employed in soothing and restraining the bleating flock.

No one was present to witness the spectacle because, in those remote days, there were scarcely a thousand white men on the whole coast of Maine from Kittery to Louisberg, while at this season of the year the Indians were following the migrating game along the northern rivers. The nearest settlement was a tiny log hamlet, ten miles up the bay, which the two voyagers had left that morning.

The boy's keen face, under its shock of sandy hair, was turned toward the sea and the dim outline of land that smudged the southern horizon.

"Father," he suddenly asked, "how big is the Island?"

"You'll see soon enough, Jeremy. Stop your questioning," answered the man. "We'll be there before night and I'll leave you with the sheep. You'll be lonesome, too, if I mistake not."

[Illustration: Jeremy]

"Huh!" snorted Jeremy to himself.

Indeed it was not very likely that this lad, raised on the wildest of frontiers, would mind the prospect of a night alone on an island ten miles out at sea. He had seen Indian raids before he was old enough to know what frightened him; had tried his best with his fists to save his mother in the Amesbury massacre, six years before; and in a little settlement on the Saco River, when he was twelve, he had done a man's work at the blockhouse loophole, loading nearly as fast and firing as true as any woodsman in the company. Danger and strife had given the lad an alert self-confidence far beyond his years.

Amos Swan, his father, was one of those iron spirits that fought out the struggle with the New England wilderness in the early days. He had followed the advancing line of colonization into the Northeast, hewing his way with the other pioneers. What he sought was a place to raise sheep. Instead of increasing, however, his flock had dwindled--wolves here--lynxes there--dogs in the larger settlements. After the last onslaught he had determined to move with his possessions and his two boys--Tom, nineteen years old, and the smaller Jeremy--to an island too remote for the attacks of any wild animal.

So he had set out in a canoe, chosen his place of habitation and built a temporary shelter on it for family and flock, while at home the boys, with the help of a few settlers, had laid the keel and fashioned the hull of a rude but seaworthy boat, such as the coast fishermen used.

Preparations had been completed the evening before, and now, while Tom cared for half the flock on the mainland, the father and younger son were convoying the first load to their new home.

In the day when these events took place, the hundreds of rocky bits of land that line the Maine coast stood out against the gray sea as bleak and desolate as at the world's beginning. Some were merely huge up-ended rocks that rose sheer out of the Atlantic a hundred feet high, and on whose tops the sea-birds nested by the million. The larger ones, however, had, through countless ages, accumulated a layer of earth that covered their gaunt

sides except where an occasional naked rib of gray granite was thrust out. Sparse grass struggled with the junipers for a foothold along the slopes, and low black firs, whose seed had been wind-blown or bird-carried from the mainland, climbed the rugged crest of each island. Few men visited them, and almost none inhabited them. Since the first long Norse galley swung by to the tune of the singing rowers, the number of passing ships had increased and their character had changed, but the isles were rarely touched at except by mishap--a shipwreck--or a crew in need of water. The Indians, too, left the outer ones alone, for there was no game to be killed there and the fishing was no better than in the sheltered inlets.

It was to one of the larger of these islands, twenty miles south of the Penobscot Settlement and a little to the southwest of Mount Desert, that a still-favoring wind brought the cumbersome craft near mid-afternoon. In a long bay that cut deep into the landward shore Amos Swan had found a pebbly beach a score of yards in length, where a boat could be run in at any tide. As it was just past the flood, the man and boy had little difficulty in beaching their vessel far up toward high water-mark. Next, one by one, the frightened sheep were hoisted over the gunwale into the shallow water. The old ram, chosen for the first to disembark, quickly waded out upon dry land, and the others followed as fast as they were freed, while the collie barked at their heels. The lightened boat was run higher up the beach, and the man and boy carried load after load of tools, equipment and provisions up the slope to the small log shack, some two hundred yards away.

Jeremy's father helped him drive the sheep into a rude fenced pen beside the hut, then hurried back to launch his boat and make the return trip. As he started to climb in, he patted the boy's shoulder. "Good-by, lad," said he gently. "Take care of the sheep. Eat your supper and go to bed. I'll be back before this time tomorrow."

"Aye, Father," answered Jeremy. He tried to look cheerful and unconcerned, but as the sail filled and the boat drew out of the cove he had to swallow hard to keep up appearances. For some reason he could not explain, he felt homesick. Only old Jock, the collie, who shouldered up to him and gave his hand a companionable lick, kept the boy from shedding a few unmanly tears.

CHAPTER II

The shelter that Amos Swan had built stood on a small bare knoll, at an elevation of fifty or sixty feet above the sea. Behind it and sheltering it from easterly and southerly winds rose the island in sharp and rugged ridges to a high hilltop perhaps a mile away. Between lay ascending stretches of dark fir woods, rough outcroppings of stone and patches of hardy grass and bushes. The crown of the hill was a bare granite ledge, as round and nearly as smooth as an inverted bowl.

Jeremy, scrambling through the last bit of clinging undergrowth in the late afternoon, came up against the steep side of this rocky summit and paused for breath. He had left Jock with the sheep, which comfortably chewed the cud in their pen, and, slipping a sort pistol, heavy and brass-mounted, into his belt, had started to explore a bit.

He must have worked halfway round the granite hillock before he found a place that offered foothold for a climb. A crevice in the side of the rock in which small stones had become wedged gave him the chance he wanted, and it took him only a minute to reach the rounded surface near the top. The ledge on which he found himself was reasonably flat, nearly circular, and perhaps twenty yards across.

[Illustration]

Its height above the sea must have been several hundred feet, for in the clear light Jeremy could see not only the whole outline of the island but most of the bay as well, and far to the west the blue masses of the Camden Mountains. He was surprised at the size of the new domain spread out at his feet. The island seemed to be about seven miles in length by five at its widest part. Two deep bays cut into its otherwise rounded outline. It was near the shore of the northern one that the hut and sheep-pen were built. Southwesterly from the hill and farther away, Jeremy could see the head of the second and larger inlet. Between the bays the distance could hardly have been more than two miles, but a high ridge, the backbone of the island, which ran westward from the hilltop, divided them by its rugged barrier.

Jeremy looked away up the bay where he could still see the speck of white sail that showed his father hurrying landward on a long tack with the west wind abeam. The boy's loneliness was gone. He felt himself the lord of a great maritime province, which, from his high watchtower, he seemed to hold in undisputed sovereignty.

Beneath him and off to the southward lay a little island or two, and then the cold blue of the Atlantic stretching away and away to the world's rim.

Even as he glowed with this feeling of dominion, he suddenly became aware of a gray spot to the southwest, a tiny spot that nevertheless interrupted his musing. It was a ship, apparently of good size, bound up the coast, and bowling smartly nearer before the breeze. The boy's dream of empire was shattered. He was no longer alone in his universe.

The sun was setting, and he turned with a yawn to descend. Ships were interesting, but just now he was hungry. At the edge of the crevice he looked back once more, and was surprised to see a second sail behind the first--a smaller vessel, it seemed, but shortening the distance between them rapidly. He was surprised and somewhat disgusted that so much traffic should pass the doors of this kingdom which he had thought to be at the world's end. So he clambered down the cliff and made his way homeward, this time following the summit of the ridge till he came opposite the northern inlet.

CHAPTER III

It was growing dark already in the dense fir growth that covered the hillside, and when Jeremy suddenly stepped upon the moss at the brink of a deep spring, he had to catch a branch to keep from falling in. There was an opening in the trees above and enough light came through for him to see the white sand bubbling at the bottom.

At one edge the water lapped softly over the moss and trickled down the northern slope of the hill in a little rivulet, which had in the course of time shaped itself a deep, well-defined bed a yard or two across. Following this, the boy soon came out upon the grassy slope beside the sheep-pen. He looked in at the placid flock, brought a bucket of water from the little stream, and, not caring to light a lantern, ate his supper of bread and cheese outside the hut on the slope facing the bay. The night settled chill but without fog. The boy wrapped his heavy homespun cloak round him, snuggled close to Jock's hairy side, and in his lonesomeness fell back on counting the stars as they came out. First the great yellow planet in the west, then, high overhead, the sparkling white of what, had he known it, was Vega; and in a moment a dozen others were in view before he could number them--Regulus, Altair, Spica, and, low in the south, the angry fire of Antares.

For him they were unnamed, save for the peculiarities he discovered in each. In common with most boys he could trace the dipper and find the North Star, but he regrouped most of the constellations to suit himself, and was able to see the outline of a wolf or the head of an Indian that covered half the sky whenever he chose. He wondered what had become of Orion, whose brilliant galaxy of stars appeals to every boy's fancy. It had vanished since the spring. In it he had always recognized the form of a brig he had seen hove-to in Portsmouth Harbor--high poop, skyward-sticking bowsprit and ominous, even row of gun-ports where she carried her carronades--three on a side. How those black cannon-mouths had gaped at the small boy on the dock! He wondered--

"Boom...!" came a hollow sound that seemed to hang like mist in a long echo over the island. Before Jeremy could jump to his feet he heard the rumbling report a second time. He was all alert now, and thought rapidly. Those sounds--there came another even as he stood there--must be cannon-shots--nothing less. The ships he had seen from the hilltop were men-of-war, then. Could the French have sent a fleet? He did not know of any recent fighting. What could it mean?

Deep night had settled over the island, and the fir-woods looked very black and uninviting to Jeremy when he started up the hill once more.

As their shadow engulfed him, he was tempted to turn back--how he was to wish he had done so in the days that followed--but the hardy strain of adventure in his spirit kept his jaw set and his legs working steadily forward into the pitch-black undergrowth. Once or twice he stumbled over fallen logs or tripped in the rocks, but he held on upward till the trees thinned and he felt that the looming shape of the ledge was just in front. His heart seemed to beat almost as loudly as the cannonade while he felt his way up the broken stones.

Panting with excitement, he struggled to the top and threw himself forward to the southern edge.

A dull-gray, quiet sea met the dim line of the sky in the south. Halfway between land and horizon, perhaps a league distant, Jeremy saw two vague splotches of darkness. Then a sudden flame shot out from the smaller one, on the right. Seconds elapsed before his waiting ear heard the booming roar of the report. He looked for the bigger ship to answer in kind, but the next flash came from the right as before. This time he saw a bright sheet of fire go up from the vessel on the left, illuminating her spars and topsails. The sound of the cannon was drowned in an instant by a terrific explosion. Jeremy trembled on his rock. The ships were in darkness for a moment after that first great flare, and then, before another shot could be fired, little tongues of flame began to spread along the hull and rigging of the larger craft. Little by little the fire gained headway till the whole upper works were a single great torch. By its light the victorious vessel was plainly visible. She was a

schooner-rigged sloop-of-war, of eighty or ninety tons' burden, tall-masted and with a great sweep of mainsail. Below her deck the muzzles of brass guns gleamed in the black ports. As the blazing ship drifted helplessly off to the east, the sloop came about, and, to Jeremy's amazement, made straight for the southern bay of the island. He lay as if glued to his rock, watching the stranger hold her course up the inlet and come head to wind within a dozen boat-lengths of the shore.

CHAPTER IV

One of the first things a backwoods boy learns is that it pays to mind your own business, *after* you know what the other fellow is going to do. Jeremy had been threshing his brain for a solution to the scene he had just witnessed. Whether the crew of the strange sloop, just then effecting a landing in small boats, were friends or enemies it was impossible to guess. Jeremy feared for the sheep. Fresh meat would be welcome to any average ship's crew, and the lad had no doubt that they would use no scruple in dealing with a youngster of his age. He must know who they were and whether they intended crossing the island. There was no feeling of mere adventure in his heart now. It was purely sense of duty that drove his trembling legs down the hillside. He shivered miserably in the night air and felt for his pistol-butt, which gave him scant comfort.

[Illustration]

The ridge, which has already been described, bore in a southerly direction from the base of the ledge, and sloped steeply to the head of the southern inlet. High above the arm of the bay, where the sloop was now moored, and scarcely a quarter of a mile from the shore, the ridge projected in a rough granite crag like a bent knee. Jeremy had a very fair plan of all this in his mind, for his trained woodsman's eye had that afternoon noted every landmark and photographed it. He followed this mental map as he stumbled through the trees. It seemed a long time, perhaps twenty or thirty minutes, before he came out, stifling the sound of his gasping breath, and crouched for a minute on the bare stone to get his wind. Then he crawled forward along the rough cliff top, feeling his way with his hands. Soon he heard a distant shout. A faint glow of light shone over the edge of the crag. As he drew near, he saw, on the beach below, a great fire of driftwood and some score or more of men gathered in the circle of light. The distance was too great for him to tell much about their faces, but Jeremy was sure that no English or Colonial sloop-of-war would be manned by such a motley company. Their clothes varied from the sea-boots and sailor's jerkin of the average mariner to slashed leather breeches of antique cut and red cloth skirts reaching from the girdle to the knees. Some of the group wore three-cornered hats, others seamen's caps of rough wool, and here and there a face grimaced from beneath a twisted rag rakishly askew. Everywhere about them the fire gleamed on small-arms of one kind or another. Nearly every man carried a wicked-looking hanger at his side and most had one or two pistols tucked into waistband or holster.

This desperate gang was in a constant commotion. Even as Jeremy watched, a half dozen men were rolling a barrel up the beach. Wild howls greeted its appearance and as it was hustled into the circle of bright light, those who had been dancing, quarreling and throwing dice on the other side of the fire fell over each other to join the mob that surrounded it. The leaping flames threw a weird, uncertain brilliance upon the scene that made Jeremy blink his eyes to be sure that it was real. With every moment he had become more certain what manner of men these were.

His lips moved to shape a single terrible word--"Pirates!"

The buccaneers were much talked of in those days, and though the New England ports were less troubled, because better guarded, than those farther south, there had been many sea-rovers hanged in Boston within Jeremy's memory.

As if to clinch the argument a dozen of the ruffians swung their cannikins of rum in the air and began to shout a song at the top of their lungs. All the words that reached Jeremy were oaths except one phrase at the end of the refrain, repeated so often that he began to make out the sense of it. "Walk the bloody beggars all below!" it seemed to be--or "overboard"--he could not tell which. Either seemed bad enough to the boy just then and he turned to crawl homeward, with a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach.

His way led straight back across the ridge to the spring and thence down to the shelter on the north shore. He made the best speed he was able through the woods until he reached the height of land near the middle of the

island. He had crashed along caring only to reach the sheep-pen and home, but as he stood for a moment to get his breath and his bearings, the westerly breeze brought him a sound of voices on the ridge close by. He prayed fervently that the wind which had warned him had served also to carry away the sound of his progress. Cowering against a tree, he stood perfectly still while the voices--there seemed to be two--came nearer and nearer. One was a very deep, rough bass that laughed hoarsely between speeches. The other voice was of a totally different sort, with a cool, even tone, and a rather precise way of clipping the words.

"See here, David," Jeremy understood the latter to say, "It's for you to remember those bearings, not me. You're the sailor here. Give them again now!"

"Huh!" grunted Big Voice, "two hunder' an' ten north to a sharp rock; three-score an' five northeast by east to an oak tree in a gully; two an' thirty north to a fir tree blazed on the south; five north *an'* there you are!" He ended in a chuckle as if pleased by the accuracy of his figures.

"Ay, well enough," the other responded, "but it must be wrong, for here's the blazed tree and no spring by it."

Close below, Jeremy saw their lantern flash and a moment later the two men were in full view striding among the trees. As he had almost expected from their voices, one was a tremendous, bearded fellow in sea-boots and jerkin and with a villainous turban over one eye, while his companion was a lean, smooth-shaven man, dressed in a fine buff coat, well-fitting breeches and hose, and shoes with gleaming buckles.

They must have passed within ten feet of the terrified Jeremy while the tossing lantern, swung from the hairy fist of the man called David, shone all too distinctly upon the boy's huddled shape. When they were gone by he allowed himself a sigh of relief, and shifted his weight from one foot to the other. A twig broke loudly and both men stopped and listened. "'Twas nought!" growled David. The other man paid no attention to him other than to say, "Hold you the lantern here!" and advanced straight toward Jeremy's tree. The boy froze against it, immovable, but it was of no avail.

"Aha," said the lean man, quietly, and gripped the lad's arm with his hand. As he dragged him into the light, his companion came up, staring with astonishment. A moment he was speechless, then began ripping out oath after oath under his breath. "How," he asked at length, "did the blarsted whelp come here?" The smaller man, who had been looking keenly into Jeremy's face, suddenly addressed him: "Here you, speak up! Do you live here?" he cried. "Ay," said the boy, beginning to get a grip on his thoughts.

"How long has there been a settlement here? There was none last Autumn," continued the well-dressed man. Jeremy had recovered his wits and reasoned quickly. He had little chance of escape for the present, while he must at all costs keep the sheep safe. So he lied manfully, praying the while to be forgiven.

"'Tis a new colony," he mumbled, "a great new colony from Boston town. There be three ships of forty guns each in the north harbor, and they be watching for pirates in these parts," he finished.

"Boy!" growled the bearded man, seizing Jeremy's wrist and twisting it horribly. "Boy! Are you telling the truth?" With face white and set and knees trembling from the pain, the lad nodded and kept his voice steady as he groaned an "Ay!"

The two men looked at each other, scowling. The giant broke silence. "We'd best haul out now, Cap'n," he said.

"And so I believe," the other replied, "But the water-casks are empty. Here!" as he turned to Jeremy, "show us the spring." It was not far away and the boy found it without trouble.

"Now, Dave Herriot," said the Captain, "stay you here with the light, that we may return hither the easier.

Boy, come with me. Make no fuss, either, or 'twill be the worse for you." And so saying he walked quickly back toward the southern shore, holding the stumbling Jeremy's wrist in a grip of iron.

Crashing down the hill through the brush, the lad had scant time or will for observing things about him, but as they crossed a gully he saw, or fancied he saw, on the knee-shaped crag above, the slouched figure of a buccaneer silhouetted against the sky. It was not the bearded giant called Herriot, but another, Jeremy was sure. He had no time for conjectures, for they plunged into the thicket and birch limbs whipped him across the face.

CHAPTER V

The events of that night made a terribly clear impression on the mind of the young New Englander. Years afterward he would wake with a shiver, imagining that the relentless hand of the pirate captain was again dragging him toward an unknown fate. It must have been the darkness and the sudden unexpectedness of it all that frightened him, for as soon as they came down the rocks into the flaring firelight he was able to control himself once more. The wild carouse was still in progress among the crew. Fierce faces, with unkempt beards and cruel lips, leered redly from above hairy, naked chests. Eyes, lit from within by liquor and from without by the dancing flames, gleamed below black brows. Many of the men wore earrings and metal bands about the knots of their pig-tails, while silver pistol-butts flashed everywhere.

As the Captain strode into the center of this group, the swinging chorus fell away to a single drunken voice which kept on uncertainly from behind the rum-barrel.

"Silence!" said the Captain sharply. The voice dwindled and ceased. All was quiet about the fire. "Men," went on Jeremy's captor, "clear heads, all, for this is no time for drinking. We have found this boy upon the hill, who tells of a fleet of armed ships not above a league from here. We must set sail within an hour and be out of reach before dawn. Every man now take a water-keg and follow me. You, Job Howland, keep the boy and the watch here on the beach."

Fresh commotion broke out as he finished. "Ay, ay, Captain Bonnet!" came in a broken chorus, as the crew, partially sobered by the words, hurried to the long-boat, where a line of small kegs lay in the sand. A moment later they were gone, plowing up the hillside. Jeremy stood where he had been left. A tall, slack-jointed pirate in the most picturesque attire strolled over to the boy's side and looked him up and down with a roguish grin. Under his cloak Jeremy had on fringed leather breeches and tunic such as most of the northern colonists wore. The pirate, seeing the rough moccasins and deerskin trousers, burst into a roar. "Ho, ho, young woodcock, and how do ye like the company of Major Stede Bonnet's rovers?"

[Illustration: "Ho, ho, young woodcock, and how do ye like the company of Stede Bonnet's rovers?"]

The lad said nothing, shut his jaw hard and looked the big buccaneer squarely in the face. There was no fear in his expression. The man nodded and chuckled approvingly. "That's pluck, boy, that's pluck," said he. "We'll clip the young cock's shank-feathers, and maybe make a pirate of him yet." He stooped over to feel the buckskin fringe on Jeremy's leg. The boy's hand went into his shirt like a flash. He had pulled out the pistol and cocked it, when he felt both legs snatched from under him.

His head hit the ground hard and he lay dazed for a second or two. When he regained his senses, Job Howland stood astride of him coolly tucking the pistol into his own waist-band. "Ay," said Job, "ye'll be a fine buccaneer, only ye should have struck with the butt. I heard the click." The pirate seemed to hold no grudge for what had occurred and sat down beside Jeremy in a friendly fashion.

"Free tradin' ain't what it was," he confided. "When Billy Kidd cleared for the southern seas twenty years ago, they say he had papers from the king himself, and no man-of-war dared come anigh him." He swore gently and reminiscently as he went on to detail the recent severities of the Massachusetts government and the insecurity of buccaneers about the Virginia capes. "They do say, tho', as Cap'n Edward Teach, that they call Blackbeard, is plumb thick with all the magistrates and planters in Carolina, an' sails the seas as safe as if he had a fleet of twenty ships," said Job. "We sailed along with him for a spell last year, but him an' the old man couldn't make shift to agree. Ye see this Blackbeard is so used to havin' his own way he wanted to run Stede Bonnet, too. That made Stede boilin', but we was undermanned just then and had to bide our time to cut loose.

"Cap'n Bonnet, ye see, is short on seamanship but long in his sword arm. Don't ye never anger him. He's terrible to watch when he's raised. Dave Herriot sails the ship mostly, but when we sight a big merchantman

with maybe a long nine or two aboard, then's when Stede Bonnet comes on deck. That Frenchman we sunk tonight, blast her bloody spars"--here the lank pirate interrupted himself to curse his luck, and continued--"probably loaded with sugar and Jamaica rum from Martinique and headed up for the French provinces. Well, we'll never know--that's sure!" He paused, bit off the end of a rope of black tobacco and meditatively surveyed the boy. "I'm from New England myself," said he after a time. "Sailed honest out of Providence Port when I was a bit bigger nor you. Then when I was growed and an able seaman on a Virginia bark in the African trade, along comes Cap'n Ben Hornygold, the great rover of those days and picks us up. Twelve of the likeliest he takes on his ship, the rest he maroons somewhere south of the Cubas, and sends our bark into Charles Town under a prize crew. So I took to buccaneering, and I must own I've always found it a fine occupation--not to say that it's made me rich--maybe it might if I'd kept all my sharin's."

[Illustration: Job Howland]

This life-history, delivered almost in one breath, had caused Howland an immense amount of trouble with his quid of tobacco, which nearly choked him as he finished. Except for the sound of his vast expectorations, the pair on the beach were quiet for what seemed to Jeremy a long while. Then on the rocks above was heard the clatter of shoes and the bumping of kegs. Job rose, grasping the hand of his charge, and they went to meet the returning sailors.

To the young woodsman, utterly unused to the ways of the sea, the next half-hour was a bewildering mêlée of hurrying, sweating toil, with low-spoken orders and half-caught oaths and the glimmer of a dying fire over all the scene. He was rowed to the sloop with the first boatload and there Job Howland set him to work passing water-kegs into the hold. He had had no rest in over twenty hours and his whole body ached as the last barrel bumped through the hatch. All the crew were aboard and a knot of swaying bodies turned the windlass to the rhythm of a muttered chanty. The chain creaked and rattled over the bits till the dripping anchor came out of water and was swung inboard. The mainsail and foresail went up with a bang, as a dozen stalwart pirates manned the halyards.

Dave Herriot stood at the helm, abaft the cabin companion, and his bull voice roared the orders as he swung her head over and the breeze steadied in the tall sails.

"Look alive there, mates!" he bellowed. "Stand by now to set the main jib!" Like most of the pirate sloops-of-war, Stede Bonnet's *Revenge* was schooner-rigged. She carried fore and main top-sails of the old, square style, and her long main boom and immense spread of jib gave her a tremendous sail area for her tonnage. The breeze had held steadily since sundown and was, if anything, rising a little. Short seas slapped and gurgled at the forefoot with a pleasant sound. Jeremy, desperately tired, had dropped by the mast, scarcely caring what happened to him. The sloop slid out past the dark headlands, and heeled to leeward with a satisfied grunt of her cordage that came gently to the boy's ears. His head sank to the deck and he slept dreamlessly.

CHAPTER VI

A rough hand shook him awake. He was lying in a dingy bunk somewhere in the gloom of the cramped forecabin. "Come, young'un," growled a voice, strange to Jeremy, "you've slept the clock around! Cap'n wants you aft."

The lad ached in all his bones as he rolled over toward the light. As he came to a sitting position on the edge of the bunk, he gave a start, for the face scowling down at him looked utterly fiendish to his sleepy eyes. Its ugliness fairly shocked him awake. The man had a grim, bristly jaw and a twisted mouth. His eyes were small and cruel, so light in color that they looked unspeakably cold. The livid gray line of a sword-cut ran from his left eyebrow to his right cheek, and his nose was crushed inward where the scar crossed its bridge, giving him more the look of an animal than of a man. A greasy red cloth bound his head and produced a final touch of barbarity. To the half-dazed Jeremy there seemed something strangely familiar about his pose, but as he still stared he was jerked to his feet by the collar. "Don't stand there, you lubber!" shouted the man with the broken nose. "Get aft, an' lively!" A hard shove sent the boy spinning to the foot of the ladder. He climbed dizzily and stumbled on deck, looking about him, uncertain where to go. It must have been past noon, for the sun was on the starboard bow.

The *Revenge* was close-hauled and running southwest on a fresh west wind. Dave Herriot leaned against the weather rail, a short clay pipe in one fist and his bushy brown beard in the other. At the wheel was a swarthy man with earrings, who looked like a Portuguese or a Spaniard. Glancing over his shoulder, Jeremy saw most of the crew lolled about forward of the fo'c's'le hatch. Herriot looked up and called him gruffly but not unkindly, the boy thought. He advanced close to the sailing-master, staggering a little on the uneven footing.

"Now look sharp, lad," said the pirate in a stern voice, "and mind what I tell 'ee. There's nought to fear aboard this sloop for them as does what they're told. We run square an' fair, an' while Major Stede Bonnet and David Herriot gives the orders, no man'll harm ye. *But*"--and a hard look came into the tanned face--"if there's any runnin' for shore 'twixt now and come time to *set* ye there, or if ever ye takes it in yer head to disobey orders, we'll keel-haul ye straight and think no more about it. You're big and strong, an' may make a foremast hand. For the first on it, until ye get your sea legs, ye can be a sort o' cabin boy. Cap'n wants ye below now. Quick!"

Jeremy scrambled down the companionway indicated by a gesture of Herriot's pipe. There was a door on each side and one at the end of the small passage. He advanced and knocked at this last one, and was told, in the Captain's clear voice, to open.

Major Bonnet sat at a good mahogany table in the middle of the cabin. Behind him were a bunk, two chairs and a rack of small arms, containing half a dozen guns, four brace of pistols, and several swords. He had been reading a book, evidently one of the score or more which stood in a case on the right. Jeremy gasped, for he had never seen so many books in all his life. As the Captain looked up, a stern frown came over his face, never a particularly merry one. The boy, ignorant as he was of pirates, could not help feeling that this man's quietly gentle appearance fitted but ill with the blood-thirsty reputation he bore. His clothes were of good quality and cut, his grayish hair neatly tied behind with a black bow and worn unpowdered. His clean-shaven face was long and austere--like a Boston preacher's, thought Jeremy--and although the forehead above the intelligent eyes was high and broad, there was a strange lack of humor in its vertical wrinkles.

"Well, my lad," said the cool voice at last, "you're aboard the *Revenge* and a long way from your settlement, so you might as well make the best of it. How long you *stay* aboard depends on your behavior. We might put into the Chesapeake, and if there are no cutters about, I'd consider setting you ashore. But if you like the sea and take to it, there's room for a hand in the fo'c's'le. Then again, if you try any tricks, you'll leave us--feet first, over the rail." He leaned forward and hissed slightly as he pronounced the last words. Something in the eyes under his knotted gray brows struck deeper terror into the boy's heart than either Herriot's threat or the cruel face of the man with the broken nose. For that instant Bonnet seemed deadly as a snake.

[Illustration: Stede Bonnet]

Jeremy was much relieved when he was bidden to go. The sailing-master stood by the companionway as he ascended. "You'll bunk for'ard," he remarked curtly. "Go up with the crew now." The boy slipped into the crowd that lay around the windlass as unobtrusively as he could. A thick-set, bearded man with a great hairy chest, bare to the yellow sash at his waist, was speaking. "Ay," he said, "a hundred Indians was dead in the town before ever we landed. They didn't know where to run except into the huts, an' those our round-shot plowed through like so much grass--which was what they was, mostly. Then old Johnny Buck piped the longboat overside and on shore we went, firin' all the time. Cap'n Vane himself, with a dirk in his teeth and sword an' pistol out, goes swearin' up the roadway an' we behind him, our feet stickin' in blood. A few come out shootin' their little arrers at us, but we herded 'em an' drove 'em, yellin' all the time. At close quarters their knives was no match for cutlasses. So we went slashin' through the town, burnin' 'em out an' stickin' 'em when they ran. Our sword arms was red to shoulder that day, but we was like men far gone in rum an' never stayed while an Indian held up head. Then we dropped and slept where we fell, across a corp', like as not, clean tuckered, every man of us. Come mornin', the sight and smell of the place made us sober enough and not a man in the crew wanted to go further into the island. There was no gold in the town, neither. All we got was a few hogs and sheep. We left the same day, for it come on hot an' we had no way to clean up the mess. That island must ha' been a nuisance to the whole Caribbean for weeks."

Job Howland nodded and spat as the story ended. "Ye're right, George Dunkin," he said. "That was a day's work. Vane's a hard man, I'm told, an' that crew in the *Chance* was one of his worst." He was interrupted by a villainous old sea-dog with a sparse fringe of white beard, who sprawled by the hatchway. He cleared his throat hoarsely and spoke with a deep wheeze between sentences.

"All that was nowt to our fight off Panama in the spring of 'eighty," he growled. "We weren't slaughterin' Indians, but Spaniards that could fight, an' did. What's more, they were three good barks and nigh three hundred men to our sixty-eight men paddlin' in canoes. Ah, that was a day's work, if you will! I saw Peter Harris, as brave a commander as ever flew the black whiff, shot through both legs, but he was a-swingin' his cutlass and tryin' to climb the Spaniard's side with the rest when our canoe boarded. Through most of that battle we was standin' in bottoms leakin' full of bullet holes, a-firin' into the Biscayner's gun-ports, an' cheerin' the bloody lungs out of us! When we got aboard, their hold was full of dead men an' their scuppers washin' red. They asked no quarter an' on we went, up an' down decks, give an' take. At the last, six men o' them surrendered. The rest--eighty from the one ship--we fed to the sharks before we could swab decks next day. Eh, but that was a v'yage, an' it cost the seas more good buccaneers than ever was hanged. Harris an' Sawkins an' half o' their best men we left on the Isthmus. But out of one galleon we took fifty thousand pieces-of-eight, besides silver bars in cord piles. Think o' that, lads!"

A fair, stocky, young deserter from a British man-of-war--his forearm bore the tattooed service anchor--broke in, his eyes gleaming greedily at the thought of the treasure.

"That was in New Panama," he cried. "Do you mind old Ben Gasket we took off Silver Key last summer! Eighty years old he was, and marooned there for half his life. He was with Morgan at the great sack of Old Panama before most on us was born. An' Old Ben, he said there was nigh two hundred horse-loads o' gold an' pearls, rubies, emeralds and diamonds took out o' that there town, an' it a-burnin' still, after they'd been there a month. Talk o' wealth!"

The man with the broken nose raised himself from his place by the capstan and stretched his hairy arms with an evil, leering yawn. Every eye turned to him and there was silence on the deck as he began to speak.

"Dollars--louis d'ors--doubloons?" said he. "There was one man got 'em. Solomon Brig got 'em. All the rest was babes to him--babes an' beggars. Billy Kidd was thought a great devil in his day, but when he met Brig's six-gun sloop off Malabar, he turned tail, him an' his two great galleons, an' ran in under the forts. Even then

we'd ha' had him out an' fought him, only that the old man had an Indian princess aboard he was takin' in to Calicut for ransom. That was where Sol Brig got his broad gold--kidnappin'. Twenty times we worked it--a dash in an' a fight out, quick an' bloody--then to sea in the old red sloop, all her sails fair pullin' the sticks out of her, an' maybe a man-o'-war blazin' away at our quarter. Weeks after, we'd slip into some port bold as brass an' there, sure enough, Brig would set the prisoner ashore an' load maybe a hundred weight of little canvas bags or a stack of pig-silver half a man's height. The very name of him made him safe. I'd take oath he could have stole the Lord Mayor o' London and then put in for his ransom at Execution Dock.

"We got good lays, us before the mast, but there never was a fair sharin' aboard that ship. One night I crawled aft an' looked in the stern-port. 'Twas just after we'd got our lays for kidnappin' the Governor o' Santiago--a rich town as you know. In the cabin sat ol' Brig, a bare cutlass acrost his lap, countin' piles o' moidores that filled the whole table. When a rope creaked the old fox saw me an' let drive with his hanger. Where I was I couldn't dodge quick, an' the blade took me here, acrost the face. Why he never knifed me, after, I don't know."

The scarred man stopped with the same abruptness that had marked his beginning. His fierce, light eyes, like those of a sea-hawk, swept slowly around the audience and lit on Jeremy. He reached forward, clutched the boy's shirt, and with an ugly laugh jerked him to his feet. "'Twas havin' boys aboard as killed Sol Brig," he rasped.

[Illustration: Pharaoh Daggs]

"They hear too much! Look at this young lubber"--giving him a shake--"pale as a mouldy biscuit! No use aboard here an' poverty-poor in the bargain! Why Stede don't walk him over the side, I don't see. Here, get out, you swab!" and he emphasized the name with a stiff cuff on the ear. Job Howland interposed his long Yankee body. His lean face bent with a scowl to the level of the other's eyes. "Pharaoh Daggs," he drawled evenly, "next time you touch that lad, there'll be steel between your short ribs. Remember!"

He turned to Jeremy who, poor boy, was utterly and forlornly seasick. "Here, young 'un," he said kindly, "--the *lee* rail!"

CHAPTER VII

Bright summer weather hovered over the Atlantic as the *Revenge* ploughed smartly southward. Jeremy grew more accustomed to his new manner of life from day to day and as he found his sea-legs he began to take a great pleasure in the free, salt wind that sang in the rigging, the blue sparkle of the swells, and the circling whiteness of the offshore gulls. He was left much to himself, for the Captain demanded his services only at meal times and to set his cabin in order in the morning. In the long intervals the boy sat, inconspicuous in a corner of the fore-deck, watching the gayly dressed ruffians of the crew, as they threw dice or quarrelled noisily over their winnings. He was assigned to no watch, but usually went below at the same time as Job Howland, thus keeping out of the way of Daggs, the man with the broken nose. As Howland was in the port watch, on deck from sunset to midnight, Jeremy often took comfort in the sight of his loved stars wheeling westward through the taut shrouds. He would stand there with a lump in his throat as he thought of his father's anguish on returning to the island to find the sheep uncared for and the young shepherd vanished. In a region desolate as that, he knew that there was but one conclusion for them to reach. Still, they might find the ashes of the pirate fire and keep up a hope that he yet lived.

But the boy could not be unhappy for long. He would find his way home soon, and he fairly shivered with delight as he planned the grand reunion that would take place when he should return. Perhaps he even imagined himself marching up to the door in sailor's blue cloth with a seaman's cloak and cocked hat, pistol and cutlass in his belt and a hundred gold guineas in his poke. Not for worlds would he have turned pirate, but the romance of the sea had touched him and he could not help a flight of fancy now and then.

Sometimes in the long hours of the watch, Job would give him lessons in seamanship--teach him the names of ropes and spars and show how each was used. The boy's greatest delight was to steer the ship when Job took his trick at the helm. This was no small task for a boy even as strong as Jeremy. The sloop, like all of her day, had no wheel but was fitted with a massive hand tiller, a great curved beam of wood that kicked amazingly when it was free of its lashings. Of course, no grown man could have held it in a seaway, but during the calm summer nights Jeremy learned to humor the craft along, her mainsail just drawing in the gentle land breeze, and her head held steadily south, a point west.

One night--it was perhaps a week after Jeremy's capture, and they had been sighting low bits of land on both bows all day--Dave Herriot came on deck about the middle of the watch and told Curley, the Jamaican second mate, he might go below. He set Job to take soundings and, himself taking the tiller, swung her over to port with the wind abeam. Jeremy went to the bows where he could see the white line of shore ahead. They drew in, steering by Job's soundings, and by the time the watch changed were ready to cast anchor in a small sandy bay. Herriot came forward, scowling darkly under his bushy eyebrows, and rumbling an occasional oath to himself. The sloop, her anchor down and sails furled, swung idly on the tide. The men were clearly mystified as the sailing-master started to give orders. "George Dunkin," he said, "take ten men of the starboard watch, and go ashore to forage. There be farms near here and any pigs or fowls you may come across will be welcome. You, Bill Livers," addressing the ship's painter, "take a lantern and your paint-pot and come aft with me. All the rest stay on deck and keep a double lookout, alow an' aloft!" The forage party slipped quietly off toward the beach in one of the boats. The remainder of the crew looked blankly after the retreating Bill Livers.

"Hm," murmured Job, "has Stede Bonnet gone *clean* crazy?"--and as Herriot let the painter down over the bulwark at the stern--"Ay, he's goin' to change her name, by the great Bull Whale!"

An hour before dawn the crew of the long-boat returned, grumbling and empty-handed. Herriot appeared preoccupied with some weightier matter and scarcely deigned to notice their failure by swearing. There was no singing as the anchor was raised. A sort of gloom hung over the whole ship. As she stole out to sea again, the men, one by one, went aft and leaned outboard, peering down at the broad, squat stern. Jeremy did likewise and beheld in new white letters on the black of the hull, the words *Royal James*. Next day in the fo'c's'le council he learned why the renaming of the *Revenge* had cast a pall of apprehension over the crew.

There were low-muttered tales of disaster--of storm, shipwreck, and fire, and that dread of all sailors--the unknown fate of ships that never come back to port. Apparently the rule was unailing. Sooner or later the ship that had been given a new name would come to grief and her crew with her. Pharaoh Daggs cast an eye of hatred at Jeremy and growled that "one Jonah was enough to have abroad, without clean drownin' all the luck this way," while the crew looked black and shifted uneasily in their places.

The bay where they had anchored overnight must have been somewhere on the eastern end of Long Island, a favorite landing place for pirates at that time. All day they cruised along the hilly southern shore. The men seemed unable to cast off the gloom that had settled upon them. Stede Bonnet sat in his cabin, never once coming on deck, and drinking hard, a thing unusual for him. Jeremy, who saw more of him than any of the foremast hands, realized from his gray, set face that the man was under a terrible strain of some sort. He told Job what he had seen and the tall New Englander looked very thoughtful. He took the boy aside. "There'll be mutiny in this crew before another night," he whispered. "They'll never stand for what he's done. If it comes to handspikes, you and I'd best watch our chance to clear out. Pharaoh Daggs don't love us a mite."

But the mutiny was destined not to occur. An hour before noon next day the lookout, constantly stationed in the bows, gave a loud "Sail ho!" and as Dave Herriot re-echoed the shout, all hands tumbled on deck with a rush.

CHAPTER VIII

As the pirate sloop raced southward under full sail, the form of the other ship became steadily plainer. She was a brig, high-pooped, and tall-masted, and apparently deeply laden. Major Bonnet, who had come up at the first warning, seemed his old cool self as he conned the enemy through a spyglass. Jeremy had been detailed as a sort of errand boy, and as he stood at the Captain's side he heard him speaking to Herriot.

"She's British, right enough," he was saying. "I can make out her flag; but how many guns, 'tis harder to tell. She sees us now, I think, for they seem to be shaking out a topsail.... Ah, now I can see the sun shine on her broadside--two ... three ... five in the lower port tier, and three more above--sixteen in all. 'Twill be a fight, it seems!"

Aboard the *Royal James* the men were slaving like ants, preparing for the battle. Every man knew his duties. The gunners and swabbers were putting their cannon in fettle below decks. Others were rolling out round-shot from the hold and storing powder in iron-cased lockers behind the guns. Great tubs of sea water were placed conveniently in the 'tween-decks and blankets were put to soak for use in case of fire. Buckets of vinegar water for swabbing the guns were laid handy. In the galley the cook made hot grog. Cutlasses were looked after, pistols cleaned and loaded and muskets set out for close firing. Jeremy was sent hither and thither on every imaginable mission, a tremendous excitement running in his veins.

The sloop gained rapidly on her prey, hauling over to windward as she sailed, and when the two ships were almost within cannon range, Stede Bonnet with his own hand bent the "Jolly Roger" to the lanyard and sent the great black flag with its skull and crossbones to fly from the masthead. The grog was served out. No man would have believed that the roaring, rollicking gang of cutthroats who tossed off their liquor in cheers and ribald laughter was identical with the grumbling, sour-faced crew of twenty hours before. As they finished, something came skipping over the water astern and the first echoing report followed close. The cannonade was on.

A loud yell of defiance swept the length of the *Royal James* as the men went to their posts. The gun decks ran along both sides of the sloop a few feet above the water line. They were like alleyways beneath the main deck, barely wide enough to admit the passage of a man or a keg of powder behind the gun-carriages. These latter were not fixed to the planking as afterward became the fashion, but ran on trucks and were kept in their places by rope tackles. In action, the recoil had to be taken up by men who held the ends of these ropes, rove through pulleys in the vessel's side. Despite their efforts the gun would sometimes leap back against the bulkhead hard enough to shatter it. As the charge for each reloading had to be carried sometimes half the length of the ship by hand, it is easy to see that the men who served the guns needed some strength and agility in getting past the jumping carriages.

Jeremy was sent below to help the gunners, as the shot from the merchantman continued to scream by. Job Howland was a gunner on the port side and the boy naturally lent his services to the one man aboard that he could call his friend. There was much bustle in the alley behind the closed ports but surprisingly little confusion was apparent. The discipline seemed better than at any time since the boy had been brought aboard the black sloop.

Job was ramming the wad home on the charge of powder in his bow gun. The other four guns in the port deck were being loaded at the same time, three men tending each one.

"Here, lad," sang out Job, as he put the single iron shot in at the muzzle, "take one o' the wet blankets out o' yon tub an' stand by to fight sparks." Jeremy did as he was bid, then got out of the way as the ports were flung open and the guns run forward, with their evil bronze noses thrust out into the sunlight.

The sloop, running swiftly with the wind abeam, had now drawn abreast of her unwieldy adversary. The merchant captain, apparently, finding himself out-speeded and being unable to spare his gun crews to trim sails, had put the head of his ship into the wind, where she stood, with canvas flapping, her bows offering a steady mark to the pirate.

"Ready a port broadside!" came Bonnet's ringing order, and then--"Fire!" Job Howland's blazing match went to the touch-hole at the word and his six-pounder, roaring merrily, jumped back two good feet against the straining ropes of the tackle. Instantly the next gun spoke and the next and so on, all five in a space of a bare ten seconds. Had they been fired simultaneously they might have shaken the ship to pieces. Jeremy was half-deafened, and his whole body was jarred. Thick black smoke hung in the alleyway, for the ports had been closed in order to reload in greater safety. The boy felt the deck heel to starboard under him and thought at first that a shot had caught them under the waterline, but when he was sent above to find out whether the broadside had taken effect, he found that the sloop had come about and was already driving north still to windward of the enemy. Bonnet was giving his gunners more time to load by running back and forth and using his batteries alternately. Herriot had the tiller and in response to Jeremy's question he pointed to the fluttering rags of the brig's foresail and the smoke that issued from a splintered hole under her bow chains.

Below in the gun deck the buccaneers, sweating by their pieces, heard the news with cheers. The sloop shook to the jarring report of the starboard battery a moment later, and hardly had it ceased when she came about on the other tack. "Hurrah," cried Job's mates, "we'll show him this time! Wind an' water--wind an' water!"

The open traps showed the green seas swirling past close below, and off across the swells the tall side of the merchantman swaying in the trough of the waves. "Ready!" came the order and every gunner jumped to the breach, match in hand. Before the command came to fire there was a crash of splintering wood and a long, intermittent roar came over the water. The brig had taken advantage of her falling off the wind to deliver a broadside in her own turn. Stede Bonnet's voice, cool as ever, gave the order and four guns answered the brig's discharge. The crew of the middle cannon lay on the deck in a pitiable state, two killed outright and the gunner bleeding from a great splinter wound in the head. A shot had entered to one side of the port, tearing the planking to bits and after striking down the two gun-servers, had passed into the fo'c's'le. Jeremy jumped forward with his blanket in time to stamp out a blaze where the firing-match had been dropped, and with the help of one of the pirates dragged the wounded man to his berth. Almost every shot of the last volley had done damage aboard the brig. Her freeboard, twice as high as that of the sloop, had offered a target which for expert gunners was hard to miss. Jagged openings showed all along her side, and as she rose on a swell, Job shouted, "See there! She's leakin' now. 'Twas my last shot did that--right on her waterline!"

"All hands on deck to board her!" came a shout, almost at the same instant. Jeremy hurrying up with the rest found the sloop bearing down straight before the wind, and only a dozen boat's lengths from the enemy.

A wild whoop went up among the pirates. Every man had seized on a musket and was crouching behind the rail. Bonnet alone stood on the open deck, his buff coat blowing open and his hand resting lightly on his sword. An occasional cannon shot screamed overhead or splashed away astern. Apparently the brig's batteries were too greatly damaged and her crew too badly shot up to offer an effective bombardment. She was drifting helplessly under tattered ribbons of canvas and the *Royal James*, whose sails had suffered far less, bore down upon her opponent with the swoop of a hawk.

As she drew close aboard a scattered fusillade of small arms broke out from the brig's poop, wounding one man, a Portuguese, but for the most part striking harmlessly against the bulwark. The buccaneers held their fire till they were scarce a boat's length distant. Then at the order they swept the ship with a withering musket volley. The brig was down by the head and lay almost bow on so that her deck was exposed to Bonnet's marksmen. Herriot brought his sloop about like a flash and almost before Jeremy realized what was toward, the ships had bumped together side by side, and the howling mob of pirates was swarming over the enemy's rail. Job Howland and another man took great boat-hooks, with which they grappled the brig's ports and kept

the two vessels from drifting apart. Jeremy was alone upon the sloop's deck. He put the thickness of the mast between him and the hail of bullets and peered fearfully out at the terrible scene above.

[Illustration: Dave Herriot]

The crew of the brig had been too much disorganized to repel the boarders as well as they might, and the entire horde of wild barbarians had scrambled to her deck, where a perfect inferno now held sway. The air seemed full of flying cutlasses that produced an incessant hiss and clangor. Pistols banged deafeningly at close quarters and there was the constant undertone of groans, cries and bellowed oaths. Above the din came the terrible, clear voice of Stede Bonnet, urging on his seadogs. He had become a different man from the moment his foot touched the merchantman's deck. From the cool commander he had changed to a devil incarnate, with face distorted, eyes aflame, and a sword that hacked and stabbed with the swift ferocity of lightning. Jeremy saw him, fighting single-handed with three men. His long sword played in and out, to the right and to the left with a turn and a flash, then, whirling swiftly, pinned a man who had run up behind. Bonnet's feet moved quickly, shifting ground as stealthily as a cat's and in a second he had leaped to a safer position with his back to the after-house. Two of his opponents were down, and the third fighting wearily and without confidence, when a huge, flaxen-haired man burst from the hatch to the deck and swung his broad cutlass to such effect that the battling groups in his path gave way to either side. The burly form of Dave Herriot opposed the new enemy and as the two giants squared off, sword ringing on sword, more than one wounded sailor raised himself to a better position, grinning with the Anglo-Saxon's unquenchable love of a fair fight. Herriot was no mean swordsman of the rough and ready seaman's type and had a great physique as well, but his previous labors--he had been the first man on board and had already accounted for a fair share of the defenders--had rendered him slow and arm-weary. The ready parrying, blade to blade, ceased suddenly as his foot slipped backward in a pool of blood. The blond seaman seized his advantage and swung a slicing blow that glanced off Herriot's forehead, and felled the huge buccaneer to the deck where he lay stunned, the quick red staining his head-cloth. As the blond-haired man stepped forward to finish the business, a long, keen, straight blade interposed, caught his cutlass in an upward parry and at the same time pinked him painfully in the arm.

Jumping back the seaman found himself faced by the pitiless eyes of Stede Bonnet, who had killed his last opponent and run in to save his mate's life. That quick, darting sword baffled the sailor. Swing and hack as he might, his blows were caught in midair and fell away harmless, while always the relentless point drove him back and back. Forced to the rail, he stood his ground desperately, pale and glistening with the sweat of a man in the fear of death. Then his sword flew up, the pirate captain stabbed him through the throat and with a dying gasp the limp body fell backward into the sea.

Meanwhile the pirates had steadily gained ground in the hand to hand struggle and now a bare half-dozen brave fellows held on, fighting singly or in pairs, back to back. The brig's captain, wounded in several places and seeing his crew in a fair way to be annihilated, flung up a tired arm and cried for quarter. Almost at once the fighting ceased and half the combatants, utterly exhausted, sank down among their dead and wounded fellows. The deck was a long shambles, red from the bits to the poop.

While the hands of the prisoners were being bound, Bonnet and all of his men not otherwise employed hurried below to search for loot. The man who had held the boat-hook astern left this task and greedily clambered up the brig's side lest he should miss his chance at the booty. Job alone stuck to his post, and motioned Jeremy to stay where he was. Cheers and yells of joy rang from the after-hold of the merchantman where the pirates had evidently discovered the ship's store of wine.

After a few moments Pharaoh Daggs thrust his scarred face out of the companion, and with a fierce roar of laughter waved a black bottle above his head. The others followed, drinking and babbling curses, and last of all Stede Bonnet, pale, dishevelled, mad with blood and liquor, stood bareheaded by the hatch. He raised his hand in a gesture of silence and all the hubbub ceased. "We have beaten them!" he cried between twitching

lips. "I Captain Thomas, the chiefest of all the pirates, and my bully-boys of the *Royal James*! We'll show 'em all! We'll show 'em all! Blackbeard and all the rest! He, he, he!" and his voice trailed off in crazy laughter. The men of the crew stood about him on the brig's deck dumbfounded by his words. Jeremy could hardly breathe in his surprise. Suddenly he gave a start and would have cried out but that Job Howland's hand closed his mouth. A swiftly widening lane of water separated the sloop from her late enemy.

CHAPTER IX

As she cleared the side of the waterlogged merchantman, the *Royal James* began to move. Her sails which had been left flapping during the close fighting, now filled with a bang and she went away smartly on the starboard tack. Job had dragged Jeremy aft and the two were huddled at the tiller, partially screened by the mainsail, when a howl of consternation broke out aboard the brig. Few if any of the firearms were still loaded, or they might have been shot to death, out of hand. As it was, the sloop had drawn away to a distance of nearly a quarter of a mile before any effort was made to stop her.

Then a single cannon roared and a round shot whizzed by along the tops of the waves. When the next report came, Jeremy could see the splash fall far astern. They were out of range.

The two runaways now felt comparatively safe. It was certain that the brig was too badly damaged to give chase even if she could keep afloat. Jeremy felt a momentary pang at the thought of leaving even that graceless crowd in such jeopardy, but he remembered that they had the brig's boats in which to leave the hulk, and his own present danger soon gave him enough to occupy him.

Job lashed the tiller and going to the lanyard at the mainmast, hauled down the black flag. Then they both set to work cleaning up the deck. The three dead men were given sea burial--slipped overboard without other ceremony than the short prayer for each which Jeremy repeated. The gunner who lay in agony in his berth had his wound bound up and was given a sip of brandy. Then the lank New Englander went below to get a meal, while Jeremy sluiced the gun decks with sea water.

Night was falling when Job reappeared on deck with biscuit and beans and some preserves out of the Captain's locker. There was little appetite in Jeremy after what he had witnessed that day, but his tall friend ate his supper with a relish and seemed quite elated at the prospect of the voyage to shore. He filled a clay pipe after the meal and smoked meditatively awhile, then addressed the boy with a queer hesitancy.

"Sonny," he began, "since we picked you up, I've been thinkin' every day, more an' more, what I'd give to be back at your age with another chance. Piratin' seemed a fine upstandin' trade to me when I begun,--independent an' adventurous too, it seemed. But it's not so fine--not so fine!" He paused. "One or two or maybe five years o' rough livin' an' rougher fightin', a powerful waste o' money in drink an' such, an' in the end--a dog's death by shootin' or starvation, or the chains on Execution Dock." Another pause followed and then, turning suddenly to Jeremy--"Lad, I can get a Governor's pardon ashore, but 'twould mean nought to me if my old days came back to trouble me. You're young an' you're honest an' what's more you believe in God. Do you figger a man can square himself after livin' like I've lived?" The boy looked into the pirate's homely, anxious face. He felt that he would always trust Job Howland. "Ay," he answered straightforwardly, and put out his hand. The man gripped it with a sort of fierce eagerness that was good to see and smiled the smile of a man at peace with himself. Then he solemnly drew out his clasp-knife and pricked a small cross in the skin of his forearm. "That," said he, "is for a sign that once I get out o' this here pickle I'll never pirate nor free-trade no more."

The wind sank to a mere breath as the darkness gathered and Jeremy stood the first watch while his tired friend settled into a deep sleep that lasted till he was wakened a little after midnight. Then the boy took his turn at sleeping.

When the morning light shone into his eyes he woke to find Job pacing the deck and casting troubled looks at the sky. The wind was dead and only an occasional whiff of light air moved the idly swinging canvas. A tiny swell rocked the sloop as gently as a cradle.

"Well, my boy, we won't get far toward shore at this gait," said Job cheerfully as Jeremy came up. "Except for maybe three hours sailin' last night, we've made no progress at all. I've got some porridge cooked below. You

bring it on deck an' we'll have a snack."

The meal finished, they turned to the rather trying task of waiting for a breeze. About noon Job climbed to the masthead for a reconnaissance and on coming down reported a sail to the east, but no sign of any wind. The sky was dull and overcast so that Job made no effort to determine their bearings. They figured that they had drifted a dozen or more sea-miles to the west since the battle, and were lying somewhere off the little port of New York.

The day passed, Job amusing Jeremy with tales of his adventures and old sea-yarns and soon night had overtaken them again. This time the boy had the first nap. He was roused to take his watch when Job saw by the stars that it was eight bells, and, still yawning with sleep, the lad went to stand by the rail. Everything was quiet on the sea, and even the swell had died out, leaving a perfect calm. There was no moon. The boy's head sank on his breast and softly he slid to the deck. Drowsiness had overcome him so gently that he slept before he knew he was sleepy.

CHAPTER X

Jeremy's first waking sensation was the sound of a hoarse confused shout and the rattle of oars being shipped. He struggled to his feet, staring into the dark astern. Almost at the same instant there came a series of bumps along the sloop's side, and as the boy rushed to the hatch to call his ally, he heard feet pounding the deck. "Job!" he cried, "Job!" and then a heavy hand smote him on the mouth and he lost consciousness for a time.

The period during which he stood awake and terrified had been so brief and so fraught with terror that it never seemed real to the lad in memory. There was something of the awful hopelessness of nightmare about it. Always afterward he had difficulty in convincing himself that he had not slept steadily from the time he drowned on watch to the minute when he opened his eyes to the light of morning and felt his aching head throb against the hard deck.

As he lay staring at the sky, a footstep approached and some one stood over him. He turned his eyes painfully to look and beheld the dark, bearded visage of George Dunkin, the bo's'n, who scowled angrily and kicked him in the ribs with a heavy toe. "Get up, ye young lubber!" roared the man and swore fiercely as the boy, unable to move, still lay upon his back. A moment later the bo's'n went away. To Jeremy's numb consciousness came the realization that the pirates had caught them again.

The words of the Captain on his first day aboard came back to the lad and made him shudder. There had been stories current among the men that gave a glimpse of how Stede Bonnet dealt with those who were treacherous. Which of a dozen awful deaths was in store for him? Ah, if only they would spare the torture, he thought that he could die bravely, a worthy scion of dauntless stock. He thought of Job who must have been seized in his bunk below. The poor fellow was to have short happiness in his changed way of life, it seemed.

Jeremy tried to steel his nerves against the test he was sure must follow soon. Instead of going to pieces in terror, he succeeded in forcing himself to the attitude of a young stoic. He had done nothing of which he was ashamed, and he felt that if he was called to face a just God in the next twenty-four hours, he would be able to hold his head up like a man.

Time passed, and he heard a heavy tramp coming along the deck. He was hoisted roughly by hands under his arm-pits and placed upon his feet, though he was still too weak to stand without support. A dozen faces surrounded him, glaring angrily. Out of a sort of mist that partly obscured his vision came the terrible leer of the man with the broken nose. The twisted mouth opened and the man spoke with a deliberate ugliness. The very absence of oaths seemed to make his slow speech more deadly.

"Ah, ye misbegotten young fool," he said, "so there ye stand, scared like the cowardly spawn ye are. We took ye, and kept ye, and fed ye. What's more, we was friends to ye, eh mates? An' how do ye treat yer friends? Leave 'em to starve or drown on a sinkin' ship! Sneak off like a dog an' a son of a cowardly dog!" Jeremy went white with anger. "An' now"--Daggs' voice broke in a sudden snarl--"an' now, we'll show ye how we treat such curs aboard a ten-gun buccaneer! Stand by, mates, to keel-haul him!"

At this moment a second party of pirates poured swearing out of the fo'c's'le hatch, dragging Job Howland in their midst. He was stripped to his shirt and under-breeches and had apparently received a few bruises in the tussle below. Jeremy's spirits were momentarily revived by seeing that some of the buccaneers had suffered like inconveniences, while the young ex-man-o'-war's-man was gingerly feeling of a shapeless blob that had been his nose. Dave Herriot, his head tied up in a bandage, was superintending the preparations for punishment. "Let's have the boy first," he shouted.

Aboard a square-rigger, keel-hauling was practiced from the main yardarm. The victim was dragged completely under the ship's bottom, scraping over the jagged barnacles, and drawn up on the other side, more often dead than living. As the sloop had only fore and aft sails, they had merely run a rope under the bottom,

bringing both ends together amidships. They now dragged the boy forward, still in a half-fainting condition and made fast his feet in a loop in one end of the rope, then, stretching his arms along the deck in the other direction, bound his wrists in a similar way. He was practically made a part of the ring of hemp that circled the ship's middle.

Without further ceremony other than a parting kick or two, the crew took their places at the rope, ready to pull the lad to destruction. He set his teeth and a wordless prayer went up from his heart.

The wrench of the rope at his ankles never came. As he lay with his eyes closed, a high-pitched voice broke the quiet. "If a man starts to haul on that line, I'll shoot him dead!" Jeremy turned his head and looked. There stood Stede Bonnet, his face ashen gray and trembling, but with a venomous fire in his sunken eyes. He held a pistol in each hand and two more were thrust into his waist-band. Not a man stirred in the crew.

"That boy," went on the clear voice, "had no hand in the business, and well you know it. It is for me to give out punishments while I am Captain of this sloop, and by God I shall be Captain during my life. Pharaoh Daggs, step forward and unloose the rope!" The man with the broken nose fixed his light eyes on the Captain's for a full five seconds. Bonnet's pistol muzzle was as steady as a rock. Then the sailor's eyes shifted and he obeyed with a sullen reluctance. Jeremy, liberated, climbed to his knees and stood up swaying. Just then there was a rush of feet behind. He turned in time to see Job Howland vanish head foremost over the rail in a long clean dive. The astonished crew ran cursing to the side and stared after him, but no faintest trace of the man appeared. At dawn a breeze had sprung up and now the little waves chopped along below the ports with a sound like a mocking chuckle. They had robbed the buccaneers of their cruel sport.

Mutiny might have broken out then and there, but Stede Bonnet, cool as ever, stood amidships with his arms crossed and a calm-looking pistol in each fist. "Herriot," he remarked evenly, "better set the men to cleaning decks and repairing damage. We'll start down the Jersey coast at once."

Jeremy got to his bunk as best he might and slept for the greater part of twenty-four hours. When he awoke, the crew had just finished breakfast and were sitting, every man by himself, counting out gold pieces. Bonnet had divided the booty found on the brig and in their greedy satisfaction the pirates were, for the time at least, utterly oblivious to former discontent. When he got up and went to the galley for breakfast, Jeremy was ignored by his fellows or treated as if nothing had occurred. Indeed, there had been little real ground for wishing to punish the boy aside from the ugly temper occasioned by having to row a night and a day in open boats. Only Pharaoh Daggs bore real malice toward Jeremy and his feelings were for the most part concealed under a mask of contemptuous indifference.

As the day progressed the lad found that matters had resumed their accustomed course and that he was in no immediate danger. He missed his brave friend and co-partner as bitterly as if he had been a brother, but partially consoled himself with the thought that Job's act in jumping overboard had probably spared him the awful torture of the keel or some worse death. The Captain would never have defended the runaway sailor as he had done Jeremy, the boy was certain.

All day the sloop made her way south at a brisk rate, occasionally sighting low, white beaches to starboard. Sometime in the first dog-watch her boom went over and she ran her slim nose in past Cape May, heading up the Delaware with the hurrying tide, while the brig's long-boat, towing behind, swung into her wake astern.

CHAPTER XI

When the gang of buccaneers had tumbled down the hatch after Jeremy's cry of warning, Job Howland, barely awake, had leaped to the narrow angle that made the forward end of the fo'c's'le, seizing a pistol as he went. Intrenching himself behind a chest, with the bulkhead behind him and on both sides, he had kept the maddened crew at bay for several moments. The pistol, covering the only path of attack, made them wary of approaching too close. When, finally, a half-dozen jumped forward at once, he pulled the trigger only to find that the weapon had not been loaded. In desperation he grasped the muzzle in his hand and struck out fiercely with the heavy butt, beating off his assailants time after time. This was well enough at first, but the buccaneers, who cared much less for a broken crown than for a bullet wound, pressed in closer and closer, striking with fists and marline-spikes. It was soon over. They jammed him so far into the corner that his tireless arm no longer had free play, and then bore him down under sheer weight of numbers. When he ceased to struggle they seized him fast and carried him to the deck.

Job was out of breath and much bruised but had suffered no lasting hurt. He saw Jeremy led forward, heard the men's cries and realized that the torture was in store for them both.

Unbound, but helpless to interfere, he saw the boy stretched on the deck and the rope attached to his arms and legs. He suffered greater agony than did Jeremy as the crew made ready to begin their awful work, for he had seen keelhauling before. And then suddenly Stede Bonnet was standing by the companion and the ringing shout that saved the boy's life struck on Job's ears. He could hardly keep from cheering the Captain then and there, but relief at Jeremy's delivery brought with it a return of his quick wits. He himself was in as great danger as ever.

He was facing aft, and his eye, roving the deck for a means of escape, lit on the brig's boat, which the pirates had tied astern after reboarding the sloop. She was trailing at the end of a painter, her bows rising and falling on the choppy waves. He waited only long enough to see that the Captain succeeded in freeing Jeremy, then drew a great breath and plunged over the side. Swimming under water, he watched for the towed longboat to come by overhead, and as her dark bulk passed, he caught her keel with a strong grip of his fingers, worked his way back and came up gasping, his hands holding to the rudder ring in her stern.

The hot, still days had warmed the surface of the sea to a temperature far above the normal, or he must certainly have become exhausted in a short time. As it was, he clung to his ring till near noon, when, cautiously peering above the gunwale, he saw the sloop's deck empty save for a steersman, half asleep in the hot sun by the tiller. With a great wrench of his arms the ex-buccaneer lifted himself over the stern and slipped as quietly as he was able into the boat's bottom. There he lay breathless, listening for sounds of alarm aboard the sloop. None came and after a few moments he wriggled forward and made himself snug under the bow-thwart. The boat carried a water-beaker and a can of biscuit for emergency use. After refreshing himself with these and drying out his thin clothing in the sun, he retreated under the shade of the thwart and slept the sleep of utter fatigue.

Late the next day he took a brief observation of the horizon. There was sandy shore to the east and from what he knew of the coast and the ship's course he judged they must be nearing the entrance to Delaware Bay. His long rest had restored to him most of his vigor and although he was sore in many places, he felt perfectly ready to try an escape as soon as the sloop should approach the land and offer him an opportunity.

As the night went on the *Royal James* made good speed up the Bay aided by a strong tide. A little while before light she came close enough to the west shore for Job to see the outlines of trees on a bluff. He figured the distance to be not above a mile at most. There was some question in his mind whether he should cut the painter and use the boat in getting away or swim for it. He decided that it would be better for him in most ways if the pirates still supposed him dead. So, quietly as an otter, he slipped over the gunwale, paddled away from the boat's side and set out for the land, ploughing through the water with a long overarm stroke.

Job had a hard fight with the turning tide before the trees loomed above his head and his feet scraped gravel under the bank. When at last he crept gasping out upon dry ground, it was miles to the southward of his first destination. Dawn had come and the early light silvered the rippling cross-swells and glinted on the white wings of the gulls. The big mariner shook the water from his sides like a spaniel, stretched both long arms to the warm sky, laughed as he thought of his escape and turning his gaunt face to the northward set out swiftly along the tree-clad bluffs.

CHAPTER XII

Meanwhile the *Royal James* was far up inside the Capes, sailing demurely along, the ports of her gun deck closed and the British colors fluttering from her top. Jeremy watched the shores they passed with deep interest. He wondered if there would be a chance for him to get away when they came to anchor. There was nothing but hardship in his lot aboard the sloop, now that Job was gone. He was unnoticed for the most part by the men of the crew, and when any of them spoke to him it was with a cuff or a curse. As for Captain Bonnet, he had relapsed into one of his black moods. Nothing brought him on deck or made him speak except to give Herriot monosyllabic commands.

Late the following day, after a slow progress along the Delaware shore, the sloop hove to in a wide roadstead and the anchor was run out. The steeples and shipping of a little town were visible by the water side, but no one put off to meet them. To the surprise of all, Bonnet himself came on deck, wearing a good coat and fresh ruffles and with his hair powdered. He ordered the gig lowered, then looked about the assembled crew and addressed them good-humoredly enough. "Now, my lads," said he, "I'm going ashore with a picked boat's crew to get what news there is about. You that go with me remember that you are of the *Royal James*, honest merchant coaster, and that I am Captain Thomas, likewise honest navigator. We'll separate into every tavern and ship-chandler's place along the wharves, pick up the names of all ships that are soon to sail, and their cargoes, and meet at the gig at eight bells. Herriot and you men aboard here, keep a strict watch. Daggs, I leave the boy in your charge. Don't let him out of your sight."

At the last words Jeremy's heart sank to his boots. He knew how futile would be any attempt to escape under the cold hawk-eyes of the man with the broken nose. As the gig put off from the sloop's side, the boy leaned dejectedly against the rail. Pharaoh Daggs slouched up to him. "Ah there, young 'un," said he with cynical jocularly, "just thinkin' o' leavin' us, were ye, when the old man took the gimp out o' ye?" The bantering note vanished from the man's voice. "I'd like to break yer neck, ye young whelp, but I won't--not just yet!" He seemed to be licking his ugly chops at the thought of a future occasion when he might allow himself this luxury. Then he went on, half to himself it seemed. "Hm, Bonnet's a queer 'un! Never *can* tell what he'll do. Them eight men aboard that brig, now--never was a rougher piece o' piracy since Morgan's day than his makin' those beggars walk the plank. Stood there an' roared an' laughed, he did, an' pricked 'em behind till they tipped the board. An' then to stop us from drownin' a blasted little rat that'd tried to kill us all! Oh, he's bad, is Stede--bad!" Jeremy gave a start as this soliloquy progressed. He had wondered once or twice what had become of the prisoners taken aboard the brig. That attempted escape of Job's had cost dear in human life it seemed. And his own deliverance had been the mere whim of a mad-man! He shuddered and thanked God fervently for the fortune that had so far attended him.

There was a pause while the buccaneer seemed to regard him with a sort of crafty hesitancy. At length he spoke.

"See here, boy," he said, his voice sinking to a hoarse whisper, "how long had you been livin' on that there island?"

Jeremy looked up wonderingly. "Not long," he answered, "only a day or two, really."

"And you--nor none of yer folks--never went nosin' 'round there to find nothin', did yer? Tell me the truth, now!" Daggs leaned closer, a murderous intensity in his face.

"No," said Jeremy, squirming as the man's fingers gripped his shoulder.

The pirate gave him another long, piercing look from his terrible eyes, then released him and went forward, where he stood staring off toward the shore.

In his wretched loneliness the boy sank down by the rail, his heart heavier than it had ever been in his whole life. It might have been a relief to him to cry. A great lump was in his throat indeed and his eyes smarted, but he had considered himself too old for tears almost since he could walk, and now with the realization that he was near shedding them, he forced his shoulders back, shut his square jaw and resolved that he would be a man, come what might. Darkness settled over the river mouth. The form of Pharaoh Daggs in black silhouette against the gray of the sky sent a shudder through Jeremy. He recalled with startling distinctness the solitary man he had seen on the island the night of his capture. The two figures were identical. Pondering, the boy fell asleep.

It was some four hours later that he woke to the sound of hurrying oars close aboard. A subdued shout came across the water. The voice was Stede Bonnet's. "Stand by to take us on!" he cried. A moment later the gig shot into sight, her crew rowing like mad. They pulled in their oars, swept up alongside the black sloop, and were caught and pulled aboard by ready hands. "Cut the cable!" cried the Captain as soon as he reached the deck. The gig was swung up, the cable chopped in two and the mainsail spread, and in an incredibly short time the *Royal James* was bowling along down the roadstead. Hardly had she gotten under way when two long-boats appeared astern and amid shouts and orders to surrender from their crews, a scattered fusillade of bullets came aboard. No one on the sloop was hit, and as the sails began to draw properly the pirate craft soon left her pursuers far to the rear.

Jeremy, never one to watch others work, had lent a hand wherever he was best able, during the rush of the escape. When the sloop was well out of range and the excitement had subsided, he turned for the first time to look at a small group that had been talking amidships. Two of the figures were very well known to him--Bonnet and Herriot. The light of a lantern, which the latter held, fell upon the face of a boy no older than Jeremy, dressed in the finest clothes the young New Englander had ever seen.

The lad's face was dark and resolute, his hair black, smoothly brushed back and tied behind with a small ribbon. His blue coat was of velvet, neatly cut. Below his long flowered waistcoat were displayed buff velvet breeches and silk stockings of the same color. His shoes were of fine leather and buckled with silver.

In response to the oaths and rough questions of the two pirates, the lad seemed to have little to say. When he spoke it was with a scornful ring in his voice. The first words Jeremy heard him say were: "You'll understand it soon, I fancy. We are well enough known along the bay and my father, as I have said, is a friend of the Governor's. There'll be ten ships after you before morning." Herriot put back his head and roared with laughter. "Hear the young braggart!" he shouted. "Ten ships for such a milk-fed baby as he is!"

"Well, my lad," said the Captain, "you'll be treated well enough while we wait for the money to be paid. Here, Jeremy!" As the young backwoodsman came up, Bonnet continued, "Two boys aboard is bad business, for you're sure to be scheming to get away. However, it can't be helped, just yet, and mind what I say,--there'll be a bullet ready for the first one that tries it. Now get below, the pair of you."

Glad as he was to have a companion of his own age aboard, Jeremy, boylike, was too shy to say anything to the new arrival that night, and indeed the other boy seemed to class him with the rest of the pirates and to feel some repugnance at his company. So the two unfortunate youngsters slept fitfully, side by side, until broad daylight next morning.

CHAPTER XIII

The "salt horse" which was served out for breakfast aboard the *Royal James* made scant appeal to the Delaware boy's appetite. He hardly touched the portion which Jeremy offered him and kept up his pose of proud aloofness all the morning. It is scarcely a matter for wonder that he did not at once make friends with Jeremy. The latter's buckskin breeches and moccasins had been taken from him when he came aboard and he was now clad in his old leather tunic, a pair of seaman's trousers, which bagged nearly to his ankles, wrinkled, garterless wool socks and an old pair of buckled shoes, stuffed with rags to make them fit. His hair, never very manageable, had received little attention during the voyage and now was as wild and rough as that of a savage. It would have required a long second glance for one to see the fine qualities of grit and self-reliance in the boy's keen face.

The sloop was making great speed down the middle channel of the Bay, her canvas straining in a fine west breeze, and her deck canted far to leeward. No boy could long withstand the pleasure of sailing on such a day, and before noon the young stranger had given in to a consuming desire to know the names of things. Jeremy now had the whole ship by heart and was filled with joy at the opportunity of talking about her to one more ignorant than himself. Of course, he was as proud of the *Royal James* as if he owned her. How he glowed over his account of the battle with the brig! Nothing on the coast could outsail the sloop, he was sure. Indeed, it was with some regret that he admitted a hope of her being overtaken by the Delaware boy's friends, and he was divided between pride and despair as the day went on and no sail appeared to the north. By noon his new acquaintance was ravenously hungry, as was to be expected, and over their pannikins of soup the last reserve between them went by the board.

[Illustration: Bob]

"Are you his son?" asked the dark-haired lad, nodding toward Herriot. Jeremy laughed and described his adventure from the beginning while the other marveled open-mouthed. "Are they holding you for ransom, too?" asked he, as the story ended. "No," replied Jeremy, "I reckon they knew as soon as they saw me that there wasn't much money to be gotten in my case. As I figure it, they didn't dare leave me on the island for fear I'd have those three ships-of-war after them." Both boys laughed as they thought of the head-long flight of Stede Bonnet's company from a garrison of fifteen sheep.

"Well," said the Delaware boy, still chuckling, "you know most of my story already. My father is Clarke Curtis of New Castle. My own name is Bob. Father owns some ships in the East India trade and has a plantation up on the Brandywine creek. Last night I was at our warehouse by the wharves. Father was inside talking to one of his captains who had just come to port. I wanted to see the ship--she's a full-rigger, three or four times as big as this, and fast too for her burden. Well, I went down on the dock where she was moored. There was nobody around and no lights and she stood up above the wharf-side all dark and big--her mainmast is as high as our church steeple, you know--and I was just looking up at her and wondering where the watchman was, when four men came along down the wharf. I thought perhaps 'twas Father and some of his men. When they were quite close that biggest one, Herriot, stepped up to me and before I could shout he put his hand over my mouth and held me. They gagged me fast and then one of them gave a whistle, long and low. Pretty soon a boat came up to the dock and they grabbed me and put me in, spite of all I could do. They paddled along to another wharf and took aboard some more men and then started to row out as fast as they could. I guess those boats that came after us were from Father's ship. He must have missed me right away. So now old Bonnet or Thomas or whatever his name is thinks he's going to get a fat sum out of me. That's all of my story, so far. But there'll be another chapter yet!" Jeremy, for both their sakes, sincerely hoped that there might.

At sunset of that day the *Royal James* cleared Cape Henlopen and held her course for the open sea, while behind her in the gathering dusk the coast grew hazy--faded out--was gone. The two boys, sitting late into the first watch, shivered with that fine ecstasy of adventure that can come only in the shadowy mystery of star-lit

decks and the long, whispering ripple of a following sea.

Jeremy, who twenty-four hours before had thought of the ship as a place of utter desolation, would not now have changed places with any boy alive. He knew, perhaps for the first time, the fulness of joy that comes into life with human companionship. That night two lads at least had golden dreams of a youthful kind. Ducats and doubloons, princesses and plum-cake, swords awave and cannon blazing, great galleons with crimson sails--no wonder that they were smiling in their sleep when George Dunkin held a lantern over the bunk at the change of the watch.

CHAPTER XIV

The day came in dark with fog, which changed a little after noon to driving scud. The wind had gone around to the northeast and freshened steadily, driving the waves in from the sea in steep gray hills, quite different from anything Jeremy had before experienced. The sloop, under three reefs and a storm jib, began to make rough weather of it, staggering up and down the long slopes in an aimless, dizzy fashion that made Jeremy and Bob very unhappy. The poor young New Englander had to perform his regular tasks no matter how he felt within, but once the work was done he stumbled forward miserably and lay upon his bunk. Bob was too wretched to talk all day, and for the time at least cared very little whether he was rescued or keel-hauled.

Near nightfall Jeremy went aft to serve the Captain's supper, and as he returned along the reeling wet deck in the gathering dark, he stopped a moment to look off to windward. The racing white tops of the waves gleamed momentarily and vanished. He was appalled at their height. While the little vessel surged along in the trough, great slopes of foam and black water rose on either beam, up and up like tossing hillsides. Then would come the staggering climb to the summit, and for a dizzy second the terrified lad, clinging to a shroud, could look for miles across the shifting valleys. Before he could catch his breath, the sloop pitched down the next declivity in a long, sickening sag, and rocked for a brief instant at the foot, her masts swaying in a great arc half across the sky. Then she began to ascend. Shivering and wide-eyed, the boy crept to his bunk, where he fell asleep at last to the sound of screaming wind and lashing water.

At dawn and all next day the gale swept down from the northeast unabated. The fo'c's'le was thick with tobacco smoke and the wet reek of the crew, for only the steersman and the lookout would stay on deck. Bob, somewhat recovered from his seasickness, lay wide-eyed in his bunk and heard such tales of plunder and savagery on the high seas as made his blood run cold. When Jeremy came dripping down the ladder, early that afternoon, he found the Delaware lad staring at Pharaoh Daggs with a look of positive terror. The buccaneer's evil face was lit up by the rays of the smoky lantern, hung from a hook in one of the deck beams. He sat on the edge of the fo'c's'le table, his heavy shoulders hunched and a long clay pipe in his teeth. "That night," he was saying, "four on us went an' cut Sol Brig down from where they'd hanged him. We got away, down to the sloop an' out to sea with him. I didn't have no cause to love the old devil, but I'd ha' hated to have a ghost like his after me, so I lent a hand. We wrapped him up decent an' gave him sea-burial from his own deck, as he'd paced for thirty year. An' *then*," he said with a snarl and half-turning to face Jeremy, "we got them two boys on deck! Both of 'em said 'twas the other as told, so we treated 'em fair an' alike. We stripped 'em an' laid in deep with the cat till there wasn't no white skin left above the waist. Then we sluiced 'em with sea water. When they could feel pain again, we stretched 'em with rope an' windlass till one died. T'other was a red-headed, tough young devil, an' took such a deal of it that we had to brain him with a handspike at the last."

Even the crew were silenced for a little by this recital. Jeremy and Bob shivered in their places, hardly daring to breathe. Then a Portuguese spoke from the corner, his greedy little black eyes glittering in his swarthy face.

"Where wass da Cap'n's money--da gold 'e 'ada-not divide', eh?"

Daggs gave a little start and leaned forward scowling. "Who said he had any?" he asked savagely. "Sol Brig kept himself to himself. He never told secrets to any man aboard!" Then he turned and with a black frown at the two boys, climbed through the hatch into the howling smother outside.

Jeremy, always alert, saw one or two glances exchanged among the pirates before the interminable foul stream of fo'c's'le talk resumed its course, but apparently the incident of the scarred man's abrupt departure was soon forgotten.

As the storm continued, Bonnet and Herriot gave up their attempts to sail the *Royal James* and contented themselves with keeping her afloat. The gale was driving them southward at a good rate and they were not ungrateful as they reflected that it must have effectually put a stop to all pursuit. Toward night the wind went

down a trifle, though the seas still ran in veritable mountain ranges. The dawn of the following day showed a clear sky to the north, and every prospect of fair weather. Before breakfast all hands were set to shaking out reefs and trimming sails, a task which the tossing of the sloop made unusually difficult. New halyards had to be fitted in some places. Otherwise the vessel herself had suffered but little. The brig's boat, towed astern all through the flight down the bay, had been swamped and cut loose on the first day of storm. However, as the *Royal James* had two boats of her own lashed on deck, this was not considered a real loss.

When the sun was high enough, Herriot took his bearings, and gave the helmsman orders to keep her headed west, a point north. The sloop made a long beat of it to starboard, thrashing up all night and most of the following day, before she sighted the Virginia Capes. Slipping through under cover of darkness, Bonnet resumed his rôle of sober merchantman and sailed the *James* up the Chesapeake under the British flag, with a fine air of honesty.

Jeremy and Bob regained their spirits as the low shores unrolled ahead and passed astern, with an occasional glimpse of a plantation house or a village at the water's edge. As every fresh estuary and arm of the bay opened on the bow, the lads hoped and expected that the sloop would enter. Bob thought the chances for escape or rescue would be much increased if they came to anchor in some harbor. Jeremy remembered the Captain's half-promise to free him when they reached the Chesapeake, and although he would have been loth to part from his new friend, he felt that he might render him better service ashore than in his company aboard the pirate.

It was two full days before the order was finally given to anchor. They had put into the mouth of a wide inlet far up on the Eastern shore, and Bonnet had her brought into the wind at a good distance from either side. The banks were high and wooded, and as far as the boys could see there was no sign of habitation anywhere about. Their minds were both busy planning some way of getting to land when Dave Herriot came up behind them and put a huge hand into the collar of each. "Come along below, lads," he said gruffly. They went, completely mystified, until the big sailing-master thrust them before him into the port gun deck. Then Jeremy understood. The old-fashioned arrangement of iron bars called the "bilboes" was fastened to the bulkhead at the bow end of the alleyway. It had two or three sets of iron shackles chained to it and into the smallest pair of these, meant for the wrists of a grown victim, he locked an ankle of each of the boys.

"Ye'll stay *there* a while, till we sail again," Herriot remarked as he departed. The lads stared at each other, too glum to speak. Bob was pale with rage at what he considered a dishonor, while the Yankee boy's heart was heavy as he thought of the opportunities for flight he had let slip on the voyage up the bay. Within half an hour after the anchor was dropped the young prisoners heard the creak of the davit blocks, and a moment later the splash of a boat taking water close to the nearest gun-port. Jeremy stretched as far as his chain would allow, and through a crevice saw four men start to row toward shore. There was some coarse jesting and laughter on deck, then one of the crew sent a "Fare ye well, Bill!" after the departing gig. The hail was answered by the voice of the Jamaican, Curley. Half an hour later the boat returned, carrying only three. Jeremy, straining at his tether, made out that Curley was not one of them. He sat down, thoughtful. "Well, Bob," he said at last, "whether it's about your ransom I can't say, but Bill Curley's been sent ashore on some errand or other--and to be gone a while, too, I figure."

They could do little but wait for developments. It was something of a surprise to both when Bonnet's voice was heard on the deck above, soon after, ordering the capstan manned. The anchor creaked up and to the rattle of blocks the sail was hoisted. They felt the sloop get under way once more. When one of the foremast hands brought them some biscuit and pork for supper, he told them it was Herriot's orders that they be left in irons for the present at least, and added, in response to Jeremy's query, that they were headed south under full canvas. The boys' thoughts were very bitter as they tried to make themselves comfortable on the bare planking. Fortunately, at their age it requires more than a hard bed to banish rest, and before the ship had made three sea-miles, care and bodily misery alike were forgotten in the heavy slumber of fatigue.

CHAPTER XV

Job Howland's long legs, clad as they were in nothing more cumbersome than a pair of under-breeches, made light work of hills and ravines as he held his way steadily up the Delaware shore. Like most of the sailors of that day, he had gone barefoot aboard ship since the beginning of the warm weather and his soles were so calloused that he hardly felt the need of shoes.

At a shack on a little cove, just before midday, he found several fishermen, to whom he applied for clothing. They had pity on his plight, fitted him out with a shirt, serviceable breeches and rough boots, and gave him, as well, as much biscuit and dried fish as he wished to carry. Thus reinforced he continued to put the leagues behind him till night, when he slept under a convenient jack-pine. Early next morning he pushed on and came without further adventure to the little port of New Castle, just as the sun was setting.

Job had been in the town before and now went straight to the Red Hawk Tavern, a small place on the water-front that catered chiefly to seafaring men. The tavern-keeper, a brawny Swede, to whose blue eyes half the seamen that plied along the coast were familiar, held out a big hand to him as he entered. He had known the tall mariner when he had been on the Virginia bark before Hornygold had captured it and had had no news of him since. Job told him his whole story over a hot meal in the back room, and it is merely indicative of the public mind of that day that the big Swede had not the slightest compunction in sympathizing with him. Indeed, in most dockside resorts it was a common thing for pirates and honest seamen to fraternize with perfect goodwill. The innkeeper offered him a bed for the night, and next morning directed him to the governor's house.

Delaware, a far smaller and less developed colony than her neighbors, Pennsylvania and Maryland, had, nevertheless, her own government, located at New Castle. The brick house of the King's appointee was on the High Street--the most imposing building in the town, excepting the two churches. Job knocked at the door and was admitted by a colored servant in livery, who gave him a chair in the wide hall and asked him to wait there.

As the long Yankee fidgeted uncomfortably on the edge of his seat, he heard voices raised in a room opposite, the door of which was closed. Some one, apparently growing angry, was saying:

"Good Gad, man, are we to sit idle and let these ruffianly thieves make off with our money--children--wives! One good man-o'-war could teach the scamps such a lesson as would scare half of 'em off the seas! Why, if I'd had even a good culverin aboard the *Indian Queen* last night, I'd have chased the beggars clear to Africa, an need were. Governor, you *must* see this as we see it!"

There was a reply in a lower tone and a moment later the door opened for two gentlemen to come out. One was thin and pale and seemed a suave, cool fellow, Job thought. He was elegantly dressed in gray. His companion, larger and more strongly built, seemed to have become very red in the face from suppressed emotion. His linen ruffles were awry and his fists clenched as he emerged. Without looking at Job, he jammed his cocked hat upon his head and strode out.

The man in gray turned to the waiting seaman and beckoned him into the room just vacated. Job, as cool and self-possessed as if he were loading his six-pounder under fire, told the story of his experiences aboard the pirate sloop, finishing with an account of the attempted flight with Jeremy, their recapture and his escape. The Governor listened gravely, starting once when the mariner named Captain Bonnet. At the end he nodded. "You shall have the pardon as ruled by the Crown," he said. "But there is another side to this affair. You say you slept at the Red Hawk. Was there no talk there of a boy stolen from the wharves late in the evening?" Job replied that he had gone to bed early and had breakfasted and left without hearing any gossip.

"From what you say," went on the Governor, "I should be ready to swear that the Captain Thomas, who proclaimed himself by that name in a tavern last night and later made off with the son of Clark Curtis, was the same man as your Stede Bonnet." Job hastened to relate the incident of the buccaneer's crazed speech from the brig's deck. He asked how the kidnapper had been described. The features tallied almost exactly with those of Stede Bonnet. In addition, the schooner, as half a dozen men would swear, had been painted black.

Thus satisfied that Bob Curtis was aboard the *Royal James*, the Governor wrote a formal pardon, stating that "Job Howland, late a pirate, having duly sworn his allegiance to his Majesty the King, and repented of all unlawful acts committed by him aforesaid," was henceforward granted full release from the penalty of his crimes and was to be held an honest man during his good behavior. Then he took the seaman with him and passed quickly down to one of the larger warehouses by the dockside.

Standing in the doorway were the red-faced gentleman whom Job had seen that morning and a large man in sea boots, easily recognized as a ship's officer. To the rather cool greeting of the former the Governor returned a cheerful nod as they came up. "Look here now, Curtis," he said, "I can't spare those cannon, and that's flat, but to show that I mean well by you, I've brought a man whom you may find of some use. Tell him your story, Howland."

The tale was repeated, to the intense interest of its two new hearers. "By Gad," cried Mr. Curtis, slapping his thigh, as the seaman finished, "that's a clue worth having! We know who the scoundrel is, at least, and, of course, he'll be sure to head for Carolina. Bonnet couldn't keep away from that coast for more than six months if his life depended upon it. Howland, if you care to ship again, I'll make you gun-pointer aboard the *Indian Queen* here. You say you want nothing better than to get a crack at the pirate. We'll make what preparations we can and get off at once. This young friend of yours--about Bob's age he must be--well, I'm glad my boy's got company! Let's get to work aboard here now."

Job fell to with a good will helping the *Indian Queen's* crew get her ready for an encounter with the pirates. She carried only two light serpentine cannon of an ancient make, far below the standard necessary to combat a well-armed schooner like the *Royal James*. There were no other ships in the harbor carrying guns, however, and it was over the matter of procuring an armament that Curtis had had words with the Governor. There were six good culverins mounted in the fort below the town. The planter had wished to borrow them to fit out his vessel, urging that it was a matter of concern to the whole colony. To this the Governor replied that with the port stripped of defences it would be possible for a pirate fleet to enter and plunder without difficulty, while Curtis's ship was careering over the seven seas on a wild-goose chase. Naturally the personal element in the affair blinded Curtis to the truth in this argument. However, with the advent of Job Howland and the news he bore, all differences were forgotten. The planter and ship-owner now needed thorough, rather than hurried, preparation. He sent his overseer on horseback to Philadelphia to arrange for the purchase of guns, and put all the available carpenters and shipwrights to work on the *Queen*, strengthening the improvised gun decks and cutting the rows of ports.

The northeast gale that sprang up next day put a temporary stop to these activities and gave Job an opportunity to get himself some decent clothes and hobnob a while with his friend the Swede. The whole waterfront was agog with the news of the kidnapping, and everywhere the tall New Englander went he was surrounded by a knot of questioning seamen. Several coasting-skipper, whose vessels lay ready-loaded at the wharves, decided to put off sailing until some news should indicate that the Bay was clear.

When the storm had blown itself out the artisans again set to work on the big East Indiaman. Job, who had learned the science of gunnery under good masters, supervised the placing of every porthole with reference to ease and safety in firing as well as to the effectiveness of a broadside. He had a section of the deck forward of the capstan reinforced stoutly to bear the weight of a bow-chaser, on which he placed some dependence in case of a running fight.

It was about six days later, in the first week of August, when two men came into New Castle from different directions, one on horseback, the other on foot. The first of these was Curtis's overseer, returned from the larger colony up the Bay, and bringing the good news that a score of cannon were lying on the dock at the foot of Market Street, in Philadelphia, ready to be shipped aboard the *Queen* as soon as she was put in shape.

The other was a sour-looking man of middle height, lean and darkly sallow, dressed in good sea clothes somewhat worn. He slipped through the trees into a lane that led toward the wharves. Coming unobtrusively into the Red Hawk Tavern at a little after 7 o'clock in the evening, he asked for a pint of rum, paid for it, and began to talk politely to the Swede. Job was eating his supper in one corner. He started when the man entered, but made no exclamation, and shading his face from the light, continued to watch him narrowly. It was his old shipmate, Bill Curley, the Jamaican. The pirate finished his rum and giving the barkeep a civil "Good-night," passed out into the ill-lighted street. When he was gone Job rose and stepped to the bar. "Quick, Nels," he whispered, "what did he ask you? He's one of Bonnet's crew!" The Swede replied that he had inquired the way to Clarke Curtis's house. Job was armed with a good pistol. He made sure it was primed and then set out up the street, keeping a careful lookout.

Soon he detected the figure of the Jamaican in the gloom ahead, and followed it, keeping out of earshot. The man went straight up High Street to the town residence of the planter. There were tall shrubs in the yard and he waited behind one of these, apparently reconnoitering. Then he stooped, took off his shoes, and carrying them in one hand, advanced and pinned a piece of paper to the door. Turning, he made his way back to the gate and once on the soft earth of the road, started to run in the direction from which he had come. This brought him, in fifty yards, face to face with a pistol muzzle, the butt of which was held by his old friend, Job Howland. He stopped in his tracks and at the big Yankee's command held both arms above his head. Job jammed the nose of his weapon against Curley's breastbone and searched him without a word. Having removed a long dirk and a pistol from the Jamaican's waistband, he ordered him to face about and walk back to the planter's house. When they arrived there, Job took down the paper from the door and knocked loudly. A negro boy, scared almost into fits at the sight of the drawn pistol, led the way into his master's room.

Curtis rose with an ejaculation of surprise and heard Job's brief account of the events leading to Curley's capture. Then he took the paper and read it, alternately frowning and exclaiming. As he finished, he passed it to the New Englander. It was a letter neatly drawn up and written in Stede Bonnet's even, refined hand.

Aboard Sloop *Royal James*, now in an Inlet near the Head of the Chesapeake Bay.

To Mr. Clarke Curtis, Esq. of New Castle, in the Delaware Colony.

Sir:

Having now aboard us and in safe custody your son Robert Curtis, we offer you the following terms for his release and safe return to you. Namely, to wit:

First, that you shall make no attempt to attack us in an armed vessel, or otherwise to employ force upon us.

Second, that you shall send a single man, carrying or otherwise bringing, provided he is alone, a sum in gold amounting to 5,000 pounds sterling.

Third, that this man shall be on the sandbars at the entrance to the Cape Fear River in Carolina at noon on the 10th day of September in this year of grace 1718, ready to deliver the sum before-mentioned and to take in charge the boy, also before-mentioned.

Failing the accomplishment of any or all of these terms the boy will be immediately put to death without stay or pity.

Expecting you to act with discretion and for the welfare of your son,

Ever your humble servant,

Captain Thomas. (Ship *Royal James*)

"Well," remarked Job as he finished, "we know where they'll be on September the 10th, at all events. As for our friend here, we can safely turn him over to the constable, I reckon. Here, Curley--march!" And he ushered the Jamaican out as they had entered. The gaol was only a few doors down a cross street, and Job had soon delivered his prisoner into capable hands. Then he returned to Curtis's house.

The shipowner was pacing up and down his library, where the paper lay half-crumpled on the floor. He looked up as Job entered and his brow was wrinkled deep with lines of worry.

"Gad!" he exclaimed, "this is awful! Must we actually give up trying to punish the dog? Why, he has us at his mercy, it seems. The money I can raise, I believe, and it's not the thought of losing it that cuts me. It's letting that gallows-hound go unscathed. And if anything should slip in the plans--good God, it's too terrible to think of!"

He dropped into an armchair, his head resting in his hands. Job understood something of the father's anguish and refrained from any comment. Standing by the broad oak mantelpiece, he mused over the chances of the boy's escape alive. Knowing Bonnet's eccentricities, he would have been the last to urge an armed attack in defiance of the terms in the letter. He had not the slightest doubt that the Captain, half-insane as he was, would be capable of even more dastardly crimes than the one he now threatened. Gradually an idea took form in the ex-pirate's brain. It was a bold one and needed to be executed boldly if at all. When the grief-stricken gentleman raised his head, Job turned and faced him. "Mr. Curtis," he said, "there's one thing to be done, as far's I can see, and I believe it's for me to do it. I've told you about Jeremy Swan, the boy we took aboard up north along. I think most as much o' getting him out o' this scrape as you do o' savin' your lad. Now here's my scheme. I know that coast around Cape Fear like I know the black schooner's deck. I'll get down there about the first o' September, an' I reckon they'll be there near the same time. I'll sneak up as close as I can in a small boat, then crawl acrost the bars till I'm near their moorin', an' swim out after dark, so I can look over the lay o' things aboard. It's just possible that I can get a word to one o' the boys and maybe take 'em off without bein' caught. You can be lyin' to, somewhere out o' sight, and' if we get clean away, we'll take the *Queen* around an' blow Bonnet out o' water. That's the best I can offer, but if it works it'll do the job up brown."

Curtis had listened earnestly, amazed at the daring of the man's suggestion. He reached out a broad hand and took Job's hairy fist in a grip that expressed the depth of his feelings. His eyes were blinking and he could not trust his voice, but the long Yankee knew that the risk he had offered to undertake was appreciated. They talked far into the night, planning the details of the attempt and discussing measures to be employed should it fail. They still had the best part of a month in which to work.

It was Job's suggestion that they should interest the governments of North and South Carolina to help in destroying Bonnet's craft. The pirate's port of departure had been Charles Town and he was to be fought in waters adjacent to both the colonies. It seemed not unreasonable to hope that there was aid to be obtained there. Next day they asked the Governor's sanction to this proposal, and were so far rewarded that in less than another twenty-four hours a messenger had been dispatched to Wilmington and Charles Town bearing letters under the colony seal.

CHAPTER XVI

The *Royal James* hurried down the Chesapeake for a day and a night before Captain Bonnet gave orders to free the young prisoners below in the bilboes. Jeremy and Bob came on deck stiff and weary from their cramped quarters and very far from happy in their minds. Rescue seemed farther away than ever, and though they had laid many plans for an escape by swimming, the sight of the great stretch of water off either beam--the shore was frequently a dozen miles away--quenched their hopes in this direction.

The crew seemed quite elated over something, and talked and joked incessantly about the prospect of action in the near future. Bonnet was merrier than Jeremy had ever seen him, came often on deck and even mixed a little in the conversation of the foremast hands. On the night that they cleared the Capes he served out double noggins of rum to all the men aboard. There was a good deal of prodigality in the way it was poured out and a fine scene of carousal ensued, lasting until after the watch changed at midnight. It was the first time either of the boys had heard the smashing chorus of "Fifteen Men" sung by the whole fo'c's'le. Of course, the words had often been hummed by one or two of the pirates, but it took the hot cheer of the grog to open most of their throats. At the final "Yo, ho, ho!" every cannikin crashed on the deal table and the lantern heaved to and fro overhead as if a gale were blowing outside. There followed the howling refrain that Jeremy had heard on the beach of the island a month before--"An' we'll walk the bloody beggars all below, all below--an' we'll walk the bloody beggars all below!"

The sentiment seemed too true to be picturesque after what had happened aboard the brig. The fierce-faced buccaneers, with their red, drunken eyes, strained forward, every man, and yelled like demons under the swaying lantern. Close behind and above were the smoky beams and planking, black with dancing shadows. Yet wild and exciting as it all was, Jeremy felt sickened. There was no illusion, no play-acting about it for him. He had seen the awful reality--the murder and the madness--and he had no admiration left for the jolly buccaneer of story.

On the following morning, and for two days thereafter, the schooner cruised slowly along a level sea under shortened sail. A double lookout was kept constantly on duty and as they bore up to the northward, Jeremy saw that they must be watching for south-bound shipping out of the Delaware. Bonnet was evidently gambling on the chance that Bob's friends had given up the idea of pursuit.

Then one hot mid-afternoon the two boys were startled from their places in the shade of the after-companion by a quick shout from the man at the masthead. They followed the direction of his pointing arm with their eyes and as the schooner heaved slowly on a gentle swell, they caught a glimpse of a low, broad sail on the port bow. The men were all on deck ready to trim the sails for greater speed, but Herriot, after consulting with the Captain, ordered the gunners and gun-servers below to prepare ordnance. Bob and Jeremy were under a tremendous strain of excitement. The stranger ship might be one of the New Castle fleet which Bob firmly believed to be searching the seas to recapture him from Bonnet. Should it prove to be so, their lives were in worse danger than ever, for neither of the boys doubted that the erratic Captain would kill them at once if the fight went against him.

However, their minds were soon set at rest on this score. As the pirate drew up closer and closer, the details of the other ship became visible to those on deck. She also was schooner-rigged, a trifle larger than the *Royal James*, but without the latter's height of mast. Her low free-board indicated that she was heavily cargoed. No gunports could be seen along her sides.

Bonnet now ordered an extra jib to be broken out, and had the sloop brought around on the port tack so that her course, instead of running opposite to the stranger's, would obliquely cross it. The wind, what little there was, came from the West.

As soon as the other ship perceived this change in direction, she veered off her course closer to the wind, and almost immediately the boys could see the white flutter of some extra canvas being spread at her bows. As this new piece filled out, it proved to be a great balloon jib, which increased her sail area by nearly half. Her head came off the wind again and she went bowing along over the swells to the southward faster than one would have imagined possible. Bonnet had figured on crossing her at close range, but as she swept onward he realized that he would go by too far astern to hail her if he kept his present direction. Herriot himself took the tiller. As quickly as he could, without loss of headway, he eased the *Royal James* over till she was running nearly parallel with the fleeing ship. His orders came quick and fast, while the men trimmed the main and fore sheets to the last hair's breadth of perfection. It was to be a race, and a hard one.

For nearly half an hour the sloops ran along almost neck and neck and perhaps half a mile apart. The pirates dared not risk pointing closer to the wind in order to get into cannon range. They would have lost so much speed that it would have developed into a stern chase--useless since they possessed only broadside batteries. The best they could do was to hold their position, hoping for luck in the wind.

Bonnet scowled awhile at the British Jack that still flew from the *James's* top, then went below and brought up the black pirate flag. The buccaneers, now all assembled on deck, gave it a cheerful howl of greeting as it fluttered up to the main truck. "Now we'll catch 'em, lads!" roared Herriot, and they answered him with a second cheer.

For once, however, the Jolly Roger seemed to bring bad fortune instead of good. The wind had hardly swept it easily to leeward once when it fell back against the shrouds, hardly stirring. The pirate sloop's deck righted slowly and her limp sails drooped from the gaffs. A sudden flaw in the breeze had settled about her, without interrupting her rival's progress in the least. A glum despair came over the crew. They lolled, for the most part silent or grumbling curses, against the rails, with here and there one trying to whistle up a wind. The other sloop rapidly drew away to the south.

Bonnet had been talking to Herriot with quick gestures and pointings. Now he walked forward swiftly and the men got to their feet with a jump. "We'll board the prize yet," said the Captain short and sharp. "Now look alive--every one of you!" He ordered one squad of men to the hold for spars, another for rope, a third for a spare mainjib. Meanwhile he set two men to making a sort of stirrup out of blocks of wood. This was fastened to the deck far up in the bows. When the spars came up he had one of them rigged with a tackle running to the foremast, and set its foot in the wooden contrivance just finished. It swung out forward like a great jibboom. The crew saw what was in the Captain's mind and gave a ringing yell of joy. A score of willing hands made fast the stays to windward and others spread the spare sail from the upper end of the spar. As the last rope was bent, a strong draught of air came over the water. The canvas shook, then filled, and as the fresh breeze steadied in her sails the sloop heeled far to port. She moved faster and faster, while the white water surged away under her lee. This was sailing worth while! The returning wind had come in much stronger than before the flaw, and was now almost worthy of at least one reef under ordinary conditions. With her extra canvas, the *James* was canted over perilously. Her lee scuppers were often awash and a good deal of water was coming into the port gundeck.

But to the delight of all on board, including the boys, who could hardly be blamed for relishing the excitement, Bonnet refused to take in an inch of sail. Instead, he ordered every available man to the weather rail. The dead weight of thirty seamen all leaning half-way over the side served to keep the light craft ballasted for the time being. Bob and Jeremy clung to the rail amidships and vied with each other in stretching out over the boiling seas that raced below.

The fleeing ship, which had gained four or five miles during the lull, was now in plain view again, nearly straight ahead. Her deep lading was telling against her now. The handicap of sail area being overcome, the black pirate's shallow draft and long lines gave her the advantage. Every buccaneer in the crew was howling with excitement as the race went on. The long main boom of the *Royal James* skipped through the spray and

her mainsail was wet to the second line of reef points, but Herriot held her square on the course and Bonnet smiled grimly ahead, with a look that meant he would run her under before he would shorten sail. Hand over hand they overhauled their rival, until once more the tiny figures of men were visible over her rail. A little knot of them were gathered aft, busy at something. Bonnet seized his glass and scrutinized them intently. Then he yelled to Herriot to ease the sloop off to port. "They've got a gun astern there!" he shouted. "They'll try our range in a minute." Hardly had he spoken when a spout of foam went up from the sea far to starboard, followed almost instantly by the dull sound of an explosion. By the time the gunners on the ship had loaded their piece again the *James* had come over to their port quarter and they had to shift the cannon's position. The shot went close overhead, cutting a corner from the black flag of the pirate. Bonnet swore beneath his breath, then ordered the cannoneers below to their batteries. They went on the run. Jeremy and Bob stayed above watching the operations on the enemy's deck. The two sloops were less than three hundred yards apart and the *James* had drawn nearly abeam when a third shot came from her rival's deck gun. This time it crashed into the pirate's hull far up by the bits. Bonnet was by the fore hatch, sword in hand, as was his custom during an action. Looking coolly at the splintered bulwark forward, then back at the enemy, he gave the sharp "Ready a starboard broadside!" to the waiting gunners. He allowed them time to have their matches alight, then "Fire!" rang his clear voice. The deck leaped under the boys' feet. The long, thunderous bellow of the battery jarred out over the sea. Even as they looked the enemy's maingaff, shot away at the jaws, dangled loose from the peak halyards, and her broad sail crumpled, puffing out awkwardly in the breeze.

At the same time a wide rent in her side above the waterline gaped black as she topped a wave. The gunners' cheer as they saw their handiwork rose to a deafening yell, taken up by all hands, when, a moment later, the British colors came fluttering down aboard the other ship.

Herriot ordered the improvised spinnaker and the flying-jib taken in, then brought the buccaneer sloop around and came up beside the newly captured prize. All the pirates were behind the bulwarks with muskets loaded, prepared for any treachery that might be intended. However, as they ranged alongside, the hostile crew lined up on their deck, sullen but unarmed, and the Captain, a big, gray-bearded man, held up a piece of white cloth in token of surrender. Bonnet hailed him, asking his name.

"Captain Peter Manewaring of the sloop *Francis*, Philadelphia for Charles Town," answered the coasting skipper.

"And I am Captain Thomas, in command of the sloop *Royal James*," Bonnet gave him in return. "You will set your men to carrying over into my ship all the powder you have aboard. As soon as we are fast alongside I shall be pleased to entertain you in the cabin."

The sails were run down on both sloops and their hulls were quickly lashed together with ropes. Herriot superintended the operation of transferring a half-dozen kegs of powder, some casks of wine and the best food in the coaster's larder to the hold of the black schooner. The cargo of the *Francis* was a varied one, but not by any means a poor prize. She carried some grain in bags forward, a great number of bolts of cloth, chiefly woollens, and other things of divers sorts, including some fine mahogany chairs and tables newly brought from England. The wine was merely incidental, but proved very acceptable to the ever-thirsty buccaneers.

That night, with the nine men of the *Francis's* crew lying in irons on the ballast, they drank deep to their victory, and once more Jeremy and Bob fell asleep to the rough half-harmony of their bellowings.

CHAPTER XVII

A stiff easterly breeze whitened the gray seas next morning. It was cloudy and seemed to be getting ready for a blow. The pirate and her prize had drifted all night, bound together, and as day broke a tipsy lookout spied land to the westward. Herriot came on deck hastily at the call and himself went to the rail to heave the lead. The soundings showed a bare four fathoms of water. Bonnet was summoned and the crew, hardly recovered from their orgy, staggered about the deck preparing to get under way again. Seven men, under Dunkin, were told off to man the *Francis*. A dozen others were needed to plug her shot-holes before she was really seaworthy. This task being finally accomplished, the ropes were taken off, the sails run up and the two sloops, closehauled to starboard, set about beating off shore.

It was a terrible day for Jeremy and Bob. In the crew there was the regular fighting, swearing and vomiting that always followed a night of carousal. The fact that they were short-handed made the work harder and the grumbling louder than ever. The bow of the *Royal James* was partly shot away above the bits, and there was a full day's work for every hand that could be spared rigging canvas over the gap to prevent its taking in water in case of a storm. Meanwhile the fo'c's'le was in as filthy a state as could well be imagined. Herriot thrust his head down the hatch once during the morning and as he caught the sickening stench of the place he called the two boys, who had been up forward helping the patching.

"Here, young 'uns, get below and clean up," he ordered sharply, and handed each lad a bucket and a deck-brush. They filled the buckets and went below reluctantly. At first it was impossible for them to stay under hatches for more than five minutes at a time, so they took turns in running up for air and a fresh supply of water. Gradually the flooding they gave the place told in its atmosphere, and by noon they had put it into decent shape again. Hardly had Jeremy come on deck, weary and sickened with this task, when Captain Bonnet called to him from the companion. He made his way aft and entered the cabin. Bonnet had just resumed his place at the broad table. Opposite him and facing Jeremy was the big slouched figure of Captain Manewaring. "Bring the wine, Jeremy," said the buccaneer quietly, and without turning. He was looking with steady eyes at his guest. Jeremy went back along the passage to the wine-locker under the companion stairs and took from it two bottles of Madeira. As he was closing the cupboard door, Bonnet's voice cut the air like a knife. The two words he spoke were not loud, but pronounced with a terrible distinctness. "You lie!" was what he said.

Jeremy shivered and waited, listening. There was no reply loud enough for him to hear through the closed door of the cabin. After a moment he tiptoed back and before turning the knob listened again. Nothing but silence. He opened the door with a pounding heart and stepped into the room.

The two men sat motionless in their places. Bonnet held a cocked pistol in his right hand, its point covering the other man's head. On the table before Manewaring was a second pistol. His face was drawn and gray and a fine sweat stood upon his forehead. Jeremy shrank against the wall, hardly breathing, his two bottles clutched idiotically, one in each hand. The tense seconds ticked on by the cabin clock.

"Come--quick!" said the pirate, with a gesture toward the other pistol. Manewaring's hand appeared over the edge of the table and gave a trembling jerk toward the pistol-butt. Then it fell back into his lap. He gasped. A drop of sweat ran down his temple into his gray beard. Again the only sounds were the tick of the cabin clock, the wash of the seas outside and the hoarse breathing of the cornered man. At length he moved with a sort of shudder, whispered the name of his Maker and seized the butt of the pistol desperately.

Bonnet had raised his weapon, pointing to the ceiling. "I shall count three, then fire," said he in the same even voice.

"One----" But before he spoke again his opponent had jerked his muzzle down and fired. Bonnet must have seen the flash of the intention in his eyes, for he threw himself to the left at that instant, and the shot went

crashing through a panel of the door. With the deliberate sureness of Fate the pirate took aim at his adversary, who whimpered and grovelled behind the table. Then he shot him. Jeremy's knees went limp, but he saved himself from falling and managed to set the bottles on the table.

Behind him as he staggered out, Stede Bonnet poured himself a glass of wine and drank it with a steady hand. The boy met a crowd of men at the head of the companion, but was too shaken to tell them what had happened. Herriot, going below, heard the details of the duel from the Captain's own lips. Under the sailing-master's orders the body of the dead man was carried out on deck, sewed into a piece of sailcloth and heaved over the rail without more ado. Jeremy made his way to his bunk and told Bob the story between chattering teeth.

There was silence on the ship that afternoon. Bonnet's action had sobered his rough company to the point where they ceased quarreling and talked in undertones, gathering in little knots about the slanted deck when not at work. The two boys were glad enough to be out of the way. Jeremy, tired and discouraged, sat on the bunk's edge, his shoulders hunched and his eyes on the floor. His young companion, who had more cause for hope, watched him with sympathetic eyes. He could see that the New England boy was too dejected even to try to plan their escape--the usual occupation of their hours together. Finally he reached over, a bit shyly, and gave him a friendly pat on the back.

"Brace up, Jeremy," he said. "You're clean tuckered out, but a rest and a nap'll help. Here, cover yourself up and I'll do your work tonight. Maybe I'll have a scheme thought up to tell you in the morning."

Jeremy cared little whether he slept or woke, for the events of the past days, coupled with the disappointment of not being set ashore as he had hoped, had brought even his determined courage to a low ebb. He was on the verge of a fever, and Bob's prescription of rest and sleep was what he most needed. Made snug at the back side of the berth, where little or no light came, he fell into a fitful slumber. Bob took a last look to see that his friend was comfortable and went on deck.

Pharaoh Daggs had taken a great deal of liquor the night before, as was his wont when grog was being passed. The rum he consumed seemed to affect him very little. No one ever heard him sing, though his cruel face, with its awful, livid scar, would lean forward and sway to and fro with the rhythm of the choruses. He could walk a reeling deck or climb a slack shroud as well, to all appearances, when he had taken a gallon as most men when they were sober. From Newfoundland to Trinidad he was known among the pirates as a man whose head would stand drink like a sheet-iron bucket. This reputation was made possible by the fact that he was no talker at any time, and when in liquor clamped his jaws like a sprung trap. Whatever effect the alcohol may have had upon his mind was not apparent because no thoughts passed his lips. The rum did go to his head, however. The instinctive effort of will that kept his legs steady and his mouth shut had no root in thought. Behind the veil of those light eyes, the brain of Pharaoh Daggs, drunk, was like a seething pit, one black fuddle of ugliness. To compensate for the apparent lack of effect of liquor upon him, the inward disturbance usually lasted long after the more tipsy seamen had slept around to clear heads.

Today he lolled with his sneering face toward the weather beam, a figure upon whose privacy no one would care to trespass. The sound of the shots and the tale of the duel had neither one awakened in him any apparent interest. Through the long afternoon till nearly five o'clock he slouched by the fo'c's'le. Then with a leisurely stretch he walked to the hatch, and peered down it. Wheeling about he scanned the deck craftily, looking at all the men in turn, before he descended the ladder.

In the half-light below he paused again, and seemed to send his piercing glance into every bunk, from the forward to the after bulkhead. Finally, satisfied that no one else was in the fo'c's'le, he went to his own sleeping place, on the port side, and kneeling beside the berth hauled a heavy sea-chest from beneath it.

Jeremy's light sleep was broken by a scraping sound close by. He opened his eyes without moving, and from

where he lay could see a man busy at something opposite him. As the figure turned and straightened, he knew it for the man with the broken nose. The boy was instantly on the alert, for he had every reason to distrust Daggs. Without making a sound he worked nearer to the edge of the bunk and pulled the cover up to hide all but his eyes. The pirate hauled his chest out farther into the middle of the floor, where more light fell.

[Illustration]

Then he knelt before it and unlocked it with a key which he took from about his neck. Jeremy almost expected to see a heap of gold coin as the lid was raised. He was disappointed. A garment of dark cloth, probably a cloak, and some dirty linen were all that came to view. The buccaneer lifted out a number of articles of seaman's gear and laid them beside him. After them came a leather pouch, quite heavy, Jeremy thought. The man raised it carefully and weighed it in his hand. It must have been his portion of the spoils taken on the voyage. However, this was not what he was after, it seemed, for a moment later it was laid on the floor beside the other things. Next he removed two pistols and a second pouch of the sort used for powder and shot. There was a long interval as he rummaged in the bottom of the box, under other contents which Jeremy could not see. At last the pirate stood up, holding a rolled paper tied with string. Another long moment he peered about him and listened. When he had reassured himself, he untied the string and opened the paper, a square document, perhaps a foot each way. It was discolored and worn at the edges, apparently quite old. What was inscribed on it Jeremy could not see, stare as he might. Daggs examined it a moment, then knelt, preoccupied, and spread it upon the floor. With one finger he traced a line along it, zigzagging from one side diagonally to the foot, his lips moving silently meanwhile. Then his other hand hovered above the document for a time before he planted his thumb squarely upon a spot near the top.

Jeremy's thoughts kept time with his racing heart. He watched every motion of the buccaneer with a fierce intentness that missed no detail. Daggs had been quiet for a full two minutes, a crafty gloating smile playing over his thin lips. Now once more he touched a place upon the sheet before him. "Right there, she'll be," he muttered. Then, after slowly rolling up the paper, he replaced it and locked the box. The eyes of the boy in the bunk gleamed excitedly, for he was sure now of the nature of the document. Beyond any reasonable doubt, it was a chart. "Solomon Brig's treasure!" he whispered to himself as the tall figure of the man with the broken nose clambered upward through the hatch.

CHAPTER XVIII

Jeremy realized that his life would be in danger if Daggs saw him coming on deck after what had just happened. He lay still, therefore, in spite of his desire to tell Bob what he had seen. The rest of the afternoon his imagination painted pictures of ironbound chests half-buried in the yellow beach sand of some lonely island far down in the tropics; gloomy caves beneath mysteriously waving palm trees--caves whose black depths shot forth a ruddy gleam of gold coin, when a chance ray of light came through the shade; of shattered hulks that lay ten fathoms down in the clear green water of some still lagoon, where pure white coral beds gave back the sleeping sunshine, and fishes of all bright colors he had ever seen or dreamed about swam through the ancient ports to stare goggle-eyed at heaps of glistening gems.

At last he must have slept, for Bob's voice in his ear brought him back to the dingy fo'c's'le of the *Royal James* with a start. The lantern was lit and most of the port watch were snoring heavily in their bunks after a hard day's work. Bob took off his shoes and trousers and climbed into the narrow berth beside his friend, who was now wide awake. "Listen, Bob," whispered the New England boy as soon as they were settled, "do you remember the things Daggs has said, off and on, about old Sol Brig--how there was always a lot of gold that the men before the mast never saw and how he must have saved it till he was the richest of all the pirates? Well, who would know what became of that money, if anybody did? Daggs, of course, the only man that's left of Brig's crew! I think Daggs knows, and what's more, I believe I saw the very chart that shows where it is." He went on to tell all he had seen that afternoon. Bob was as excited as he when he had finished. "We must try to get hold of that map or else get a sight of it!" he exclaimed. Jeremy was doubtful of the possibility of this. "You see," he said, "the key is on a string 'round his neck. The only way would be to break the chest open. It's big and heavy and we should raise the whole ship with the racket. Then, besides, I don't like to steal the thing, even though he is a pirate." Bob also felt that it would hardly be honest to break into a man's box, no matter what his character might be. "If we should just happen to see the chart, though," he finally explained, "why, we have just as much right to hunt for the treasure as he has, or any one else." Jeremy agreed to this solution of a knotty problem of honor and both boys decided that for the present they had no course in the matter but to wait for some accident to put the paper in their way. However, not to let any opportunities slip, they resolved to watch Pharaoh Daggs constantly while he was awake, in the hope of getting a second glimpse of the treasured document.

Jeremy had regained both strength and spirits when he tumbled out next morning. The pall of uneasiness which had hung over the ship all the day before had lifted and the men, sobered once more, went about their business as usual. The boys set themselves to the task of watching with much zeal. It was not so difficult as might be expected. They had always been aware of the presence of the man with the broken nose whenever he was on deck. His sinister eye was too unpleasant to meet without a shiver. Likewise they felt an instinctive relief when he went out of sight. For this reason it was no great matter for either lad that happened to be present to note the fact of the pirate's going below. Whenever he left the deck for anything he was shadowed by Bob or Jeremy as the case might be. For nearly three days the mysterious chest remained untouched. Of that the boys were sure.

The threatened storm that had roughened the sea on the day when Captain Manewaring met his sudden end seemed to have spent itself in racing clouds and gusts of wind. Fair weather followed and for forty-eight hours the *James* and her prize stood off the coast, heading up to the northeastward with the wind on the port quarter.

Bonnet had remained below, haggard and brooding, suffering from one of the spells of reaction that commonly followed his misdeeds. By night of the second day he cast off his gloom and came on deck, the old reckless light in his eye.

"Here, Herriot," he called, as he appeared, "we've got a rich prize in our fist and a richer one coming. Let's be gay dogs all tonight. Give the hands extra grog and I'll see you in the cabin over a square bottle when the watch is changed."

Before the mast the news was hailed with delighted cheering. A keg of rum was rolled out of the hold and set on the fo'c's'le table. Hardly had darkness settled before half the men aboard were drunk and the cannikins came back to the spigot in an unending procession. There was too much liquor available for the usual choruses to be sung. Most of the pirates swilled it like pigs and stopped for nothing till they could move no longer, but lay helpless where they happened to fall. Only a bare three men stayed sober enough to sail the ship. Jeremy thanked his stars for fair weather when he thought of the case they might have been in had the orgy occurred in a night of storm.

Next day a few of the crew woke at breakfast time. The rest snored out their drunken sleep below. Daggs came on deck as usual, to the outward eye quite his careless, ugly self. His two young enemies watched him closely, for they suspected that the drink he had taken had helped to Jeremy's previous discovery. As the hours went by, one after another of the buccaneers woke and dragged himself on deck to growl the discomfort out of him. By mid-afternoon Jeremy, going below, found all the bunks empty. He slipped behind a chest far up in the dark bow angle and waited for a signal from Bob. The boys had seen the man with the broken nose watching the decks uneasily for hours and suspected that he meant to go below as soon as the fo'c's'le was empty.

Jeremy must have been in his hiding place close to half an hour before he heard Bob's sharply whistled tune close outside in the gun deck. He ducked lower behind his box and presently heard steps descending the ladder. A guarded observation taken from a dark corner close to the floor disclosed the slouching form of Daggs standing by the table.

The buccaneer took a long time for his cautious survey of the fo'c's'le. Standing perfectly still he turned his body from the hips and gave the place a silent scrutiny before he set to work. He proceeded just as he had done before and quickly had the chest open and its contents spread upon the planking. He had just unrolled the chart when a shout from the hatch made him leap to his feet. "Sail ho!" was being passed from mouth to mouth above, and already there were men on the ladder. In a fever of haste, Daggs half-pushed, half-threw the chest under his bunk and shoved the loose clothes and small arms after it. The paper he still held in his hand. After a second of indecision, while he looked over his shoulder at the descending crowd of seamen, he thrust it in on top of the box and stood erect, flushed and swaying. The hands were preoccupied and none seemed to notice his act. There was a general scurrying of sailors to get out their cutlasses and pistols, and in the confusion Jeremy found an easy opportunity to crawl out of the hiding place and busy himself like the rest.

Going on deck a minute later, he found Bob and whispered a brief account of what he had seen. For the present there was much to be done on deck. They ran hither and thither at Herriot's commands, giving a hand at a rope or fetching something mislaid in the cabin. The *James* was under all her canvas and in hot pursuit of a large sloop, visible some three miles to leeward. The fleeing ship was driving straight to sea before the strong west breeze, her sails spread on both sides like the broad, stubby wings of a white owl. Bonnet had his jury spar swung to starboard from the foremast foot and bent the big jib to balance his main and foresail. Bowing her head deep into every trough as the waves swept by, the black sloop ran after her prey at dizzy speed. The crew gathered along the wet bows, silent, intent on the game in hand. They were drawing up perceptibly from moment to moment. At last they were within half a mile--five hundred yards--close astern. Aboard the enemy they could see a small knot of men huddled aft, working desperately at the breach of a swivel-cannon. Bonnet ordered Herriot to stand off to starboard for a broadside. But as the *James* swerved outward, a flare of fire and a loud report went up from her opponent's after part. For a moment it seemed that her cannon had been discharged at the pirate, but as they waited for the splash of the shot, a thick smoke grew in a cloud over the enemy's deck. The gun or a keg of powder had exploded. As soon as the buccaneers perceived it, they bellowed hoarse hurrahs and prepared to board. The gunners swarmed up from the port gun deck at the order and all lined up along the rail howling defiance at the merchantman. Jeremy saw that all were on deck and touched Bob's arm.

They made their way quietly below, and the New Englander went to Daggs' berth. From beneath it protruded

the corner of the piece of paper. Both boys knelt eagerly over it as Jeremy pulled it into the light.

It was, as they had expected, a chart. The drawing was crudely done in ink, applied it seemed with a stick, or possibly with a very badly fashioned quill-pen. There was very little writing upon it, and this of the raggedest sort. To their intense disappointment it bore no name to tell where in the seven seas it might be. That the chart was of some coast was certain. A deep, irregular bay occupied the central part of the sheet. Two long promontories jutting from east and west nearly closed the seaward or southern end. The single word "Watter" was written beside a dot high up on the paper and a little northeast of the bay. An anchor, roughly drawn near the northern shore and a small cross between two parallel lines a short distance inland, completed the information given, except for a crossed arrow and letters indicating the cardinal points of the compass.

[Illustration]

It required no great time for the two lads to examine every line and mark. They looked up and faced each other disappointed. Jeremy voiced the thought which both had. "How are we to know where the thing is?" he asked. Bob shook his head and looked glum. Then he seized the paper feverishly and turned it over. Its soiled yellow back gave no clue. Not even the latitude and longitude were printed. "Well," said Jeremy, finally, "one thing we can do, and that's remember exactly how it looks." He measured the length of the bay with the middle joint of his forefinger. "Three--four--and a bit over," he counted. "Anchorage in that round cove to the northwest." Then, measuring again, "And the cross is two finger-joints northwest of the anchorage. What those lines each side of it are I don't know, but I'll remember them. And that dot marked "Watter" is one and a half northeast of the mitten-shaped cove. There--I guess we've got it all by heart now." He had just finished speaking and both of them were still looking intently at the map when a fresh outburst of cheers and the beginning of a sharp musketry fire were heard above. Jeremy replaced the paper where he had found it and they hurried up to look out of the hatchway.

The two ships were now only half a cable's length apart, running side by side. Few shots were being returned by the merchantman and all her crew were keeping out of sight behind the solid rail.

"All hands to board her," Bonnet sang out and answering her tiller the *Royal James* swung over till the two sloops' sides met with a jar. They were fast in an instant and a score of whooping buccaneers swept over the rail. From a place of vantage the boys watched the short, bloody conflict that followed. It seemed that several of the enemy's crew, few as they were at the beginning, had been killed by the explosion of the gun. Only a half-dozen rose to meet the pirate onslaught. Not one asked for mercy, even after Herriot had shot down the captain, and the tide of sea-rovers rushed at and over the little handful of defenders in an overwhelming flood. There was no need of the plank this time. Every man fell fighting and died sword in hand. To the two young prisoners, already sickened with the sight of blood, this wholesale murder of a band of gallant seamen came as a revolting climax. They stared at each other, white-faced as they thought of the fate that threatened them and all honest men who fell into such ruthless hands. It was Bob's first sight of a hand-to-hand sea-battle, and as the last merchant sailor went down under the howling pack he fainted and tumbled into Jeremy's arms. When he came to his senses again the Yankee boy had propped him up behind the companion and was rubbing him vigorously. "I know how you feel," he said in answer to Bob's stammered apology. "It's all right and you've no call to be ashamed. I came near it myself." The Delaware lad, who had been almost as distressed at being guilty of swooning as at the pillage of the merchant sloop, felt a vast relief when he heard Jeremy's words, and quickly got upon his feet once more.

The pirates had cleared the enemy's deck of bodies and blood and now were taking an inventory of the sloop's cargo, if the shouts that came from her hold meant anything. She was a little larger than the *James* in length and beam, but had carried no armament other than the now damaged stern-chaser. The white letters at her stern declared her the *Fortune* of New Castle. From what Captain Bonnet said to his sailing-master as they returned over the rail, Jeremy gathered that she had been in light cargo and was not as rich a prize as the *Francis*.

The latter ship had now come up and was standing off and on waiting for orders. Bonnet had lost two men killed and several hurt in the fight, so that the crew of the *Royal James*, without the prize crew on board the *Francis*, now numbered scarce a dozen able-bodied men. The question of manning the newly captured sloop was finally settled by transferring to her George Dunkin and his seven seamen. Bonnet freed the men of the *Francis* who had been in chains, and set them to work their own ship under command of Herriot and another pirate. He undertook to sail the *James* himself, for by this time he was really an able skipper, despite the fact that he had taken to the sea so late in life. As the crew of the *Francis* lined up before going aboard, the notorious buccaneer faced them with a cold glitter in his eyes. For a while he kept them wriggling under his piercing scrutiny. Then he spoke, his voice even and dangerous.

"You will be under Mr. Herriot's orders. I think you are wise enough not to try to mutiny with him. But if you should undertake it, remember that no sooner does your sloop draw away to over one mile's distance than I will come after you and blow you out of water without parley. There are just enough sails left aboard your ship to keep headway in a light breeze. Over with you now!"

As darkness deepened the three sloops set out westward under shortened canvas, keeping so close that the steersmen hailed each other frequently through the night. Bob and Jeremy went to their bunks gloomy and subdued. But Jeremy's sorrows were lightened by the feeling that sometime, somewhere, he would find a use for the chart, the outline of which he had firmly fixed in his memory that afternoon. And wondering how, he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIX

The fair weather held and for several days the little fleet cruised west by south, then southerly when they had picked up the Virginia Capes. The pirate crew, in spite of their impatience to divide the cumbersome booty they had helped to win, kept in a fairly good temper. Hopes were high and quarrels were quickly put aside with a "Take it easy, boys--wait till the sharin's over." Bob and Jeremy got off with a minimum of hard words and might have considered their lot almost agreeable but for one incident. The whippings which were a regular part of boys' lives aboard ship in those days, had always been administered by George Dunkin. As bo's'n, it was not only his right but his duty to lay in with a rope's end occasionally. He was one of the fairest men in Bonnet's company and Jeremy had never felt any great injustice in the treatment Dunkin had accorded him. Since his lieutenancy aboard the prize-sloop, however, the bo's'n had necessarily ceased to be the executive of punishment, and when Monday, recognized on all the seas as whipping day, came around, there was a very secret hope in Jeremy's heart that the office would be forgotten. As for Bob, he had so far escaped the lash, it being understood that he was not an ordinary ship's boy. As the day wore on, the Yankee lad remained as inconspicuous as possible, and began to think that he was safe. About mid-afternoon, however, a gang of buccaneers, working at the rent in the bows which still gave trouble, shouted for a bucket of drinking water. Bob had been snoozing in the shade of the sail, and when he was roused at last, took his own time in carrying out the order. When he appeared finally, there was a good deal of swearing in the air. Daggs reached out and jerked the boy into the center of the group, his light eyes agleam under scowling brows. "See here, you little runt," he hissed, "don't think because the Cap'n's savin' you to kill later, that you're the bloomin' mate of this ship! Come here to the capstan, now!" Before Bob was aware of what they meant to do, the angry sailors had slung him over a capstan bar and tied his hands and feet to a ring in the deck. After the clothes had been pulled off his back, there was an interval while the pirates quarrelled over who should do the whipping. Daggs demanded the right and finally prevailed by threatening the instant disemboweling of his rivals. Bob was trembling and white, not from fear but because of the indignity of the punishment. The scarred executioner spat on his hands, took the heavy rope and squared his feet. "Shiver away, you cowardly pup," said he, grinning at one side of his twisted mouth. Then with a vicious whirl of his arm he brought the hard hemp down on the boy's naked shoulders--once, twice, three times--the lad lost count. At last he nearly lost consciousness under the torturing fire of the blows. When the buccaneer ceased for lack of breath his victim hung limp and twitching over the wooden bar. Long welts that were beginning to drip red crossed and recrossed his back. "Now, where's that other whelp?" panted Daggs. Somebody went below and dragged Jeremy to light. The boy was brought up to the crowd at the capstan. He took one look at Bob's pitiful, set stare and the red drops on the deck, then turned blazing to face the man with the broken nose.

"You great coward!" he cried. The man was staggered for an instant. Then his rage boiled up and the tanned skin of his neck turned the color of old mahogany. "I'll kill the boy," he whispered hoarsely and drew back his heavy rope for a swing at Jeremy's head.

"Daggs"--a voice cut the air from close by his side. "Daggs, who made you bo's'n of this sloop?"

The man whirled and nearly fell over, for Stede Bonnet was at his elbow. "One more thing of this kind aboard, and I'll maroon you," said the Captain sharply, and added, "Gray, put this man in irons and see that he gets only bread and water for five days!" Then he turned on his heel and went back to the cabin. So once more Jeremy's life was saved by the Captain's whim. He half carried, half supported his chum to their bunk and after rubbing his back with grease, begged from the galley, nursed him the rest of the day. By the following afternoon the Delaware lad had recovered his spirits and although he was still too sore and stiff to go on deck, had no trouble in eating the food Jeremy brought him. The absence of Daggs made life assume a happier outlook and it was not long before the boy was as right as ever.

August was nearly past. To the boys, who knew little of the geography of the coast and nothing of Bonnet's plans, it was something of a surprise when the man at the tiller of the *James*, which was in the lead, swung her head over to landward one morning. Low shores, with a white line of sand beneath the vivid dark green of

trees, ran along the western horizon. As the sloop ran in, the boys expected to see the broad opening of some bay but there was still no visible variation of the coast line. No town was to be seen, nor even a single hut, when they were close in. The trees were live-oaks, Bob said, though Jeremy had never seen one to know it before.

The *Royal James* and her consorts held a slow course along the shore for several hours. The strip of sand was gradually widening and in places stretched inland for a mile in dunes and hillocks, traversed by little tidewater creeks. At last there showed a narrow inlet between two dunes, and Bonnet, who had now taken the helm, headed the sloop cautiously for this opening. One of the men constantly heaved the lead and cried the soundings as the ship progressed. The pirate chief kept to the left of the channel and finally passed through into a wide lagoon, with a scant fathom to spare at the shallowest place. The *Fortune* entered without difficulty, but the deeply-laden *Francis* grounded midway in and had to wait several hours for the tide to float her.

Listening to the talk of the crew, Bob heard them say they had come into the mouth of the Cape Fear River in Carolina. From what he knew of the nearby coast he believed that it was a very wild region, almost unsettled, and that there would be slight chance of getting to safety, even if they were able to effect an escape. This fear seemed justified later in the day, when Bonnet said to one of his men that there was no need of shackling the boys as had been done in the Chesapeake. Turning so that they could hear, he added, "Too many Indians in these woods for the lads to try to leave the ship." Jeremy, who had seen enough of both pirates and Indians to last him a lifetime, remarked to his friend that personally he would risk his neck with one as soon as the other, but Bob had heard terrible stories of the red men's cruelty and did not agree with him. "We'd best stay aboard and wait for a better chance," he argued.

All three of the sloops were leaky and needed a thorough overhauling in various ways. As soon as the *Francis* was off the bar, therefore, they proceeded up the estuary for a distance of nearly two miles and secured their vessels in shallow water, where they could be careened at low tide.

Next morning and for many hot days thereafter the pirates and their prisoners toiled hard at the refitting of the ships. Lumber was not easy to come by in that desolate region and when they had used up all their spare planking, Bonnet took the *Royal James* out over the bar to hunt for the wherewithal to do his patching. After a cruise of a day and a night to the southward they sighted a small fishing shallop which they quickly overtook, and captured without a fight. The two men in the shallop jumped overboard and swam ashore when they saw the black flag, and Bonnet was too much occupied in getting the prize back to the river-mouth to give chase. It was an unfortunate thing for him that he did not do so, but of that presently. The shallop was run into the river-mouth and broken up the next day. With the fresh supply of lumber thus secured, the work of repair went forward undelayed, and within a few weeks the sloops were almost ready for sea again.

CHAPTER XX

It had been about the beginning of September when the pirate fleet had sighted the live oaks on the bars of the Cape Fear River. To Bob and Jeremy those first days were uneventful but hardly pleasant. Through the long still afternoons a pitiless sun blazed into every corner of the deck. Wide flats and hot-looking white dunes stretched away on either hand. Only the line of woods half a mile distant offered a suggestion of green coolness. When the sun had set the fo'c's'le held the heat like a baker's oven. One long, tossing night of it sufficed for the two boys, and after that they sought a corner of the deck away from the snoring seamen and lying down on the bare planks, contrived to sleep in reasonable comfort.

The days were spent in hard work for the most part. A good deal of washing and cleaning had to be done aboard all three vessels, and as labor requiring no special skill, it fell frequently to the lot of Jeremy and Bob. It was small matter to them whether they toiled or were idle, for the blistering sun allowed no respite and it seemed preferable to sweat over something useful than over nothing at all.

On the third day after the return of the *James* from her foraging trip, Jeremy, who had been scraping and tarring ropes for hours on end, straightened his back with a discontented grunt and looked away to the edge of the woods, his eyebrows puckered in a frown. "Bob," he said in a voice too low for any of their shipmates to hear, "Bob, I'm going to run away if something doesn't happen soon."

"You'll be shot, like as not," answered the Delaware boy.

"Well, shot let it be," he replied doggedly. "If I'm to stay aboard here all my life, I'd *rather* be shot. It looks like the best chance we've had, right now. Will you come tonight?"

Bob thought for a moment. "I'm not afraid of their catching us," he finally said. "It's the Indians, after we're into the woods. You say you know the Indians and trust them as long as they are treated right. That may be true of the ones you've known, but these Tuscaroras are different. They don't talk the same language, and those words you learned would mayhap go for curses down here. I don't think we ought to try it."

Jeremy admitted that his previous acquaintance stood for nothing, but argued, from the fact that Bonnet had been trying to frighten them, that he had probably exaggerated the danger. Finally, not wishing to leave his friend if he could help it, he agreed to abandon the plan for the present.

They worked at the rope-tarring till suppertime, then rose wearily, stretching, and went for their salt-horse and biscuit. When the coarse rations were eaten, it was nearly sunset. Jeremy watched the sluggish water glide by below the canted rail, till at last small quivering blurs of light, the reflections of stars, began to gleam in the ripples. A faint breeze, sprung up with the coming of night, blew across the sweltering lagoon. Bob, tired out, fell asleep, his head pillowed on the deck. The pirates, some below in the bunks, some stretched on the planking, lay like dead men. After the hard labor of the day even the regular watch slumbered undisturbed. Jeremy's thoughts went drifting off into half-dreams as the soft black water lulled him with its unending whisper. His head nodded. He raised it, striving, he knew not why, to keep awake. The gentle water-sounds crept in again, soothing his drowsy ears. He was close to sleep--so close that another moment would have taken him across the border. But in that little time the sharp double cry of a heron, flying high over the lagoon, cut the night air and startled the boy broad awake.

As he stared off over the dim whiteness of the bars, his senses stretch for a repetition of that weird call, there was a faint splashing in the water close to the sloop. One of the starpools was blotted out in blackness at the instant he turned to look over the rail. The boy's heart seemed to be beating against the roof of his mouth. Thoughts of alligators crossed his mind, for he had heard of them from the pirates who had plied in southern waters. As quietly as he could, he moved to the rail and stood staring over, his eyes bulging into the dark and his breath coming short and fast. For perhaps a minute there was no sight nor sound but the lapping water of

the lagoon. Then he became aware of a whiteness drifting close, and heard a familiar voice whispering his name. "Jeremy--Jeremy--it's Job!" said the white blotch. It bumped softly along the side, and at last the boy could see the homely features of his old friend, pale through the gloom. There was a loose rope-end dragging over the side, and Job's hand feeling along the woodwork came in contact with it.

"Better not try to come aboard," whispered Jeremy. "They're all on deck here. Can you take us off?"

There was silence for an instant as Job felt for a hold in one of the gun ports. Then he raised himself till his head was level with the deck.

"Is the other lad there?" he asked.

"Ay," replied Jeremy. "He's here but he will have to be wakened."

[Illustration: "Don't say a word--sh!--easy there--are you awake?"]

"Go to him and take his hand. Begin squeezing soft-like, and press harder till he opens his eyes. Don't startle him," was Job's admonition.

The boy did as he was bid. A gentle grip on the Delaware lad's palm brought him to his senses. Jeremy was whispering in a cool, steady undertone, "Bob, that's the lad--wake up, Bob--don't say a word--sh!--easy there--are you awake?" When he was rewarded by a nod of comprehension, he told his comrade of Job's presence and the chance they had to escape. Bob understood in a moment. They returned to the rail and first one, then the other let himself quietly down, holding to the rope. Jeremy slipped into the water last.

Luckily they could both swim, though the sloop was so near the beach that swimming was hardly necessary. The tall ex-pirate crawled out upon the sand in the lead and they followed him quickly over a dune and across another creek. They were now far enough away for their flight to be unheard and Job began to run, the boys close behind him. They made a good mile to the south before he allowed his panting runaways to stop for breath. There in the reeds beside a narrow estuary, they came upon a small dinghy, pulled up. The seaman ran the boat into the water, bundled the boys into the bottom astern, and was quickly pulling down stream along the sharp windings of the creek.

When they had put three miles of sand and water behind them, Job rested on his oars to catch his breath. His voice came through the hot dark, pantingly. "Lucky you stood up an' came to the rail the way you did, lad," he said. "I didn't know just how I was to reach you. When you came to the side I could see it was a boy, an' knew things was all right. Well--we'd best be gettin' on--no tellin' how soon they may find you're gone." Once more the big Yankee bowed his back to the task in hand and a silence fell, broken only by the faint sound of the muffled oars and the swirl of water along the sides. Not even the thrill of the escape could keep the two tired boys awake, and it was nearly an hour later that they were roused by voices calling at no great distance. A tall black mass on which showed a single moving light rose out of the gloom ahead. The hail was repeated. "Oh, there, Job Howland--boat ahoy! What luck?" "All's well," replied Job, and ran in under the ship's counter. A line was let down and as soon as the skiff was made fast Bob and Jeremy and their deliverer scrambled up to the open port.

There was shouting and a moving to and fro of lanterns, as they were ushered into the cabin, and suddenly a tall man, half-clad, burst through the door at the farther end. He had the tattered form of Bob Curtis in his arms in an instant, and great boy though he was, the Delaware lad hugged his father ecstatically and wept.

Job and Jeremy, pleased as they were to see this reunion, were hardly comfortable in its presence and made a vain attempt to withdraw gracefully. The merchant was after them before they could reach the door. "Here, Howland," he cried, holding to Bob with one hand and seizing the ex-pirate's arm with the other. "Don't you

try to leave yet. Gad, man, this is the happiest hour I've had in years. I owe you so much that it can't be put in figures. And this tall lad is Jeremy that you've told me of. Look at the sunburn on the pair of 'em--pretty desperate characters to have aboard, I'm afraid!"

His roar of laughter was joined by the other three, as he showed the way to a couple of roomy berths, built in at the end of the cabin. The two boys were left, after a final boisterous "Good-night," and proceeded to make themselves snug between the linen sheets. Jeremy had never slept in such luxury in his whole life, and moved gingerly for fear of hurting something. At last their exhilaration subsided enough for the rescued lads to go to sleep once more. Jeremy's last thought was a half-mournful one as he wondered how long it must be before he, too, could throw himself against the broad homespun wall of his father's breast.

CHAPTER XXI

When they woke it was to the regular heave and lurch of a sailing vessel in motion, and Jeremy, looking out the port, beheld the crisp, sparkling blue of open sea.

There were two suits of every-day clothes upon the cabin bench and into these the boys climbed, impatient to get out on deck. The ship was the big merchantman, *Indian Queen*, though Bob, used as he was to her appearance, would hardly have known her in her new guise. Long lines of black cannon grimly faced the open ports along either side. The rail had been built up solidly to a height of about six feet, so that the main deck was now a typical gun deck, open overhead. Her regular crew of seasoned mariners was augmented by as many more longshoremen, all good men, picked for their courage and hand-to-hand fighting ability.

Job, who acted as second mate and was in full charge of the gun crews, took the boys proudly from one big carronade to another, explaining each improvement which his experience or ingenuity had devised. His chief pride was the long nine-pounder in the bows. She was a swivel gun set on bearings so finely adjusted and well-greased that one man could aim her. Job patted her shiny brass rump lovingly as he looked across the blue swells ahead. He could hardly wait for the hour when he should set a match to her breach.

Clarke Curtis joined the group a few minutes later, and they went together to the main cabin. Bob's father, Mr. Ghent, the Captain, and Job Howland settled themselves comfortably over long pipes and glasses of port, and prepared to hear the boys' story. Jeremy, bashful in such fine company, was persuaded to recount his adventures from the time Job had gone over the side till the kidnapped Delaware boy had come aboard. Then Bob took up the tale and told with much spirit of the storm, the trip up the Chesapeake and the subsequent pursuit of the *Francis* off the Capes. From this point on the two lads told the story together, eagerly interrupting each other to put in some incident forgotten for the moment. When they came to the discovery of Pharaoh Daggs' chart, Job sat up with a jerk. "I always thought he knew!" he exclaimed. "Jeremy, lad, could ye draw me a picture of what 'twas like?" The boy readily consented, and given a piece of paper, proceeded to set down, from his memory of the outline and from the general measurements he had taken, a very fair copy of the original. The ex-buccaneer leaned over him as he drew, and shook his head doubtfully as the work went on. "No," he said when the boy had finished, "I can't recall such a bay just this minute. An' as there was nothin' on it to tell where it might be, I don't know as there's anything for us to do. Like as not it's on some little island as isn't set down, so 'twould be scant use to look over the ship's charts. Still, I'll try it." A half-day of poring over the maps produced no result. There were bays large and small that resembled the one Jeremy had drawn, but none closely enough to warrant the belief that it was the same. "Well," remarked Job as he put away the charts, "Daggs'll never live to reach his bay. He'll swing on Charles Town Dock, an' I mistake not." But in that saying at least the ex-pirate proved himself no prophet.

The light wind held and the *Indian Queen* made reasonable speed down the coast for nearly two days. Then, after drifting under short sail all night, she made in with the dawn, past the small island which nearly a century and a half later was to be the scene of a great war's beginning, crept up against the tide till noon and anchored off the thriving port of Charles Town. Mr. Curtis and Job went ashore in the cutter, as soon as all was snug aboard. On landing they went directly to the Governor's house.

Governor Johnson was at home and gladly welcomed the Delaware merchant, who was an old acquaintance of his. When they had been shown into a large room where the official business of the colony was transacted, Mr. Curtis proceeded at once to the point of his visit. He learned that the messenger from Delaware had arrived and his plea for aid had been duly considered. Johnson was troubled at having no better answer for his friend, but said that the treasury of the southern colony had not yet recovered from the strain put upon it four years before at the time of the Indian massacres. He believed that he had no right at this time to spend the public funds in fitting out a fleet, unless it was to avenge an injury done some member of the colony. His honest distress at being unable to assist was so obvious that neither the merchant nor his chief gunner felt like urging their claim for help.

Mr. Curtis told of the rescue of the two boys, much to the discomfort of the blushing Job, and they rose to take their departure, feeling no ill will toward the Governor for his inability to help them. As they started to go out of the room, a loud insistent knock was heard. "Come in," said Johnson, and immediately the door was opened to admit a short, well-built gentleman, very much flushed as to the face, and whose eyes fairly shot forth sparks. He was followed by two other men, dressed in rough clothes that seemed to have seen recent hard usage. The leader advanced with rapid steps. "Look'e here, Governor," he said, "those confounded pirates are at us again. Here's two of my men----"

"Gently, Colonel Rhett," interrupted the Governor, his eyes twinkling. "Allow me to introduce Mr. Clarke Curtis of Delaware and his friend, Mr. Howland. I believe your business and theirs will fall very easily into one track. Pray be seated, gentlemen."

The Colonel shot a keen glance at these new acquaintances and, when the four had taken chairs around the table, began again more calmly to tell his story. A fishing smack, one of a half-dozen open boats belonging to him, had been cruising along the coast to the eastward the week before, and when about forty miles west of Cape Fear had sighted a large black sloop under great spread of sail, bearing down upon her. The two men in the shallop put about and made for shore as fast as they could, using oars and canvas alike, but when they were still half a mile out they saw that the pursuing ship flew a black pirate flag. When, a few moments after, a round shot came dangerously close to their stern, they leaped over the side without more ado and succeeded in swimming ashore, glad to come out of the adventure with whole skins. After a perilous journey of many leagues overland, they had just arrived in Charles Town and reported the affair to Rhett, their employer. "So you see," said the Colonel in conclusion, "we're in for another siege of the kind we had with *Blackbeard* unless we take some quick action on this."

Johnson sat thoughtful for a moment. "Let me put the matter up to you exactly as it now stands," he finally said. "There is a little money in the treasury. But to buy and fit out properly three ships would drain us almost as dry as we were in 1715. Would you have me do that, Rhett?" The Colonel shook his head. "No," he replied, "you must not." Then after looking at the floor for a moment he stood up with quick decision. "See here," he said, "we can get enough volunteers to do this whole business or my name's not William Rhett." Mr. Curtis thrust out a big hand. "My ship *Indian Queen*, twenty-one guns, is in the harbor, ready for sea. She's at your service," he smiled. The Colonel gripped his hand delightedly. "Done," he cried, "and now let's see what other commanders we can recruit. Will you give me a commission, Governor?" And receiving an affirmative reply, he led the way down to the docks.

Colonel Rhett was a well-known figure in Charles Town. He owned a large plantation a few miles inland, and conducted a fish warehouse as well. Among tobacco growers, townsmen and sea-captains alike he was widely acquainted and respected as much as any man in the colony. His courage and skill as a soldier were proverbial, for he had been a leader in the suppression of the Indian uprising. Certainly no man in the Carolinas was better fitted for the task which he had in hand. For two days he and his friends from the *Queen* fairly lived on the wharves, and before sunset of the second he had secured the services of two sloops, the *Henry*, Captain John Masters, and the *Sea Nymph*, Captain Fayrer Hall. Neither ship was equipped for fighting, but by using cannon from the town defences and borrowing some half-dozen pieces from the heavily-armed *Indian Queen*, a complement of eight guns for each sloop was made up.

On September 15th the three ships, in war trim and carrying in their combined crews nearly 200 men, crossed the Charles Town bar. Just before they sailed news had come in that the notorious pirate, Charles Vane, had passed to the south with a prize, and Rhett's first course was laid along the coast in that direction. Two or three days of search in the creeks and inlets failed to reveal any sign of the buccaneer, however, and much to the relief of the impatient Mr. Curtis, they put about for Cape Fear on the eighteenth. The progress of the fleet up the coast was slow. Constant rumors of pirates were received, and every hiding place on the shore was examined as they went along.

Bob and Jeremy, wild with suppressed excitement, could hardly brook this delay, for, as they warned the officers of the expedition repeatedly, there was every reason to expect that Bonnet would leave the river soon, if he had not gone already. For this reason the *Indian Queen* went on in advance of the others and patrolled the waters off the headland for four days, until Rhett should come up.

On the evening of the twenty-sixth he made his appearance and as there was still light they decided to enter the river-mouth. The tide was just past flood. Rhett's flagship, the *Henry*, nosed in first over the bar and was followed by the *Sea Nymph*. The great, deep-draughted *Queen* advanced to within a few lengths of the entrance, but the soundings showed that even there she had only a fathom or two to spare, and would certainly come to grief if she adventured further. As it was, even the lighter sloops ran aground fifteen minutes later and were not launched again till nearly dawn. Captain Ghent had anchored the big ship as close in as he dared and she sat bow-on to the channel-mouth. Her two consorts were in plain sight a few hundred yards inside. Rhett came back during the night in a small boat and held a council of war with Curtis, Ghent and Job Howland. He reported that a party of pirates in longboats had come down river during the evening to reconnoitre, but had beat a retreat as soon as they had seen the *Henry's* guns.

It was decided about half the crew of the *Queen* should be added to the force of men on the two sloops, while the big vessel herself was forced to be content with standing guard off the entrance. This was a bitter blow not only to Mr. Curtis, but to Job and the boys, who had looked forward to the battle with zest.

Bob and Jeremy had been ordered to bed about midnight, but they rose before light, in their excitement, and sunrise found them in the bows with Job, watching the long point of sand behind which they knew the pirates lay. Preparations had been made aboard the *Henry* and *Sea Nymph* for an immediate advance up the river. Hardly had the first slant beams of sunlight struck upon Rhett's deck before the crew were lustily pulling at the main halyards and winding in the anchor chain.

But even before the two Carolina sloops were under way there was an excited chorus of "Here he comes!" and above the dune at the bend of the river, appeared the headsails of the *Royal James*. Bonnet had weighed his chances and decided for a running fight. The pirate ship cleared the point, nearly a mile away, and came flying down, every inch of canvas drawing in the stiff offshore breeze. It seemed for a moment as if she might get safely past the Carolinians and out to sea, with the *Queen* as her only antagonist. Probably Bonnet had counted on the unexpectedness of his maneuver to accomplish this result. But if so, he had left out of his reckoning the character of William Rhett. That gentleman hesitated not an instant, but headed upstream directly toward the enemy. Fortunately, he had two good skippers in Masters and Hall, for the good Colonel himself knew little of sailing. Thanks to these lieutenants, the two attacking sloops were let off the wind at exactly the right time, and filled away down the river close together off the pirate's starboard bow. Bonnet raced up abeam, firing broadsides as fast as his men could load, and his cannonade was answered in kind from the *Henry*. She and the *Sea Nymph* began to veer over to port, forcing the black sloop closer and closer to shore, but the buccaneer Captain refused to take in an inch of sail. His course was all but justified. The speedy craft which he commanded gained on her foes hand over hand till, when only a few hundred yards from the narrow mouth of the estuary, she led them both by her own length.

From the deck of the *Queen* Jeremy and Bob could pick out the big form of Herriot at the tiller. Just as the *Royal James* passed into the lead, they saw him swing mightily on the long steering-beam while at the same instant the main sheet was hauled in. It was prettily done. The pirate went hard over to starboard, kicking up a wave of spray as she slewed. She sprang away from under the bows of the *Henry* with only inches to spare, for the bowsprit of Rhett's sloop tore the edge of her mainsail in passing. The fierce cheer that rose from the deck of the black buccaneer was drowned in a jarring crash. She had eluded her foe only to run, ten seconds later, upon a submerged sand bar. It was now the Carolinians' turn to cheer, though it soon appeared that they might better have saved their breath for other purposes. The *Henry*, unable to check her speed, ran straight ahead, and hardly a minute after her enemy's mishap was hard aground twenty yards away. Both sloops lay careened to starboard, so that the whole deck of the *Henry* offered a fair target for Bonnet's musketry, while

the *Royal James's* port side was thrown up, a stout defence against the small-arm fire of Rhett's men. Owing to the slant of their decks it was impossible to train the cannon of either ship.

The *Sea Nymph*, meanwhile, in an effort to cut off the course of the pirate, had put over straight for the channel mouth, and before she could come about her bows also were fast in the sand, and she lay stern toward the other two, but out of musket-shot, unable to take a hand in the hot fight that followed. Had either the *Henry's* crew or the buccaneers been able to send a proper broadside from their position, it seems that they must surely have blown their foe out of water, though we need, of course, to make allowance for the comparative feebleness of their ordnance in contrast to that of the present day.

The stranding of the three vessels had occupied so short a time that the little group of witnesses high up in the bow of the *Indian Queen* had not yet exchanged a word. Clinging to the rail, open-mouthed, they had seen the pirate make her bold dash across the bows of her pursuers, only to strike the bar in her instant of triumph, then following with the quickness of events in a dream, the grounding first of the *Henry*, afterwards of the *Nymph*.

Nor was there an appreciable pause in the spectacle, for the pirates, who had been shooting steadily during the race down river, wasted no time in trying to get off the bar, but raked their nearby adversaries' deck with a withering fire. Rhett's crew tumbled into the scuppers, where they were under the partial cover of the bulwark, but many were killed, even before they could reach this shelter, and living and dead rolled down together, as in a ghastly comedy.

CHAPTER XXII

The boys, intent upon this awful scene, turned as a shout from Job Howland swelled above the uproar. The big gunner was at the breach of his swivel-gun, ramrod in hand. The little group scattered to one side or the other, leaving an open space at the bow rail. At the same moment Job put in his powder, a heavy charge, ramming it home quickly, but with all care. On top of the wadding went the round-shot, which was in its turn hammered down under the powerful strokes of the ramrod. Maneuvering the well-balanced breech with both hands, the tall Yankee trained his cannon upon the pirate sloop; allowed for distance, raising the muzzle an inch or more; nosed the wind and glanced at the foremast pennons; then swung his piece a fraction of an inch to windward.

At last with a shout of "'Ware fire!" he sprang back and laid his match to the touch-hole. There was a spurt of flame as the long nine roared above the staccato bark of the musketry. Then they saw a section of the pirate's upper rail leap clear of her deck and fall overside. "Too high," said Job shortly, though Ghent and Curtis had cheered at the shot, for the distance was a good half-mile. Job worked feverishly at his reloading, helped by others of the *Queen's* gun crews. Again the charge was a stout one, but this time the gunner laid his muzzle pointblank at the top of the rail, allowing only for wind. Once more he fired. Just short of the *Royal James* went up a little tower of spray. Job said not a word, but set his great angular jaws and went about his work with all the speed he had.

"Look," said Jeremy to Bob, in a sudden burst of understanding, "the tide's rising. See how it runs in past our bows. In another five minutes one of those boats will be afloat. Watch how the *James* rocks up and down already! If she gets off first, it'll go hard with Rhett, for Bonnet'll let off a broadside as soon as his guns are level. That's why Job's trying so hard to put a hole in her."

Almost as he spoke the report of the third shot rolled out. The buccaneer sloop jumped sharply, like a spurred horse. In her side, just at the water line, a black streak had suddenly appeared. The waves of the incoming tide no longer swayed her buoyantly, for she wallowed on the bar like a log. The effect of the shot, though it could be seen from the *Sea Nymph*, where it was greeted with cheers, was still unknown aboard the *Henry*. In the wash of water as the tide rolled in, Rhett's sloop stood almost on an even keel. The remnant of his crew appeared to have taken heart, for a brisk fire now answered that of the buccaneers. Suddenly a triumphant shouting began aboard the stranded flagship, soon answered in increasing volume from her two consorts. The *Henry* was moving slowly off the bar.

On the black sloop there was a silence as of death. Stede Bonnet, late gentleman of the island of Barbadoes, honorably discharged as major from the army of his Majesty, since turned sea-rover for no apparent cause, and now one of the most notorious plunderers of the coast, faced his last fight. Outnumbered nearly ten to one, his ship a stranded hulk, his cannon useless, surely he read his doom. His men read it and turned sullenly to haul down the tattered rag of black that still hung from the masthead. But a last blaze of the old mad courage flared up in the Captain, as he faced them, dishevelled and bloody, from behind cocked pistols. Above the tumult of the fusillade his voice, usually so clear, rose hoarse with anger. "I'll scatter the deck with the brains of any man who will not fight to the end!" he cried.

For a second the issue was in doubt. In another instant the iron spell he held over his men must have won them back. Herriot was already running to his side. But before he reached his chief a louder cheer from the attacking sloops made him turn. The black "Roger" fluttered downward to the deck.

One of the captive sailors from the *Francis*, fearing to be taken for a pirate if it came to deck-fighting, had crept up behind the mast and cut the flag halyards. The men's hearts fell with the falling ensign and they stood irresolute while the *Henry* went up alongside. There was now water enough for her to come close aboard and when she stood at a boat's length distant, Colonel Rhett appeared at the rail. He pointed to the muzzles of four loaded cannon aboard his sloop and told Bonnet that he would proceed to blow him into the air if he did not surrender in one minute's time. There was little parley. The pirate captain's flare of resistance had burned out

and pale and strangely shaken he handed over his sword and submitted to the disarming of his men.

It was now well along in the morning. The prisoners whom Rhett had taken were rowed out in small boats across the bar and put aboard the *Indian Queen*. One by one they were hauled over the side and placed below in chains. Job, Jeremy and Bob stood at a little distance and counted those who had been captured. Now and then they were greeted by an ugly look and a curse as some old shipmate recognized them. Last of all, Major Bonnet passed, haggard and unkempt, his head bowed in shame.

"Thirty-five in all," finished Job. "Guess our old and handsome friend, Pharaoh Daggs must have got his gruel in that fight. Well, if ever man deserved to die a violent death, it's him. I'd like to make sure, though. Want to go over to the *James* with me?" Both boys welcomed the opportunity and as the longboat was just then starting back, they were soon aboard the battered pirate, so recently their home. Three or four dead men lay on the canted deck, for no effort had been made as yet to clean the ship. Bob and Jeremy had no stomach for looking at the corpses of their erstwhile companions and turned rather to explore the cabin and fo'c's'le, leaving Job to hunt for the body of their old enemy.

In the long bunkroom some water had entered with the rising tide and they found the lower side a miniature lake. In the semi-darkness, seamen's chests floated past like houses in a flood. One of the big boxes was open, half its contents trailing after it. Something familiar about the brass-bound cover and the blue cloth that hung over the side made Jeremy start. "Daggs' chest!" he exclaimed and reached forward, pulling it up on the dry planking. The two boys delved into the damp rubbish it held. There were a few clothes, a rusty pistol, an able seaman's certificate crumpled and torn almost beyond recognition. The sack of money and the chart were gone. After searching in dark corners of the fo'c's'le and fishing in the pool of leakage without discovering what they sought, the boys returned to the box. "Odd," said Jeremy at length. "Every other chest is locked fast. Why should he have opened his?" This seemed unanswerable. They returned to the deck, to find Job peering into the green water overside. "The body's not here," said the big seaman, "unless he fell over the rail or was thrown over. I'm looking to see if it's down there." The sand shone clean and white through the shallow water on every side. No trace of the buccaneer was to be seen. Jeremy told of finding the open chest. "Hm," mused Job, "looks like he'd got away, though he may be dead; I'd like to know for sure. Still," he added, his face clearing, "chances are we'll never see nor hear of him again." And putting the man with the broken nose out of their thoughts, they rejoined their friends on the big merchantman.

Just before nightfall the Carolina sloops, which had made an expedition up the river, returned with Bonnet's two prizes in tow. They had been abandoned in the effort to escape, and Rhett had launched them without difficulty. A great sound of hammering filled the air above the desert lagoon for two days. The old *Revenge*, now so rechristened since she had fallen into honest hands, had to be floated, for there was still service in her shattered black hull. A hundred men toiled on and around her, and in a remarkably short time a jury patch was made in her gaping side and her hold pumped dry. Then crews were picked to man the three captured sloops, and the flotilla was ready to return triumphant. On the morning when they stood out to sea, the twelve men of Rhett's party who had been killed in action were buried with military honors, saluted by the cannon of the fleet.

A voyage of three days, unmarred by any accident, brought the victorious squadron into Charles Town harbor. Joy knew no bounds among the merchants and seamen along the docks. Indeed, the rejoicing spread through the town to the tune of church bells and the whole colony was soon made aware of Rhett's victory.

When the buccaneers had been taken ashore under a heavy guard and locked up in the public watchhouse, Mr. Curtis and Bob, with Job and Jeremy, went ashore to stretch their legs. It was a fine, fall day, warm as midsummer to Jeremy's way of thinking. The docks were fascinatingly full of merchandise. Great hogsheads of molasses and rum from Jamaica, set ashore from newly arrived ships, shouldered for room with baled cotton and boxes of tobacco ready to be loaded. There was a smell of spices and hot tar where the sun beat down on the white decks and tall spars of the shipping. Negroes, hitherto almost unknown to the Yankee boy,

handled bales and barrels on the wharves, their gleaming black bodies naked to the waist.

Planters from the fertile country behind the town rode in with their attendant black boys, and gathered at the coffee-houses on King Charles Street. It was to one of these, the "Scarlet Fish," that the bluff Delaware man took his protégés for dinner.

The place was resplendent with polished deal and shining pewter. Curtains of brightly colored stuff hung at the high square windows, and on the side where the sun entered, pots of flowers stood in the broad window-shelves. There were gay groups of men at the tables, and talk of the pirates was going everywhere over the Madeira and chocolate. It seemed the news of Job's gunnery had been spread by Rhett's men, for some of the diners recognized and pointed to him. A pretty barmaid, with dimples in her elbows, curtsied low as she set down his cup. "Oh, yes, Captain Howland!" she answered as he gave his order, blushed a deep pink and ran to the kitchen. Whereupon Job, quite overcome, vowed that the ladies of Carolina were the fairest in the world, and Mr. Curtis roared heartily, saying that "Captain Howland" it should be, and that before many months, if he knew a good seadog.

As they sat and sipped their coffee after a meal that reflected glory upon the cook of the "Scarlet Fish," Colonel Rhett came in and made his way to their table through a hurly-burly of back-slappings and "Bravos." As soon as he was able to sit down in peace, he drew Mr. Curtis a little aside to talk in private. The two boys were content to watch the changing scene and listen to the hearty badinage of the fashionable young blades about the tables. It was, you must remember, Jeremy's first experience of luxury, unless the good, clean quarters and wholesome meals aboard the *Queen* could be so called. He had never read any book except the Bible, had never seen more than a half-dozen pictures in his life. From these and from the conversation of backwoodsmen and, more recently, of pirates, he had been forced to form all his conceptions of the world outside of his own experience. It is a tribute to his clean traditions and sturdy self-reliance that he sat unabashed, pleased with the color, the gayety, the richness, but able still to distinguish the fine things from the sham, the honest things from those which only appeared honest--to feel a thrill of pride in his father's hard, rough-hewn life and his own.

Colonel Rhett's conference with Mr. Curtis being over, the score was paid and the party took their triumphal way to the door, Job turning his sunburned face once or twice to glance regretfully after the dimpled barmaid.

That afternoon they were taken to the Governor's house, where Job and each of the boys told the story of their experiences in Bonnet's company. These stories were sworn to as affidavits and kept for use in the coming trial of the pirate crew. It was a special dispensation of the Governor's which allowed them to give their evidence in this form instead of waiting in Charles Town for the court to sit, and needless to say they were heartily glad of it. The formalities over, Governor Johnson led the party into the adjoining room. He motioned them to sit down and faced them with a smile. "Now, my lads," said he, "the spoil taken on the *Royal James* has been divided, and though, as you may guess, it had to go a long way, there's a share left for each of you." Jeremy and Bob stared at each other and at their friends. The benign smiles of Mr. Curtis, Colonel Rhett and Job showed that they had known beforehand of this surprise. The Governor was holding out a small leather sack in each hand. "Here, catch," he laughed, and the two astonished lads automatically did as they were bid. In each purse there was something over twenty guineas in gold. Before they had found words to thank the Governor he laughed again merrily. "Never mind a speech of acceptance," said he. "Colonel Rhett, here, has something else for you."

"Yes," replied the Colonel. "You see, there was a deal of junk in the Captain's cabin that comes to me as Admiral of the expedition. I'd be much pleased if you two lads would each pick out anything that pleases you, as a personal gift from myself and Stede Bonnet." As he spoke, he took the cloth cover from a table which stood at one side. On it the boys saw a shining array of small arms, some glass and silver decanters and a pile of books. The Colonel motioned Bob forward. "Here you are, lad, take your choice," he said. Bob stepped to the table and glanced over the weapons eagerly. He finally selected a silver-mounted pistol with the great

pirate's name engraved on the butt, and went with pride to show it to his father.

It was Jeremy's turn. He had no hesitation. From the moment he had heard the offer his shining eyes had been fastened upon one object, and now he went straight to the table and picked up the biggest and thickest of the heap of books, a great leather-bound volume--Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." It is not the least inexplicable fact in the career of the terrible Stede Bonnet that he was a constant reader of such books as this and the "Paradise Lost" of Milton. Bunyan's great allegory had come at last into a place where it could do more good than in the cabin bookshelf of a ten-gun buccaneer. Jeremy, poor lad, uneducated save for the rude lessons of his father and the training of the open, had longed for books ever since he could remember. He had affected a gruff scorn when Bob had spoken from his well-schooled knowledge, but inwardly it had been his sole ground for jealousy of the Delaware boy. That ponderous leather book was read many times and thoroughly in after years, and it became the foundation of such a library as was not often met with in the colonies. Job gave the lad an understanding smile and a pat on the back, for Jeremy had told him of his passion for an education.

The four grown men drank each other's health and separated with many hearty handclasps. An hour later the *Queen's* anchor was up and she was moving out to sea upon the tide, cheered vigorously from the docks and saluted by every vessel she passed. The warm September dusk settled over the ocean. A soft land breeze rustled in the shrouds, and the great sails filled with a gentle flapping. Slowly the tall ship bowed herself to the northeast and settled away on her course contentedly, while the water ran with a smooth murmur beneath her forefoot. Jeremy, lying wide-eyed in his bunk, where a single star shone through the open port, thought it the sweetest sound he had ever heard. He was homeward bound at last.

[Illustration]

CHAPTER XXIII

There were brave days aboard the *Queen* as she voyaged up the coast--days of sun and light winds when the boys sat lazily in the blue shadow of the sails, looking off through half-closed eyes toward the faint line of shore that appeared and disappeared to leeward; or listened to Job's long tales of adventure up and down the high seas; or fished with hand-lines over the taffrail, happy if they pulled up even a goggle-eyed flounder. Twice they ran into fog, and on those days, when the wet dripped dismally off the shrouds and the watch on deck sang mournful airs in the gray gloom, the two lads settled into big chairs in the cabin, beneath a mighty brass oil-lamp, and while Bob sat bemused over Captain Dampier's *Voyages*, Jeremy fought Apollyon with that good knight Christian, in "Pilgrim's Progress." But best of all were the days of howling fair weather, when sky and sea were deep blue and the wind boomed over out of the west, and the scattered flecks of white cloud raced with the flying spray below. Then all hands would stand by to slack a sheet here or reef a sail there, and Ghent, who was a bold sailor, would take the kicking tiller with Job's help, and keep the big ship on her course, the last possible foot of canvas straining at the yardarms. High along the weather rail, with the wind screaming in their ears or down in the lee scuppers where the white-shot green passed close below with a roar and a rush, the boys would cling, yelling aloud their exultation. It was more than the risk, more than the dizzy movement that made them happy. With every hour of that strong wind they were ten knots farther north.

So they sailed; and one morning when the mist cleared, Mr. Curtis led both boys to the port rail to show them where the green head of Cape Henlopen stood, abeam. There was moisture in the corners of his eyes as he pointed to it. "Thank God, Bob, my lad, you're here to see the Delaware again!" he said huskily.

Up the blue bay they cruised in the fine October weather and came in due time--a very long time it seemed to some aboard--to the roadstead opposite New Castle port. There was a boat over almost before the anchor was dropped and a picked crew rowed the Curtises, Job and Jeremy ashore as fast as they dared without breaking oars. They drew up across the swirling tidewater to the foot of a long pier. It was black with people who cheered continually, and somewhere above the town a cannon was fired in salute, but all Bob saw was a slender figure in white at the pier-edge and all he heard was a woman's happy crying. A message to his mother telling of his safety had been sent from Charles Town three weeks before, and there she was to welcome him. There was a ladder further in along the pier, but before they reached it some one had thrown a rope and Bob swarmed up hand over hand. Jeremy, stricken with a sudden shyness, watched the happy, tearful scene that followed from the boat below.

Women had had small part in his own life. Since his mother's death he had known a few in the frontier settlements, and they had been good to him in a friendly way, but this ecstatic mother-love was new and it made him feel awkward and lonely.

It seemed that all Delaware colony must be at the waterfront. Every soul in the little town and men from miles around had turned out to welcome the returning vessel, for the news of Bonnet's defeat had been brought in, days before, by a Carolina coaster. There was bunting over doorways and cheering in the streets as the Governor's coach with the party of honor drove up the main thoroughfare to the Curtis house.

When they were within and the laughing crowds had dispersed, Bob's mother came to Jeremy, put her hands on his shoulders and looked long into his face. She was a frail slip of a woman, dark like her son, with a sensitive mouth and big, black eyes full of courage. Jeremy flushed a slow scarlet under her gaze, but his eyes never flinched as he returned it.

"A fine boy," she said, at length, "and my own boy's good friend!" Then she smiled tenderly and kissed him on the forehead. Jeremy was then and there won over. All women were angels of light to him from that moment.

That night, alone in the white wilderness of his first four-poster, the poor New England boy missed his mother very hard, more perhaps than he had ever missed her before. He fell asleep on a pillow that was wet in spots--and he was not ashamed.

In the days that followed nothing in Delaware Colony was too good for the young heroes. Jeremy could never understand just *why* they were heroes, but was forced to give up trying to explain the matter to an admiring populace. As for Bob, he gleefully accepted all the glory that was offered and at last persuaded Jeremy to take the affair as philosophically as himself. They were in a fair way to be spoiled, but fortunately there was enough sense of humor between them to bring them off safe from the head-patting gentlemen and tearfully rapturous ladies who gathered at the brick house of afternoons.

Perhaps the thing that really saved them from the effects of too much petting was the trip up the Brandywine to the Curtis plantation. It was a fine ride of thirty miles and the trail led through woods just turning red and yellow with the autumn frosts. Jeremy, though he had been on a horse only half a dozen times in his life, was a natural athlete and without fear. He was quick to learn and imitated Bob's erect carriage and easy seat so well that long before they had reached their journey's end he backed his tall roan like an old-timer. With Job it was a different matter. He was all sailor, and though the times demanded that every man who travelled cross-country must do it in the saddle, the lank New Englander would have ridden a gale any day in preference to a steed. Even Jeremy could afford to laugh at the sorry figure his big friend made.

The trail they followed was no more than a rough cutting, eight or ten feet wide, running through the forest. Here and there paths branched off to right or left and up one of these Bob turned at noon. It led them over a wooded hill, then down a long slope into the valley of a stream. "John Cantwell's plantation. We'll stop here for a bite to eat," explained the boy. By the water side, in a wide clearing, was a group of log huts and farther along, a square house built of rough gray stone.

They rode up to the wide door which looked down upon the river. In answer to Bob's hail a colored boy in a red jacket ran out to take the horses' heads and four black and white fox terriers tore round the corner barking a chorus of welcome. Bob jumped down with a laughing, "Ah there, Rufus!" to the horse-boy, and proceeded to roll the excited little dogs on their backs. As Jeremy and Job dismounted, a big man in sober gray came to the doorway. His strong, kindly face broke into a smile as he caught sight of his visitors. "Well, Bob, I'm mightily glad to see thee back, lad! We got news from the town only yesterday." He strode down the steps and took the boy's hand in a hearty grip, then greeted the others, as Bob introduced them. Jeremy marvelled much at the cut of the man's coat, which was without a collar, and at his continual use of the plain *thee* and *thy*. But there was a direct simplicity about all his ways, and a gentleness in his eyes that won the boy to him instantly.

One moment only he wandered at John Cantwell. In the next he had forgotten everything about him and stood open-mouthed, gazing at the square doorway. In the sun-lit frame of it had appeared a little girl of twelve. She was dressed demurely in gray, set off with a bit of white kerchief. Her long skirt hid her toes and her hands were folded most properly. But above this sober stalk bloomed the fairest face that Jeremy had ever seen. She had merry hazel eyes, a straight little nose and a firm little chin. Her plain bonnet had fallen back from her head and the brown curls that strayed recklessly about her cheeks seemed to catch all the sunbeams in Delaware.

For a very little time she stood, and then the pursed red mouth could be controlled no longer. She opened it in a whoop of joy and catching up her skirts ran to smother Bob in a great hug. Next moment Jeremy, still in a daze, was bowing over her hand, as he had learned to do at New Castle. She dropped him a little curtsey and turned to meet Job.

Betty Cantwell and her father were Quakers from the Penn Colony to the north, Bob had time to tell Jeremy as they entered. That accounted for the staid simplicity of their dress and their quaint form of speech--the plain language, as it was called. Jeremy had heard of the Quakers, though in New England they were much

persecuted for their beliefs by the Puritans. Here, apparently, people not only allowed them to live, but liked and honored them as well. He prayed fervently that Betty might never chance to visit Boston town. Yet already he half hoped that she would. Of course, he would have grown bigger by then, and would carry a sword and how he would prick the thin legs of the first grim deacon who dared so much as to speak to her! These imaginings were put to rout at the dining-room door by the delicious savor of roast turkey. One of the black farmhands had shot the great bird the day before, and the three travellers had arrived just at the fortunate moment when it was to be carved.

It was a dinner never to be forgotten. The twenty miles they had ridden through the crisp air would have given them an appetite, even had they not been normally good trenchermen, and there were fine white potatoes and yams that accompanied the turkey, not to mention some jelly which Betty admitted having made herself, "with cook's help." Bob joyfully attacked his heaped-up plate and ate with relish every minute that he was not talking. Jeremy could say not a word, for opposite him was Betty and in her presence he felt very large and awkward. His hands troubled him. Indeed, had it been a possibility, he would have eaten his turkey without raising them above the table edge. As it was, he felt himself blush every time a vast red fist came in evidence. Yet he succeeded in making a good meal and would not have been elsewhere for all Solomon Brig's gold. Perhaps Job, who was neither talkative nor under the spell of a lady's eyes, wielded the best knife and fork of the three.

Dinner over, and Bob's story finished, they were taken to see the stable and the broad tilled fields by the river bank, where corn stood shocked among the stubble. Afternoon came and soon it was time for them to start. There were laughing farewells and a promise that they would stop on the return trip, and before Jeremy could come back to earth the gloom of the forest shut in above their heads once more. They put the horses to a canter as soon as the ridge was cleared, for there were still ten miles to go and the light was waning. Jeremy was very much at home in the woods, but the chill, sombre depths that appeared and reappeared on either hand seemed to warn him to be prepared. He reached to the saddlebow, undid the flap of the pistol holster, and made sure that his weapon was loaded, then put it back, reassured. The footing was bad, and they had to go more slowly for a while. Then Bob, in the lead, came to a more open space where light and ground alike favored better speed. He spurred his horse to a gallop and had turned to call to the others, when suddenly the animal he rode gave a snort of fear and stopped with braced forefeet. Bob, caught off his guard, went over the horse's head with a lurch and fell sprawling on the ground in front. Then he gave a scream, for not two feet away he saw the short, cruel head of a coiled rattlesnake.

Jeremy, riding close behind, pulled up beside the other horse and threw himself off. Even as he touched the ground a sharp whirr met his ear and he saw the fat, still body and vibrating tail of the snake. He wrenched the pistol from the holster, took the quickest aim of his life and pulled the trigger. After the shot apparently nothing had changed. The whirr of the rattle went on for a second or two, then gradually subsided. Bob lay white-faced, and still as death. Jeremy drew a step closer and then gave a choked cry of relief. The snake's smooth, diamond-marked body remained coiled for the spring. Its lithe forepart was thrust forward from the top coil and the venomous, blunt head--but the head was no more. Jeremy's ball had taken it short off.

Bob was unhurt, but badly shaken and frightened, and they followed the trail slowly through the dusk. Then just as the shadows that obscured their way were turning to the deep dark of night a small light became visible straight ahead. They pushed on and soon were luxuriously stretched before a log fire in the Curtis plantation house, while Mrs. Robbins, the overseer's wife, poured them a cup of hot tea.

When bedtime came, Bob came over to Jeremy and gave him a long grip of the hand, but said never a word. There was no need of words, for the New England boy knew that his chum would never be quite happy till he could repay his act in kind. Yet he could not tell Bob that the shooting of a snake was but a small return for the gift of a vision of one of heaven's angels. Each felt himself the other's debtor as they got into the great feather bed side by side.

CHAPTER XXIV

Two boys turned loose on a present-day farm can find enough interesting things to do to fill a book much larger than this. For me to go into the details of that week's visit to Avon Dale would preclude any possible chance of your hearing the end of this story. And there are still many things that need telling.

But though no great or grave adventure befell the two boys while they stayed at the plantation, you may imagine the days they spent together. Back of the farm buildings lay the fields, all up and down the river bank for miles. And back of the fields, crowding close to the edge of the plowed ground, the big trees of an age-old forest rose. The great wild woods ran straight back from the plantation for five hundred miles, broken only by rivers and the steep slopes of the Alleghanies, as yet hardly heard of by white men. Giant oaks, ashes and tulip trees mingled with the pine and hemlock growth. The hillsides where the sun shone through were thick with rhododendron and laurel. And all through this sylvan paradise the upper branches and the underbrush teemed with wild life. Squirrels, partridges and occasional turkeys offered frequent marks for the long muzzle-loading rifles, while a thousand little song birds flitted constantly through the leaves. Jeremy had never seen such hunting in his colder northern country. The game was bigger and more dangerous in New England, but never had he found it so plentiful. As the boys were both good marksmen, a great rivalry sprang up between them. They scorned any but the hardest shots--the bright eye of a squirrel above a hickory limb fifty yards off or the downy form of a wood pigeon preening in a tree top. Though a good deal of powder and lead was spent in the process, they were shooting like old leather-stocking hunters by the end of the week.

The last two days had to be spent indoors, for a heavy autumn rain that came one night held over persistently and drenched the valley with a sullen, steady pour. Little muddy rivulets swept down across the fields and joined the already swollen current of the Brandywine. On the morning when they started back, the river was running high and fast and yellow along the low banks, but a bright sun shone, and a fresh breeze out of the west promised fair weather.

The horses were left at the plantation. They took their guns and a day's provisions and carried a long, narrow-beamed canoe down to the shore. It was a dugout, quite unlike the graceful birch affairs that Jeremy had seen among the Penobscots, but serviceable and seaworthy enough.

Job, happy to be on the water once more, took the stern paddle, Bob knelt in the bow, and Jeremy squatted amidships with the blankets and guns. With a cry of farewell to the kindly folk on the bank, they shoved out and shot away down the swift river.

It was exciting work. The stream had overflowed its banks for many yards and the brown water swirled in eddies among the trees. To keep the canoe in the main channel required judgment and good steering. Job proved equal to the occasion and though with their paddling the swiftness of the current gave the craft a speed of over ten miles an hour, he brought her down without mishap into a wide-spreading cove. They rested, drifting slowly across the slack water. "This can't be far from Cantwell's," Bob was saying, when Jeremy gave a startled exclamation, and pointed toward the shore, some fifty yards away. A little girl in a gray frock stood on the bank, her arms full of golden rod and asters. She had not seen the canoe, for she was looking behind her up the bank. At that instant there was a crashing in the brush and a big buck deer stepped out upon the shore, tossing his gleaming antlers to which a few shreds of summer "velvet" still clung. He was not twenty feet from the girl, who faced him, perfectly still, the flowers dropping one by one from her apron.

It was the rutting season and the buck was in a fighting mood. But he was puzzled by this small motionless antagonist. He hesitated a bare second before launching his wicked charge. Then as he bellowed his defiance there came a loud report. The buck's haunches wavered, then straightened with a jerk, as he made a great leap up the bank and fell dead. From Jeremy's long-barrelled gun a wisp of smoke floated away. Betty Cantwell sat down very suddenly and seemed about to cry, but as the canoe shot up to the shore she was smiling once more. They took her aboard and started down stream again. A few hundred yards brought them to the edge of

the Cantwell clearing, where Bob hailed the negroes working in the field and gave them orders for bringing down the dead buck.

At the landing John Cantwell was waiting in some anxiety, for the sound of Jeremy's shot had reached him at the house. Bob told the story, somewhat to Jeremy's embarrassment, for nothing was spared in the telling. The Quaker thanked him with great earnestness and reproved his daughter gently for straying beyond the plantation.

After another of those famous dinners Job and the boys returned to their craft, for there were many miles to make before night. As Jeremy took up the bow paddle he waved to Betty on the bank, and thrilled with happiness at the shy smile she gave him. Once again they were in the current, shooting downstream toward tidewater.

It was mid-afternoon when they crossed the Brandywine bar and paddled past the docks of Wilmington. Outside in the Delaware there was a choppy sea that made their progress slower, and the sun had set when the slim little craft ran in for the beach above New Castle. The voyagers shouldered their packs and made their way up the High Street to the brick house.

When the greetings were over and the boys were changing their clothes before coming down for supper, Clarke Curtis entered their room. "Lads," he said, "I'd advise you to go early to bed tonight. You'll need a long rest, for in the morning you start overland for New York." At Bob's exclamation of surprise he went on to explain that the *Indian Queen* had weighed anchor two days before for that port, and as there was no other ship leaving the Delaware soon, he wished the boys to board her at New York for the voyage to New England. Both youngsters were overjoyed at the prospect of an early start. Bob, who had been promised that he could accompany his chum, was hilarious over the news, while Jeremy was too happy to speak.

Later, as they were packing their belongings for the trip, Job Howland came in. He, too, looked excited. "Jeremy, boy," he said, "I'd have liked to go north with you, but something else has come my way. Mr. Curtis bought a new schooner, the *Tiger*, last week, and she's being fitted out now for a coast trader. He offered me the chance to command her!"

"Three cheers!" shouted Bob. "Then New Castle will be your home port, and I'll see you after every voyage!"

The three comrades chatted of their prospects a while and shortly went to bed.

CHAPTER XXV

The boys and their luggage were on their way to Wilmington in the family chaise before dawn, and it was scarce seven o'clock when they bade farewell to the old colored serving-man and clambered aboard the four-horse coach that connected in Philadelphia with the mail coach for New York.

The coaches of that day were cumbersome affairs, huge of wheel, and with ridiculously small bodies slung on wide strips of bull's hide which served for springs. The driver's box was high above the forward running gear. There were as yet no "seats on top," such as were developed in the later days of fast stage-coach service.

In one of these rumbling, swaying conveyances the boys rode the thirty miles to Philadelphia, crossing the Schuylkill at Gray's Ferry about noon. They had barely time for a bite of lunch in the White Horse Tavern before the horn was blown outside and they hurried to take their places in the north-bound coach. Along the cobbled streets of the bustling, red-brick town they rumbled for a few moments, then out upon the smooth dirt surface of the York Road, where the four good horses were put to a gallop.

The Delaware, opposite Trenton, was reached by six o'clock, and there the half-dozen passengers left the coach and were carried across on a little ferry boat, rowed by an old man and his two sons. They spent the night at an Inn and next morning early boarded another coach bound northeast over the sparsely settled hills of New Jersey. The road was narrow and bad in places, slackening their speed. Twice the horses were changed, in little hamlets along the way. In the late afternoon they crossed the marshy flats beyond Newark and just after dusk emerged on the Jersey side of the Hudson. A few lights glimmered from the low Manhattan shore. The quaint Dutch-English village which was destined to grow in two hundred years to be the greatest city in the world, lay quiet in the gathering dark.

The ferry was just pulling out from shore, but at the sound of the coach horn it swung back into its slip and waited for the passengers to board.

A gruff Hollander by the name of Peter Houter was the ferryman. He stood at the clumsy steering-beam, while four stout rowers manned the oars of his wide, flat-bottomed craft. Approaching the steersman, Bob asked where in the town he would be likely to find the Captain of a merchantman then taking cargo in the port. The Dutchman named two taverns at which visiting seafaring men could commonly be found. One was the "Three Whales" and the other the "Bull and Fish."

Landing on the Manhattan shore, the boys shouldered their luggage and trudged by ill-lighted lanes across the island to the East River. As they advanced along the dock-side, Jeremy distinguished among the low-roofed houses a small inn before which a great sign swung in the wind. By the light which flickered through the windows they could make out three dark monsters painted upon the board, a white tree apparently growing from the head of each. "The Three Whales," laughed Jeremy, "and every one a-blowing! Let's go in!"

It was an ill-smelling and dingy room that they entered. A score of men in rough sailor clothes lounged at the tables or lolled at the bar. Two pierced tin lanterns shed a faint smoky light over the scene. Bob waited by their baggage at the door, while Jeremy made his way from one group to another, inquiring for Captain Ghent of the *Indian Queen*. Several of the mariners nodded at mention of the ship, but none could give him word of the skipper's whereabouts.

As he was turning to go out he noticed a man drinking alone at a table in the darkest corner. His eyes were fixed moodily on his glass and he did not look up. Jeremy shivered, took a step nearer, and almost cried out, for he had caught a glimpse of a livid, diagonal scar cutting across the nose from eyebrow to chin. It was such a scar as could belong to only one man on earth. Jeremy retreated to a darker part of the room and watched till the man lifted his head. It was Pharaoh Daggs and none other.

A moment later the boy had hurried to Bob outside and told him his news. "If we can find Ghent," said Bob, "he will be able to summon soldiers and have him placed under arrest."

They hastened along the river front for a hundred yards or more and came to the "Bull and Fish." A man in a blue cloth coat was standing by the door, looking up and down the street. He gave a hail of greeting as they came up. It was Captain Ghent.

"I was just going down to the "Three Whales" thinking you might have stopped there," he said. Bob told him their news and the skipper's face grew grave. "Better leave the bags here for the present," he suggested and then, after a moment's quiet talk with the landlord, he led the way toward the other tavern. On the way he stopped a red-jacketed soldier who was patrolling the dock. After a word or two had been exchanged the soldier fell in beside them, and just as they reached the inn door two more hurried up.

"Come in with me, Jeremy, and point out the man," said Captain Ghent.

The lad's heart beat like a triphammer as he entered the tavern once more. A silence fell on the room when the three soldiers were observed. Jeremy crossed toward the dark corner. The table was empty. He looked quickly about at the faces of the drinkers, but Daggs was not there. "He's gone," he said in a disappointed voice.

The innkeeper came forward, wiping his hands on his apron. "That fellow with the scar?" he said. "He went out of here some five minutes ago."

"Which way?" asked Ghent. But no one in the room could say.

They passed out again, and Ghent smiled reassuringly at the boys. "Well," he said, "like as not he'll never cross our path again, so it's only one rogue the more unhung."

Jeremy failed to find much comfort in this philosophy, but said no more, and soon found himself snugly on board the big merchantman, where his bunk and Bob's were already made up and awaiting them.

It was good to hear the creak of timbers and feel the rocking of the tide once more. Jeremy lay long awake that night thinking of many things. At last he was on the final lap of his journey. The *Indian Queen's* cargo would be stowed within a day or two and she would start with him toward home. He thought with a quiver of happiness of the reunion with his father. Had he quite given up hope for his boy? Jeremy had heard of such a shock of joy being fatal. He must be careful.

He thought of the evil face of the broken-nosed buccaneer. What was Daggs doing in New York? Just then there was a faint sound as of creaking cordage from beyond the side. Jeremy's bunk was near the open port and by leaning over a little he could see the river. Barely a boat's length away, in the dark, a tall-masted, schooner-rigged craft was slipping past on the outgoing tide, with not so much as a harbor-light showing.

[Illustration]

CHAPTER XXVI

It was on the second morning after the boys had reached New York that the *Indian Queen* went down the harbor, her canvas drawing merrily in the spanking breeze of dawn. The intervening day had been spent at the dock-side, where wide-breeched Dutch longshoremen were stoutly hustling bales and boxes of merchandise into the hold. Jeremy had watched the passers along the river front narrowly, though he could not help having a feeling that Pharaoh Daggs was gone. The fancy would not leave his mind that there was some connection between the vanished pirate and the dark vessel he had seen stealing out on the night tide.

A strong southwest wind followed them all day as the *Queen* ran past the low Long Island shore, and that night, though Captain Ghent gave orders to shorten sail, the ship still plunged ahead with unchecked speed. They cleared the Nantucket shoals next day and saw all through the afternoon the sun glint on the lonely white dunes of Cape Cod.

Two more bright days of breeze succeeded and they were working up outside the fringe of islands, large and small, that dot the coast of Maine.

Jeremy was too excited even to eat. He stayed constantly by the man at the helm and was often joined there by Bob and the Captain, as they drew nearer to the Penobscot Bay coast. In the morning they dropped anchor in fifteen fathoms, to leeward of a good-sized fir-clad island. Jeremy had a dim recollection of having seen it from the round-topped peak above his father's shack. His heart beat high at the thought that tomorrow might bring them to the place they sought, and it was many hours before he went to sleep.

At last the morning came, cloudless and bright, with a little south breeze stirring. Before the sun was fairly clear of the sea, the anchor had been catted, and the *Queen* was moving gracefully northeastward under snowy topsails.

They cleared a wide channel between two islands and Jeremy, forward with the lookout, gave a mighty shout that brought his chum to his side on the run. There to the east, across a dozen miles of silver-shimmering sea, loomed a gray peak, round and smooth as an inverted bowl. "It's the island!" cried Jeremy, and Captain Ghent, turning to the mate, gave a joyful order to get more sail on the ship.

About the middle of the forenoon the *Queen* came into the wind and her anchor went down with a roar and a splash, not three cables' lengths from the spot in the northern bay where Jeremy and his father had first landed their flock of sheep. On the gray slope above the shore the boys could see the low, black cabin, silent and apparently tenantless. Behind it was the stout stockade of the sheep-pen, also deserted, and above, the thin grass and gray, grim ledges climbed toward the wooded crest of the hill.

Jeremy's face fell. "They must have gone," he said. But Bob, standing by the rail as they waited for the jollyboat to be lowered, pointed excitedly toward the rocky westward shoulder of the island. "Look there!" he cried. Three or four white dots were moving slowly along the face of the hill.

"Sheep!" said Jeremy, taking heart. "They'd not have left the sheep--unless----"

But the boat was ready, below the side, and the Captain and the two boys tumbled quickly in. Five minutes later the four stout rowers sent the bow far up the sand with a final heave on the oars. They jumped out and hastened up the hill. There was still no sign of life about the cabin, but as they drew near a sudden sharp racket startled them, and around the corner of the sheep-pen tore a big collie dog, barking excitedly. He hesitated a bare instant, then jumped straight at Jeremy with a whine of frantic welcome.

"Jock, lad!" cried the boy, joyfully burying his face in the sable ruff of the dog's neck. In response to his voice, the door of the cabin was thrown open and a tall youth of nineteen stepped out, hesitating as he saw the

group below. Jeremy shook off the collie and ran forward. "Don't you know me, Tom?" he laughed. "I'm your brother--back from the pirates!"

The amazed look on the other's face slowly gave place to one of half-incredulous joy as he gripped the youngster's shoulders and looked long into his eyes.

"Know ye!" he said at length with a break in his voice. "Certain I know ye, though ye've grown half a foot it seems! But wait, we must tell father. He's in bed, hurt."

Tom turned to the door again. "Here, father," he called breathlessly. "Here's Jeremy, home safe and sound!" He seized his brother's hand and led him into the cabin. In the half-darkness at the back of the room the lad saw a rough bed, and above the homespun blankets Amos Swan's bearded face. He sprang toward him and flung himself down by the bunk, his head against his father's breast. He felt strong, well-remembered fingers that trembled a little as they gripped his arm. There was no word said.

CHAPTER XXVII

It was the savory smell of cooking hominy and the sizzle of broiling fish that woke Jeremy next morning. He drew a breath of pure ecstasy, rolled over and began pummeling the inert form of Bob, who had shared his blanket on an improvised bed in the cabin. The Delaware boy opened an eye, closed it again with carefully assumed drowsiness, and the next instant leaped like a joyful wildcat on his tormentor. There was a beautiful tussle that was only broken off by Tom's announcement of breakfast.

Opposite the stone fireplace was a table of hewn planks at which Bob, with Jeremy, Tom and their father, were soon seated. The latter had bruised his knee several days before, but was now sufficiently recovered to walk about with the aid of a stick.

"Father," said Jeremy between mouthfuls, "I want to see that cove again, where the pirates landed. If we may take the fowling-piece, Bob and I'll go across the island, after we've bade good-by to Captain Ghent."

"Ay, lad," Amos Swan replied, "you'll find the cove just as they left it. An I mistake not, the place where their fire was is still black upon the beach, and the rum-barrels are lying up among the driftwood. 'Twas there we found them--on the second day. Ah, Jeremy, lad--little we thought then we'd see you back safe and strong, and that so soon!"

The white frost of the November morning was still gleaming on the grass when the two boys went out. Against the cloudless sky the spires of the dark fir trees were cut in clean silhouette. From the *Indian Queen*, lying off shore, came the creak of blocks and sheaves as the yards were trimmed, and soon, her anchor catted home, she filled gracefully away to the northward, while the Captain waved a cheery farewell from the poop. He was bound up the coast for Halifax, and was to pick Bob up on his return voyage, a month later.

When they had watched the ship's white sails disappear behind the eastern headland, the boys started up the hill behind the cabin. They carried a lunch of bread and dried fish in a leather pouch and across Jeremy's shoulder was one of his father's guns. Bob was armed with the silver-mounted pistol from Stede Bonnet's arsenal.

It was a glorious morning for a trip of exploration and the hearts of both lads were high as they clambered out on the warm bare rock that crowned the island.

"Isn't it just as fine as I told you?" Jeremy cried. "Look--those blue mountains yonder must be twenty leagues away. And you can hardly count the islands in this great bay! Off there to the south is where I saw the *Revenge* for the first time--just a speck on the sea, she was!"

Bob, who had never seen the view from a really high hill before, stood open-mouthed as he looked about him. Suddenly he grasped Jeremy's arm.

"See!" he exclaimed, "down there--isn't that smoke?" He was pointing toward the low, swampy region in the southwestern part of the island. Jeremy watched intently, but there was nothing to disturb the morning calm of sky and shore.

"That's queer," Bob said at last, with a puzzled look. "I could take an oath I saw just the faintest wisp of smoke over there. But I must have been mistaken."

"Well," laughed Jeremy, "we'll soon make sure, for that's not far from where we're going."

They scrambled down, and following the ridge, turned south toward the lower bay at about the point where Jeremy had been discovered by Dave Herriot and the pirate Captain.

Dodging through the tangle of undergrowth and driftwood, they soon emerged on the loose sand above the beach. As Amos Swan had said, the rains had not yet washed away the black embers of the great bonfire, and near by lay a barrel with staves caved in. Looking at the scene, Jeremy almost fancied he could hear again the wild chorus of that drunken crew, most of whom had now gone to their last accounting.

"What say we walk down the shore a way?" suggested Bob. "There might be a duck or two in that reedy cove below here." And Jeremy, glad to quit the place, led off briskly westward along the sand.

Soon they came to the entrance of a narrow, winding tide-creek that ran back till it was hidden from sight in the tall reeds. Just as they reached the place, a large flock of sandpeeps flew over with soft whistling, and lighting on the beach, scurried along in a dense company, offering an easy target. Bob, who was carrying the gun, brought it quickly to his shoulder and was about to fire when Jeremy stopped him with a low "S-s-s-t!"

Bob turned, following the direction of Jeremy's outstretched arm, and for a second both boys stood as if petrified, gazing up the tide-creek toward the interior of the island. About a quarter of a mile away, above the reeds, which grew in rank profusion to a man's height or higher, they saw a pair of slender masts, canted far over.

"A ship!" whispered Bob. "Deserted, though, most likely."

"No," Jeremy answered, "I don't think it. Her cordage would have slacked off more and she wouldn't look so trim. Bob, wasn't it near here you saw that smoke?"

"Jiminy!" said Bob, "so it was! Right over in the marsh, close to those spars. It's some vessel that's put in here to careen. Wonder where her crew can be?"

"That's what looks so queer to me," the other boy replied. "They're keeping out of sight mighty careful. Men from any honest ship would have been all over the island the first day ashore. I don't like the look of it. Let's get back and tell father. Maybe we can find out who it is, afterwards."

Bob argued at first for an immediate reconnaissance, but when Jeremy pointed out the fact that if the strangers were undesirable they would surely have a guard hidden in the reeds up the creek, he accepted the more discreet plan.

They made their way quietly, but with as much haste as possible back along the shore, past the remnant of the fire, and up the hill into the thick woods.

Just as they crossed the ridge and began to see the glint of the northern inlet through the trees, Jeremy paused with a sudden exclamation.

"Here's the spring," he said, "and look at the sign above it. I never saw that before, for it was dark when I was up here. I almost fell in."

The spring itself was nearly invisible to one coming from this direction, but stuck in the fork of a tree, beside it, was a weathered old piece of ship's planking on which had been rudely cut the single word WATTER.

"Some Captain who used to fill his casks here must have put it up so that the spring would be easier to find," Bob suggested. But Jeremy, striding ahead, was thinking hard and did not answer.

Amos Swan heard their news with a grave face. No ship but the *Queen* had touched at the island for several months to his knowledge, he said. He agreed with the boys that the secrecy of the thing looked suspicious. When Tom came in for the noon meal, his father told him of the discovery and they both decided to bring the

sheep in at once, and make preparations for possible trouble.

Tom, armed, and accompanied by the boys, set out soon after dinner for the western end of the island, two miles from the shack. It was there that the flock was accustomed to graze, shepherded by the wise dog, Jock. Their way led along the rocky northern slope, where the sheep had already worn well-defined paths among the scrubby grass and juniper patches, then up across a steep knoll and through a belt of fir and hemlock. When at length they came out from among the trees, the pasture lay before them. There in a hollow a hundred yards away the flock was huddled. Jock became aware of their approach at that instant and lifted his head in a short, choking bark. He started toward them, but before he had taken a dozen steps they could see that he was limping painfully. Running forward, Jeremy knelt beside the big collie, then turned with a movement of sudden dismay and called to his comrades. He had seen the broad splotch of vivid red stained the dog's white breast. Examination showed a deep clean cut in the fur of the neck, from which the blood still flowed sluggishly. But in spite of his weakness and the pain he evidently suffered, Jock could hardly wait to lead his masters back to the flock. Hurrying on with him they crossed a little rise of ground and came upon the sheep which were crowded close to one another, panting in abject terror.

[Illustration: Jock]

"Twenty-six--twenty-eight--yes, twenty-eight and that's all!" Tom said. "There are two of them missing!"

Jock had limped on some twenty yards further and now stood beside a juniper bush, shivering with eagerness.

Following him thither, the boys found him sniffing at a blood-soaked patch of grass. The ground for several feet around was cut up as if in some sort of struggle. A few shreds of bloody wool, caught in the junipers, told their own story.

A man--probably several men--had been on the spot not two hours before and had killed two of the sheep. They had not succeeded in this without a fight, in which the gallant old dog had been stabbed with a seaman's dirk or some other sharp weapon.

Bob, scouting onward a short distance, found the deep boot-tracks of two men in a wet place between some rocks. They were headed south-eastward--straight toward the reedy swamp where the boys had seen the top-masts of the strange vessel! The crew--whoever they might be--had decided to leave no further doubt of their intentions. They had opened hostilities and to them had fallen first blood.

With serious faces and guns held ready for an attack the three lads turned toward home, driving the scared flock before them. Old Jock, stiff and limping from his wound, brought up the rear. They reached the inlet at last, but it was sunset when the last sheep was inside the stockade and the cabin door was barred.

That night the wind changed, and the cold gray blanket of a Penobscot Bay fog shut down over the island.

CHAPTER XXVIII

The fog held for two days. On the third morning Jeremy, on his knees by the hearth fire, was squinting down the bright barrel of a flintlock. He had been quiet for a long time. Bob felt the tenseness of the situation himself, but he could not understand the other's absolute silence. He scowled as he sat on the floor, and savagely drove a long-bladed hunting-knife into the cracks between the hewn planks. At length a low whistle from Jeremy caused him to pause and look up quickly.

"What is it?" he asked.

A look of excitement was growing in Jeremy's face.

"Say, Bob!" he exclaimed, after a second or two. "I've just remembered something that I've been trying to bring to mind ever since we crossed the island. You know the sign we saw up by the spring? Well, somewhere, once before, I knew I'd seen the word 'Watter' spelled that way. So have you--do you remember?"

Bob shook his head slowly. Then a look of comprehending wonder came into his eyes. "Yes," he cried. "It was on that old chart in Pharaoh Daggs' chest!"

"Right," said Jeremy. "And now that I think about it, I believe this is the very island! Let's see--the bay was shaped this way----" He had seized a charred stick from the hearth and was drawing on the floor.

"Two narrow points, with quite a stretch of water inside--a rounded cove up here, and a mitten-shaped cove over here. And the anchor was drawn--wait a minute--right here. Why, Bob, look here! That's the same rounded cove with the beach where the sloop anchored that night they got me!"

Bob could hardly contain himself. "I remember!" he said. "And the dot, with the word 'Watter' was one and a half finger-joints northeast of the bay. Let's see, the bay itself was about four joints long, wasn't it? Or a little over? Anyhow, that would put the spring about--here."

"Allowing for our not being able to remember exactly the shape of the bay," Jeremy put in, "that's just where the spring should be. Bob, this is the island! And now that cross-mark between the two straight lines--two finger-joints northwest of the anchorage-cove, it was. That's just about here." He marked the spot on the floor with his stick.

"Now we've got it all down. And if that cross-mark shows where the treasure is----" Jeremy paused and looked at Bob, his eyes shining.

"Where would that be--up on the hill somewhere?" asked Bob breathlessly.

"About three-quarters of a mile south of the spring--right on the ridge," Jeremy answered.

"When shall we start?" Bob asked, his voice husky with excitement.

"Wait a bit," counselled Jeremy. "We daren't tell father or Tom, for they'd think it just a wild-goose chase, and we'd have to promise not to leave the cabin. You know it *is* an improbable sort of yarn. Besides, we'd better go careful. Do you know who I think is at the head of that crew, over in the creek?"

"Who?" whispered Bob.

Jeremy's face was pale as he leaned close.

"Pharaoh Daggs!" He said the name beneath his breath, almost as if he feared that the man with the broken nose might hear him. And now for the first time he told Bob of the schooner that had slipped past in the dark that night in the East River.

"You're right, Jeremy," Bob agreed. "He'd lose no time getting up here if he could find a craft to carry him. You don't suppose they've found Brig's treasure yet, do you?" he added in dismay.

"They can't have reached here more than a day before us," Jeremy replied. "And if they haven't it already aboard, they won't be able to do anything while this fog holds. If it should lift tomorrow, we'll have a chance to scout around up there. But don't say a word to father."

That night the boys slept little, for both were in a fever of expectation. They were disappointed in the morning to see the solid wall of fog still surrounding the cabin. But Jeremy, sniffing the air like the true woodsman that he was, announced that there would be a change of weather before night, and set about rubbing the barrel of the flintlock till it gleamed. The day dragged slowly by. At last, about three in the afternoon, a slight wind from the northeast sprang up, and the wreaths of vapor began to drift away seaward.

Luckily for the boys' plans, both Tom and his father were inside the sheep-stockade when Bob took the pistols, powder and shot down from the wall, and with Jeremy went quietly forth.

Before the mist had wholly cleared, they were well into the woods, climbing toward the summit of the ridge. Each kept a careful watch about, for they feared the possibility that a guard might have been set to observe movements at the cabin.

They reached the top without incident, however, and turned westward along the watershed. They were increasingly careful now, for if the pirates were dependent on the spring for their water, some of them might pass close by at any moment. Bob, who was almost as expert a hunter as Jeremy, followed noiselessly in the track of the New England boy, moving like a shadow from tree to tree.

So they progressed for fifteen minutes or more. Then Jeremy paused and beckoned to Bob, whispering that they should separate a short distance so as to cover a wider territory in their search. They went on, Bob on the north slope, Jeremy on the south, moving cautiously and examining every rock and tree for some blaze that might indicate the whereabouts of the treasure.

More minutes passed. The sun was already low, and Jeremy began to think about turning toward home. Just then he came to the brink of a narrow chasm in the ledge. Hardly more than a cleft it was, three or four feet wide at its widest part, and extending deep down between the walls of rock. He was about to jump over and proceed when his eye caught a momentary gleam in the obscurity at the bottom of the crevice. He peered downward for a second, then stood erect, waving to Bob with both arms.

The other boy caught his signal and came rapidly through the trees to the spot, hurrying faster as he saw the excitement in Jeremy's face.

"What--what have you found?" he gasped under his breath.

Jeremy was already wriggling his way down between the smooth rock walls, bracing himself with back and knees. Within a few seconds he had reached the bottom, some ten feet below. It was a sloping, uneven floor of earth, lighted dimly from above and from the south, where the ledge shelved off down the hillside. The dirt was black and damp, undisturbed for years save by the feeble pushing of some pale, seedling plant. Jeremy groped aimlessly at first, then, as his eyes became accustomed to the half-light, peered closely into the crevices along either side.

Bob leaned over the edge, pointing. "Back and to the left!" he whispered. Jeremy turned as directed, felt along the earth and finally clutched at something that seemed to glitter with a yellow light. He turned his face upward and Bob read utter disappointment in his eyes.

The gleaming something which he held aloft was nothing but a bit of discolored mica that had reflected the faint light.

Bob almost groaned aloud as he looked at it. Then he took off his belt and passed an end of it down for Jeremy to climb up by. The latter took hold half-heartedly, and was commencing the ascent when his moccasined foot slipped on a low, arching hump in the damp earth. He went down on one knee and as it struck the ground there was a faint hollow thud. Astonished, the boy remained in a kneeling posture and felt about beneath him with his hands.

"What is it?" whispered Bob.

Jeremy stood erect again. "Some kind of old, slippery wet wood," he answered. "It feels like--like a barrel!"

"I'm coming down!" said the Delaware boy, and casting a cautious look around, he descended into the depths of the crevice.

With their hands and hunting-knives both boys went to work feverishly to unearth the wooden object. A few moments of breathless labor laid bare the side and part of one end of a heavily-built, oaken keg.

"Now maybe we can lift it out," said Jeremy, and taking a strong grip of the edge, they heaved mightily together. It stirred a bare fraction of an inch in its bed. "Again!" panted Jeremy, and they made another desperate try. It was of no avail. The keg seemed to weigh hundreds of pounds.

Mopping his forehead with his sleeve, Bob stood up and looked his companion in the face. "Well," he grinned, "the heavier the better!" "Right!" Jeremy agreed. "But how'll we get it home? We don't dare chop it open--too much noise--or set fire to it, for they'd see the smoke. Besides it's too damp to burn. Here--I'll see what's in it, yet!"

He crouched at the end of the barrel, whetted his hunting-knife on his palm a few times, and began to cut swiftly at a crack between two staves. Gradually the blade worked into the wood, opening a long narrow slot as Jeremy whittled away first at one side, then at the other. From time to time either he or Bob would stoop, trembling with excitement to peer through the crack, but it was pitch-dark inside the barrel.

Jeremy kept at his task without rest, and as his knife had more play, the shavings he cut from the sides of the opening grew thicker and thicker. First he, then Bob, would try, every few seconds, to thrust a fist through the widening hole.

At length Bob's hand, which was a trifle smaller than Jeremy's, squeezed through. There was a breathless instant, while he groped within the keg, and then, with a struggle he pulled his hand forth. In his fingers he clutched a broad yellow disc.

"Gold!"

They gasped the word together.

Bob's face was awe-struck. "It's full of 'em--full of pieces like this," he whispered, "right up to within four inches of the top!"

They bent over the huge gold coin. The queer characters of the inscription, cut in deep relief, were strange to both boys. Jeremy had seen Spanish doubloons and the great double *moidores* of Portugal, but never such a piece as this. It was nearly two inches across and thick and heavy in proportion.

One after another Bob drew out dozens of the shining coins, and they filled their pockets with them till they felt weighted down. At length Jeremy, looking up, was startled to see that the sun had set and darkness was rapidly settling over the island. They threw dirt over the barrel, then with all possible speed clambered forth, and taking up their guns, made their way home as quietly as they had come.

CHAPTER XXIX

"No, lad, the risk is too great. Ye'd be in worse plight than before, if they caught ye, and with a score of the ruffians searching the island over, ye'd run too long a chance. Better be satisfied with what's here, and stay where we can at least defend ourselves."

Amos Swan was speaking. On the deal table before him, a heap of great goldpieces gleamed in the firelight while seated around the board were his two sons and Bob.

It was Tom who answered. "True enough, father," he said, "and yet this gold is ours. We own the island by the Governor's grant. If we sit idle the pirates will surely find the treasure and make off with it. But if we go up there at night, as Jeremy suggests, the risk we run will be smaller, and every time we make the trip we'll add a thousand guineas to that pile there. Think of it, father."

The elder man frowned thoughtfully. "Well," he said at length, "if you go with them, Tom, and you go carefully, at night, we'll chance it, once at least. Not tonight, though. It's late now and you all need sleep. I'll take the first watch."

At about ten o'clock of the evening following, Jeremy, Bob and Tom stole out and up the hill in the darkness. They were well-armed but carried no lantern, the boys being confident of their ability to find the cleft in the ledge without a light. A half hour's walking brought them near the spot, and Jeremy, who had almost an Indian's memory for the "lay of the ground," soon led the way to the edge of the chasm. Dim starlight shone through the gap in the trees above the ledge, but there was only darkness below in the pit. One by one they felt their way down and at last all three stood on the damp earth at the bottom. "Here's the barrel--just as we left it. They haven't been here yet!" Jeremy whispered.

Working as quickly and as quietly as he could, Bob reached into the opening in the keg and pulled out the gold, piece by piece, while the others, taking the coins from his fingers, filled their pockets, and the leather pouches they had brought.

It was breathlessly exciting work, for all three were aware of the danger that they ran. When finally they crawled forth, laden like sumpter-mules, the perspiration was thick on Jeremy's forehead. Knowing the character of Pharaoh Daggs so well, he realized, better probably than either of his companions, what fate they might expect if they were discovered. So far, apparently, the pirates had not thought of setting a night guard on the ridge. If they continued to neglect this precaution and failed to find the treasure themselves, three more trips would---

His calculations were interrupted by the sudden snapping of a twig. He stopped, instantly on the alert. Behind him Tom and Bob had also paused. Neither of them had caused the sound. It had seemed to come from the thick bush down hill to the right. For an endlessly long half-minute the three held their breath, listening. Then once more something crackled, farther away this time, and in a more southwesterly direction.

Man or animal, whatever it was that made the sounds, was moving rapidly away from them.

Jeremy hunched the straps of his heavy pouch higher up on his shoulder and led on again, faster than before, and hurrying forward in Indian file, they reached the cabin without further adventure.

All through the next day they stood watch and watch at the shack, ready for the attack which they expected to develop sooner or later. But still it appeared that the pirates preferred to keep out of sight. The boys had told Amos Swan of the noises they had heard the previous night and he had listened with a grave countenance. It could hardly have been other than one of the pirates, he thought, for he was quite certain that except for a few rabbits, there were no wild animals upon the island. "Still," he said, "if you were moving quietly, there's small

reason to believe the man knew you were near. If he did know and made such a noise as that, he must have been a mighty poor woodsman!"

The boys, anxious that nothing should prevent another trip to the treasure-keg, accepted this logic without demur.

The following night Amos Swan decided to go with the boys himself, leaving Tom on guard at the cabin. As before, they armed themselves with guns, pistols and hunting-knives and ascended the hillside in the inky dark. There were no stars in sight and a faint breeze that came and went among the trees foreboded rain. This prospect of impending bad weather made itself felt in the spirits of the three treasure-hunters. Jeremy, accustomed as he was to the woods, drew a breath of apprehension and looked scowlingly aloft as he heard the dismal wind in the hemlock tops. Ugh! He shook himself nervously and plunged forward along the hillcrest. A few moments later they were gathered about the barrel at the bottom of the cleft.

It was even darker than they had found it on their previous visit. Jeremy and his father had to grope in the pitchy blackness for the coins that Bob held out to them. Their pockets were about half-full when there came a whispered exclamation from the Delaware boy.

"There's some sort of box in here, buried in the gold!" he said. "It's too big to pull out through the hole. Where's your dirk, Jeremy?"

The latter knelt astride the keg, and working in the dark, began to enlarge the opening with the blade of his hunting-knife. After a few minutes he thrust his hand in and felt the box. It was apparently of wood, covered with leather and studded over with scores of nails. Its top was only seven or eight inches wide by less than a foot long, however, and in thickness it seemed scarcely a hand's breadth.

Big cold drops of rain were beginning to fall as Jeremy resumed his cutting. He made the opening longer as well as wider, and at last was able by hard tugging to get the box through. He thrust it into his pouch and they recommenced the filling of their pockets with goldpieces.

Before a dozen coins had been removed a sudden red glare on the walls of the chasm caused the three to leap to their feet. At the same instant the rain increased to a downpour, and they looked up to see a pine-knot torch in the opening above them splutter and go out. The wet darkness came down blacker than before.

But in that second of illumination they had seen framed in the torchlit cleft a pair of gleaming light eyes and a cruelly snarling mouth set in a face made horrible by the livid scar that ran from chin to eyebrow across its broken nose.

Jeremy clutched at Bob and his father. "This way!" he gasped through the hissing rain, and plunged along the black chasm toward the southern end, where it debouched upon the hillside. They clambered over some boulders and emerged in the undergrowth, a score of yards from the point where the barrel had been found.

"Come on," whispered Jeremy hoarsely, and started eastward along the slope. Burdened as they were, they ran through the woods at desperate speed, the noise of their going drowned by the descending flood.

In the haste of flight it was impossible to keep together. When Jeremy had put close to half a mile between himself and the chasm, he paused panting and listened for the others, but apparently they were not near. He decided to cut across the ridge, and started up the hill, when he heard a crash in the brush just above him. "Father?" he called under his breath. To his dismay he was answered by a startled oath, and the next moment he saw a tall figure coming at him swinging a cutlass. The pirate was a bare ten feet away. Jeremy aimed his pistol and pulled the trigger, but only a dull click responded. The priming was wet.

[Illustration: A sudden red glare on the walls of the chasm.]

At that instant the cutlass passed his head with an ugly sound and Jeremy, desperate, flung his pistol straight at the pirate's face. As it left his hand he heard it strike. Then as the man went down with a groan, he doubled in his tracks like a hare, and ran back, heading up across the hill.

It was not till he was over the ridge and well down the slope toward home that he dropped to a walk. His breath was coming in gasps that hurt him like a knife between his ribs, and his legs were so weak he could hardly depend on them. He had run nearly two miles, up hill and down, in heavy clothes drenched with rain, and carrying a dozen pounds of gold besides the flintlock fowling-piece which he still clutched in his left hand. Somewhere behind him he had dropped the box, found amid the treasure, but he was far too tired to look for it. More dead than alive he crawled, at last, up to the door of the cabin and staggered in when Tom opened to his knock.

While he gasped out his story, the older brother looked more closely to the barring of the window-shutters and put fresh powder in the priming-pans of the guns.

Ten minutes after Jeremy, his father appeared, wet to the skin and with a grim look around his bearded jaws. He, too, was spent with running, but he would have gone out again at once when he heard that Bob was still missing if the boys had not dissuaded him. Jeremy was sure that if Bob had escaped he would soon reach the cabin, for he had the lay of the island well in mind now.

And so, while Tom kept watch, they lay down with their clothes on before the fire.

CHAPTER XXX

The gray November morning dawned damp and cold. In the sheer exhaustion that followed on their adventure of the night before, Jeremy and his father slept heavily till close to nine o'clock, when Tom wakened them. His face was haggard with watching, and he looked so worried that they had no need to ask him if Bob had come in.

It was a gloomy party that sat down to the morning meal. The youngest could eat nothing for thinking of his chum's fate. While his father still spoke hopefully of the possibility that the boy might have found a hiding place which he dared not leave, Jeremy could only remember the frightful, scarred visage of Pharaoh Daggs looming in the torchlight. He knew that Bob would find little mercy behind that cruel face, and he could not throw off the conviction that the lad had fallen into the clutches of the pirates.

All day, standing at the loopholes, they waited for some sign either of Bob's return, or, what seemed more probable, an attack by the buccaneer crew. But as the hours passed no moving form broke the dark line of trees above them on the slope.

At length the dusk fell, and they gave up hope of seeing the boy again, though on the other score their vigilance was redoubled. The night went by, however, as quietly as though the island were deserted.

It was about two hours after sunrise that Jeremy stole out to give fodder to the sheep, penned in the stockade ever since the first alarm. He had been gone a bare two minutes when he rushed back into the cabin.

"Look father," he cried. "In the bay--there's a sloop coming in to anchor!"

Amos Swan went to a northern loophole, and peered forth. "What is she? Can ye make her out? Seems to fly the British Jack all right," he said. Following the two boys, he hurried outside. Jeremy had run down the hill to the beach where he stood, gazing intently at the craft, and shading his eyes with his hand. After a moment he turned excitedly. "Father," he shouted, "it's the *Tiger*! I saw her only once, but I'd not forget those fine lines of her. Look--there's Job, himself, getting into the cutter!"

A big man in a blue cloak had just stepped into the stern sheets of the boat, and seeing the figures on the shore, he now waved a hand in their direction.

Sure enough, in three minutes Captain Job Howland jumped out upon the sand and with a roar of greeting caught Jeremy's hand in his big fist. "Well, lad," he laughed, "ye look glad to see us. Didn't know we was headed up this way, did ye? But here we be! Soon as the sloop was ready Mr. Curtis had a light cargo for Boston town, and he told me to coast up here on the same trip. He wants Bob home again. Why--what ails ye, boy?"

They were climbing the path toward the shack, when Job noticed the downcast look on Jeremy's face, and interrupted himself.

In a few words the boy told what had happened during the brief week they had been on the island.

"By the Great Bull Whale!" muttered the ex-buccaneer in astonishment. "Sol Brig's treasure, sure enough! And that devil, Daggs--see here, if Bob's alive, we've got to get him out of that!" He swung about and hailed the boat's crew, all six of whom had remained on the beach.

"Adams, and you, Mason, pull back to the sloop and bring off all the men in the port watch, with their cutlasses and small-arms. The rest of you come up here."

As soon as Job had shaken hands with Jeremy's father and brother, they entered the cabin.

"Now, Jeremy," said the skipper, "you say this craft is careened on the other side of the island, close to the place where Stede Bonnet landed us that time? How many men have they?"

"We don't know," the boy replied. "But I don't think Daggs had time to gather a big crew, and what's more, he'd figure the fewer the better when it came to splitting up the gold. I doubt if there's above fifteen men--maybe only fourteen now." He grinned as he thought of the big pirate who had attacked him in the woods.

"Good," said Job. "We'll have sixteen besides you, Mr. Swan, and your two boys. An even twenty, counting myself. If we can't put that crowd under hatches, I'm no sailorman."

The crew of the *Tiger*, bristling with arms and eager for action, now came up. Without wasting time Job told them what was afoot and they moved forward up the hill.

Once among the trees the attacking party spread out in irregular fan-formation, with Tom and Jeremy scouting a little in advance. The stillness of the woods was almost oppressive as they went forward. All the men seemed to feel it and proceeded with more and more caution. Used to the hurly-burly of sea-fighting, they did not relish this silent approach against an unseen enemy.

Clearing the ridge they came down at length to the edge of the beach, close to the old pirate anchorage, and Jeremy led the way along through the bushes toward the mouth of the reedy inlet. Working carefully down the shore to the place whence Bob and he had sighted the spars of the buccaneer, he climbed above the reeds and peered up the creek. To his surprise the masts had disappeared.

"She's gone!" he gasped.

Job and Tom looked in turn. Certain it was that no vessel lay in the creek!

"Perhaps they sighted the *Tiger*," suggested Jeremy. "If so, they can't have gotten far. They've likely taken the rest of the gold. And Bob must be aboard, too, if he's still alive."

As they turned to go back, one of the sailors who had walked down to the reeds at the edge of the creek, hurried up with a dark object in his fist. He held it out as he drew near and they saw that it was a pistol, covered with a mass of black mud, Jeremy saw a gleam of metal through the sticky lump, and quickly scraping away the mud from the mounting he disclosed a silver plate which bore the still terrible name "Stede Bonnet." The boy gave a cry of pleasure as he saw it, and thrust the weapon quickly into Job's hands.

"Look!" he exclaimed. "It's Bob's pistol. And there's only one way it could have gotten where it was. He must have thrown it from the sloop's deck as they went past, thinking we'd find it. See here! They can't be gone more than a few hours, for there's not a bit of rust on the iron parts. Maybe we could catch them, Job, if we hurry!"

Job turned to his men and called, "What say you, lads--shall we give them a chase?"

A chorus of vociferous "Ay, Ay's" was the answer.

"Here we go, then!" he shouted, and led the way back up the hill at a trot.

As they reached the ridge, Jeremy cut over to the left a little through the trees, so that his course lay past the treasure cleft. When he reached it he found just what he had expected--the shattered staves of the barrel lying

open on the ledge, and several rough excavations in the dirt at the bottom of the chasm, where the buccaneers had searched greedily for more gold. The charred remnants of a bonfire, a few yards further down the cleft, showed that they had worked partly at night.

Leaving the ledge, the boy was hurrying back to join the main party when he came out upon an elevated space, clear of trees, from which one could command a view of the sea to the west and south. Involuntarily he paused, and shading his eyes with his hand, swept the horizon slowly. Then he gave a start, for straight away to the westward, in a gap between two islands, was a white speck of sail.

"Job!" he yelled at the top of his lungs. "Job!"

The big skipper was only a short distance away, and he came through the trees at a run followed by most of his men, in answer to Jeremy's hail. No words were necessary. The boy's pointing finger led their eyes instantly to the far-off ship. Job took a quick look at the sun and the distant islands, to fix his bearings, then set out for the northern inlet again, even faster than before.

As they came running down the slope toward the cabin, Amos Swan emerged, gun in hand, evidently believing that they were in full rout before the enemy.

"They've left the island," panted Jeremy, as he reached the door. "We saw their sail--we're going to chase them! We're sure, now, that Bob's aboard!"

His father looked relieved.

"Go--you and Tom!" he said. "I'll stay and mind the island."

Job, with a dozen of his men, was starting in the cutter, and had already hailed the *Tiger* to order the other boat sent ashore. Tom and Jeremy hurried into the cabin, and stuffing some clothes into Jeremy's sea-chest along with a brace of good pistols and a cutlass apiece, were soon ready to embark.

CHAPTER XXXI

There was a bustle of action aboard the sloop when the boys swarmed up her side. One chanty was being sung up forward, where half a dozen sturdy seamen were heaving at the capstan bars, and another was going amidships as the throat of the long main gaff went to the top. Captain Job stood on the afterdeck, constantly shouting new orders. His big voice made itself heard above the singing, the groan of tackle-blocks and the crash of the canvas, flapping in the northwest wind.

It was a clear, sunny day, with a bite of approaching winter in the air, and the boys were glad to button their jackets tight and move into the lee of the after-house.

"Here, lads," Job cried, "there's work for you, too. Take a run below, Jeremy, and bring up an armload of cutlasses. See if any of those muskets need cleaning, Tom."

Jeremy scurried down the companion ladder, and forward along the starboard gun deck to the rack of small arms near the fo'c's'le hatch. Jeremy was pleased to see that the sloop carried a full complement of ten broadside guns, beside a long brass cannon in the bows. In fact, she was armed like a regular man-o'-war. The tubs were filled and neat little piles of round-shot and cannister stood beside each gun. The *Tiger*, he thought, was likely to give a good account of herself if she could come to grips with the buccaneers.

Stepping on deck once more, his arms piled with hangers, Jeremy found that the sloop had already cleared the bay on her starboard tack and was just coming about to make a long reach of it to port. The pirate sail was no longer in sight in the west, but as several islands filled the horizon in that direction, it seemed likely that she had passed beyond them.

Jeremy approached the Captain. "How far ahead do you think they are?" he asked.

"When we sighted 'em, they were about four sea-miles to the westward," answered Job. "If they're making ordinary sailing, they've gained close to three more, since then. But if they're carrying much canvas it may be more. We shan't come near them before dark, at any rate."

He cast an eye aloft as he spoke, and Jeremy's gaze followed. The *Tiger* was carrying topsails and both jibs, with a single reef in her fore and main sails. She was scudding along at a great rate with the whitecaps racing by, close below the lee gunports. Jeremy whistled with delight. He had seen Stede Bonnet crowd canvas once or twice, but never in so good a cause.

The wind held from the northwest, gaining in strength rather than decreasing, and the sloop, heeled far to port, sped along close-hauled on a west-sou'west course.

After three-quarters of an hour of this kind of sailing they were close to the group of islands, and sighting a passage to the northward, swung over on the other tack. A rough beat to starboard brought them into the gap. Though they crossed a grim, black shoal at the narrowest part, Job did not shorten sail, but steered straight on as fast as the wind would take him. And at length they came clear of the headland and saw a great stretch of open sea to the southwestward with a faint, white dot of sail at its farthest edge.

At the sight a hearty cheer went up from the seamen, clustered along the port rail. A lean, wind-browned man with keen black eyes came aft to the tiller where Jeremy and Tom stood with the Captain. It was Isaiah Hawkes, Job's first mate, himself a Maine coast man. "It's all clear sailin' ahead, sir," he said. "No more reefs or islands 'twixt this an' Cape Cod, if they follow the course they're on."

The *Tiger* hung with fluttering canvas in the wind's eye for a second or two, then settled away on the port tack with a bang of her main boom.

"Here, Isaiah, take the tiller," said Job, at length. "Hold her as she is--two points to windward of the other sloop. You'll want to set an extra lookout tonight," he continued. "We shan't be able to keep 'em in sight at this distance, if they've sighted us, which most likely they have. I'm going up to have a look at 'Long Poll' now."

Accompanied by the two boys, he made his way along the steeply canted deck of the plunging schooner to the breach of the swivel-gun at the bow.

"Ever seen this gal afore, Jeremy?" asked Job, shouting to make himself heard above the hiss and thunder of the water under the forefoot. "She's the old gun we had aboard the *Queen*. Stede Bonnet never had a piece like this. Cast in Bristol, she was, in '94. There's the letters that tells it." And he patted the bright breach lovingly, sighting along the brazen barrel, and swinging the nose from right to left till he brought the gun to bear squarely on the white speck that was the pirate sloop, still hull-down in the sea ahead. "Come morning, Polly, my gal," he chuckled, "we'll let you talk to 'em."

As he spoke, the fiery disk of the sun was slipping into the ocean across the starboard bow. With sunset the breeze lightened perceptibly, and Job ordered the reefs shaken out of the fore and mainsails and an extra jib set. Then he and the boys, who, although they had quarters aft, had been assigned to the port watch, went below and turned in.

CHAPTER XXXII

Jeremy, stumbling on deck at eight bells, pulled his seaman's greatcoat up about his ears, for the breeze came cold. He worked his way forward along the high weather rail and took up his lookout station on the starboard bow.

Overhead the midnight sky burned bright with stars that seemed to flicker like candle-flames in the wind. A half-grown moon rode down the west and threw a faint radiance across the heaving seas. It was blowing harder now. The wind boomed loud in the taut stays and the rising waves broke smashingly over the bow at times, forcing the foremast hands to cling like monkeys to the rail and rigging.

Captain Job, with Tom to help him, stood grimly at the thrashing tiller and drove the sloop southwestward at a terrific gait. The sails had been single-reefed again during the mate's watch, but with the wind still freshening the staunch little craft was carrying an enormous amount of canvas. Job Howland was a sailor of the breed that was to reach its climax a hundred years later in the captains of the great Yankee clippers--men who broke sailing records and captured the world's trade because they dared to walk their tall ships, full-canvassed, past the heavy foreign merchantmen that rolled under triple reefs in half a gale of wind.

One by one the hours of the watch went by. Jeremy, drenched and shivering, but thrilling to the excitement of the chase, stuck to his post at the rail beside the long bow gun. His eyes were fixed constantly on the sea ahead and abeam, while his thoughts, racing on, followed the pirate schooner close.

How was Bob to be gotten off alive, he wondered, for he had come to believe that his chum was aboard the fleeing craft. If it came to a running fight, their cannonade might sink her, in which case the boy would be drowned along with his captors. And there were other things that could happen. Jeremy groaned aloud as he thought of the fate that Pharaoh Daggs had once so nearly meted out to him. He felt again the bite of the hemp at his wrists, and saw that pitiless gleam in the strange light eyes of the pirate. Would Daggs try to settle his long score against the boys by some unheard-of brutality?

A sudden hail cut in upon his thoughts. "Sail ho!" the lookout on the other side had cried.

"Where away?" came Job's deep shout.

"Three points on the port bow," answered the seaman, "an' not above a league off!"

Jeremy, straining his eyes into the night, made out the dim patch of sail ahead.

"How's she headed?" called the Captain again. "Is she still on her port tack, or running before the wind?"

"Still beating up to the west!" the sailor replied.

"Good," cried Job. "They think they can outsail us. Keep her in sight and sing out if you see her fall off the wind!"

Half an hour later the watch was changed and Jeremy scrambled into his warm bunk for a few hours more sleep.

It was broad daylight when he and Tom reached the deck once more and went eagerly forward to join the little knot of seamen in the bows. All eyes were turned toward the horizon, ahead, where the sails of the fleeing schooner loomed gray in the morning haze.

The wind which had shifted a little to the north was still blowing stiffly, heeling both sloops over at a sharp angle. The *Tiger* had gained somewhat during the morning watch, but the pirates had now evidently become desperate and put on all the sail their craft would carry, so that the two vessels sped on, league after league, without apparent change of position.

Job, who had now taken the tiller again, called to Jeremy after a while. "Here, lad," he said, when the boy reached the poop, "lend me a hand with this kicker."

Jeremy laid hold with a will, and found that it took almost all his strength, along with that of the powerful Captain, to hold the schooner on her course. At times, when a big beam sea caught her, she would yaw fearfully, falling off several points, and could only be brought back to windward by jamming the thrashing rudder hard over.

"We lose headway when she does that, don't we, Job?" panted the boy after one such effort. "And I reckon we couldn't lash the beam fast to keep her this way, could we? No, I see, it has to be free so as to move all the time. Still----"

As he staggered to and fro at the end of the tiller, the boy thought rapidly. Finally he recommenced: "Job--this may sound foolish to you--but why couldn't we lash her on both sides, and yet give her play--look--this way! Rig a little pulley here and one here----" He indicated places on the deck, close to the rail on either quarter. "Then reeve a line from the tiller-end through each one, and bring it back with three or four turns around a windlass drum, a little way for'ard, there. Then you could keep hold of the arms of the windlass, and only let the tiller move as much as you needed to, either way----"

"By the Great Bull Whale," Job laughed, as he grasped the boy's plan, "I wonder if that wouldn't work! Jeremy, boy, we'll find out, anyhow. Braisted!" he called to the ship's carpenter, "up with some lumber and a good stout line and a pair of spare blocks if you've got them. Lively, now!"

In a jiffy the carpenter had tumbled the tackle out on the deck, and under the direction of Job, began to rig it according to Jeremy's scheme. It was a matter of a few moments only, once he caught the idea. When at length the final stout knot had been tied, Job, still keeping his mighty clutch on the tiller beam, motioned to Jeremy to take hold of the windlass. The boy jumped forward eagerly and seized two of the rude spokes that radiated horizontally from the hub. The position was an awkward one, but with a slight pull he found that he could swing the windlass rapidly in either direction.

"Avast there--avast!" came Job's bass bellow, and looking over his shoulder, Jeremy saw the big skipper flung from side to side in spite of himself as the windlass was turned. The seamen who had gathered to watch were roaring with laughter, and Job himself was chuckling as he let go the tiller and hurried to Jeremy's side. Taking a grip on the spokes, he spun them back and forth once or twice, to feel how the vessel answered her helm under this new contraption, and in a moment had it working handsomely. He was using the first ship's steering-wheel.

The sloop, which had yawed and lost some headway during this interlude, now struck her stride again, and drove along with her nose held steady, a full half-point closer to the wind than had been possible before. Job perceived this and loosed one hand long enough to strike Jeremy a mighty blow on the back.

"She works, boy!" he cried. "And at this gait we'll catch them before noon!"

Indeed, the crew had already noticed the difference in their sailing, and were lining the bows, waving their caps in the air and yelling with excitement as they watched the distance between the two craft slowly shorten.

An hour passed, and the gunners were sent below to make ready their pieces, for the lead of the pirate sloop

had been cut to a bare mile.

Job had turned the wheel over to Hawkes, and now, with three picked men to help him, was ramming home a heavy charge of powder in the long "nine." On top of it he drove down the round-shot, then bent above the swivel-breach, swinging it back and forth as he brought the cannon's muzzle to bear on the topsails of the pirate schooner, whose black hull was now plainly visible. He sniffed the wind and measured the distance with his eye. When his calculations were complete he turned and held up his hand in signal to the helmsman. As the swivel allowed movement only from side to side, he must depend on the cant of the deck for his elevation. Holding the long gunner's match lighted in his hand, he waited for the exact second when the schooner's bow was lifted on a wave and swinging in the right direction, then touched the powder train. There was a hiss and flare, and at the end of a second or two a terrific roar as the charge was fired. The smoke was blown clear almost instantly, and every one leaned forward, watching the sea ahead with tense eagerness. At length a column of white spray lifted, a scant hundred yards astern of the other sloop. The crew cheered, for it was a splendid shot at that distance and in a seaway. The sky was thickening to windward, and it grew harder momentarily to see objects at a distance. Job was already at work, superintending the swabbing-out of the gun and reloading with his own hands. There was a long moment while he waited for a favorable chance, then "Long Poll" shook the deck once more with the crash of her discharge. This time the shot fell just ahead and to windward of the enemy--so close that the spray blew back into the rigging.

Job had bracketed his target, but the mist-clouds that were sweeping past rendered his task a difficult one. Grimly but with swift certainty of movement he went about his preparations for a third attempt.

Suddenly there was a shout from Jeremy, who had climbed into the forestays for a better view. "Look there!" he cried. "They're lowering a boat. There's something white in it, like a flag of truce!"

In the lee of the pirate vessel a small boat could be seen tossing crazily in the heavy seas. Job, who had called for his spyglass, looked long and earnestly at the tiny craft.

"There's but one man in it," he announced at length, "and he's showing a bit of something white, as Jeremy says. Here, lad, you've the best eyes on the sloop, see if you can make out more."

The boy focussed the glass on the little boat, which was now drifting rapidly to the southeast, already nearly opposite their bows. The figure in it stood up, waving frantic arms to one side and the other.

"It's Bob!" Jeremy almost screamed. "That's a signal we used to have when we were hunting. It means 'Come here!'"

He had hardly finished speaking when--"Port your helm!" roared Job. "All hands stand by to slack the fore and main sheets!"

[Illustration: Job had bracketed his target.]

The *Tiger* fell off the wind with a lurch and spun away to leeward, bowing into the running seas.

Five minutes later they hauled Bob, drenched and dripping, to the deck.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The boy was pale and haggard and so weak he could hardly stand alone, but he looked about him with an eager grin as Tom and Jeremy helped him toward the companion.

"Why," he gasped, "here's old Job! What's he doing up here!" as the latter strode aft to seize his hand.

"Ay, lad," laughed the big mariner, a mighty relief showing in his face, "we're all your friends aboard here. But how came those devils to let you off so easy? We figured we'd have to fight to get you, and mighty lucky to do it at that!"

The schooner had come into the wind again and was heading westward in pursuit of the pirate, now hidden in the murk ahead. Bob was helped to the cabin and propped up in a bunk while his friends hastened to get some dry clothes on him. A pull of brandy stopped his shivering.

"I thought none of you would ever see me alive," he said soberly. "But, Job, before I tell you all about it, are you sure you've lost sight of Daggs' sloop? They were worried about your shooting, and figured the only chance they had was to set me adrift and then get away in the dirty weather, while you were fishing me out. They'd never have given me up if that second shot hadn't mighty near gone through and through the old *Revenge*."

"The *Revenge*!" said Job. "I thought I knew the cut of that big mainsail, and she was painted black, too! Well, their trick succeeded. Just this minute we'd have no more chance of finding 'em than a needle in a haystack. But it may clear again before night, and then we'll see! Go ahead now and spin your yarn, my lad!"

And Bob, swigging hot tea and munching a biscuit, began once more to tell his story.

"After we separated, and started to run, up on the hill that night," he said, "I seemed to lose all my sense of direction for a while. I was scared for one thing, I'll freely admit. When I saw Daggs' face in the torchlight leaning over us, there by the treasure barrel, it frightened me pretty nearly out of my senses. So I started to run, without an idea of where I was going, and by the time I got my wits back, I couldn't tell just where I was, in the rain and the dark. I seemed to be right on top of the ridge, but I had zig-zagged several times, I remembered, and when I tried to figure which side of the hill I should go down, I couldn't for the life of me decide. Finally I said to myself, 'Here, don't be a fool! Which way was the wind blowing when we set out from the shack? Aha, it was north,' says I. 'Very well, then, this must be the way to the cabin--straight into the wind,' And down the hill I started, bearing over to my right, so as to come out just above the sheep-pen."

"But--" interrupted Jeremy, "when that storm came up the wind backed clear round into the south--"

"I know it now," Bob answered, "but I didn't then. I kept right on, tickled that I was out of it so well, and wondering where the rest of you had gotten to. Pretty soon I came to some low land that I didn't remember, but I saw a light off ahead and to my right, and decided that was the cabin. I blundered along through the trees till I was quite close, and then I discovered that the light came from a bonfire. I stopped for a second, puzzled, for I was sure I must be near the cabin. I wondered if the pirates had captured it. I stole up still closer and watched the light and presently a buccaneer walked in front of it.

"That was enough for me. I turned and started to run. And at about the third step I fell plump into the arms of a pirate. You see I had walked straight toward their part of the island by making that silly mistake.

"This fellow got a grip on my collar, and I couldn't break loose, though I'll warrant his shins are tender yet, where I kicked him. He hauled me down to the fire, and he and three others who were there looked me over. The one that had caught me was a big mulatto--as ugly-looking a customer as I ever saw. And the others were

no lambs. I'll tell you, my hearties, Daggs has gathered up a pretty lot of rascals in this crew. Not one of 'em but looks as if he'd knife you for a copper farthing!

"These four by the fire wasted no time, but went through my pockets in a hurry. They took my pistol and were quarreling about dividing the goldpieces I had, when the rest of the crowd began to appear. They were all wet, and in a bad temper for a dozen other reasons. Plenty of curses came my way, but no one laid a hand on me, for they had a mighty fear of Pharaoh Daggs. When he finally came, he swore at them till they slunk around like whipped curs.

"He was in an ugly mood that night. Seemingly he was disappointed in the amount of treasure they had found. Besides that, they had come on one of their best men with his head beaten in, and you and your father had gotten clean away. Things looked black enough for me, I can tell you.

"Daggs and the mulatto, who is his mate, started in to question me, after they had grumbled awhile. They knew already how many of you there were at the cabin, but they asked about your guns and supplies. Of course, I didn't make the stronghold any weaker in the telling. When they had all the information they thought they could get out of me, they held a sort of council. Some wanted to go right over before light and attack the cabin. Others were for broaching a barrel of rum first, and making thorough preparations. Finally Daggs decided to put it off until they could get some pitch and dry grass ready, so as to set fire to the roof.

"It was nearly daylight by this time, and they started back through the reeds toward their sloop, leading me along with them. We travelled half a mile or so, down a crooked black trail only wide enough for one man at a time, and ankle deep in the mud of the swamp. When we reached the schooner they stuck a pair of handcuffs on me and put me down on the ballast. In spite of the filth and the cold I was so dog-tired that I tumbled on the nearest pile of old chains and went to sleep.

"I woke up late in the afternoon, and I don't think I was ever so stiff and uncomfortable and hungry in my life. I made my way over to the hatch and found I could reach the combing with my hands, so I pulled myself up, after a mighty hard tussle. Try it some time with your hands tied!

"Most of the pirates were forward in their bunks, but one who was keeping watch on deck took pity on me and gave me a couple of biscuits and a swig of water. He was more or less talkative, besides, and from him I learned that Daggs planned to start about midnight for your side of the island, carrying buckets of pitch and tinder, so as to roast you out.

"As you may imagine, this kind of talk nearly turned me sick with fear, and right in the midst of it Pharaoh Daggs came on deck.

"He had that empty sort of glare in his eyes that we used to see sometimes when he was drunk. Of course, he walked straight and even, but as he came over toward us, with his teeth showing and his eyes fixed on a point just above the pirate's shoulder, I almost yelled 'Look out!' If I had, it might have cost me my life right there. He walked along, light on his toes like a cat, till he stood two feet from us. Then, so fast I hardly knew what happened, he hit the other man on the chin with his fist. That was all. The man dropped with his head back against the rail. And Daggs went off, chuckling to himself but not making any noise. I don't think he saw me at all, for his attack was more like the work of a mad dog than of a man.

"I crept away and got below decks as fast as might be, and there I stayed hidden till after dark, when some of the buccaneers roused me out. A keg of rum had been opened in the waist, and the liquor was going freely. Most of the crew were already drunk, but they had the sense to chain me by one leg to the foremast, and then made me run back and forth between them and the barrel. I was only too glad. No cannikin was skimped while I was at the spigot. I looked around and remembered some of the wild nights we had seen on the old *Revenge*. And then for the first time I realized that the deck I stood on was the same! They'd gotten hold of the

old black sloop when she was auctioned at Charles Town, patched up her bottom and here she was--buccaneering once more! Where the gang of cut-throats aboard her were gathered, I don't know, but they put Stede Bonnet's famous crew to shame.

"Pharaoh Daggs was somewhere ashore with two of the crew till nearly midnight. When he returned, the rest were lying like pigs about the deck. He had sobered slightly--enough to remember the night's undertaking--but it was useless to think of rousing those sots to any sort of endeavor. He kicked one or two of them savagely with his heavy boot, too, but it got hardly more than a grunt from them.

"He stood there cursing for a minute, then came over and looked at the shackle that held me to the foremast-foot, and shook it to make sure it was solid before he went below. He had something done up in a cloth that he held mighty tenderly, and he seemed in a better humor.

"I curled up on the deck and by wrapping myself in a greatcoat which I found beside one of the drunken pirates, succeeded in keeping reasonably warm.

"When morning came Daggs and his mulatto mate managed to wake most of the men and forced them to get out and forage for wood and water, while they themselves crossed the ridge to reconnoitre. I think it was about two hours after sunrise when those of us who stayed aboard the sloop saw figures running down the hill. The buccaneers got out boarding-pikes and picked up cutlasses, but in a moment Daggs reached the side, out of breath with his haste.

"'There's a ten-gun schooner in the northern cove!' he cried. 'They're landing a boat now. We haven't any time to lose--the tide's past full already! Cut those moorings!'

"The hemp lines were slashed through with cutlasses and the men, with one accord, jumped to the push-holes. The sloop was on an even keel and just off the bottom. A few strong shoves started her down the creek.

"My hopes of escaping began to go down, for there I was, still chained to the fore-stick like a cow put out to grass. I looked around me in desperation, for I wanted to leave you some sign at least of my whereabouts. Then my eye fell on a little heap of small arms that had been thrown down near the forehatch. The pistols were useless to me, as I had no powder, but among them I saw the bright silver mountings of my own--the one that used to be Stede Bonnet's.

"We were drawing near the creek mouth, and those of the crew who were not at the poles were busy unfurling the sails. I picked the pistol up unobserved and waited till we were just hauling clear of the creek. Then I threw it overside and saw it strike in the mud. Did you find it?"

"Yes," said Jeremy. "That's how we knew for certain that you'd been captured."

"Well," the Delaware boy went on, "there's not much more to tell. The pirates made all sail to the southwest, but after we cleared the islands, there you were, roaring along in our wake. Daggs thought that the *Revenge* was a faster sailer than your craft, but he found he couldn't keep her as close to the wind on this tack. I don't think he wants to fight if he can help it, but he was getting desperate this afternoon before the weather began to thicken up. I heard him tell the mate he'd rather come to broadside grips than risk having you drop a shot through the black sloop's bottom with that bow-chaser. Then the mist started to come over, and I guess Daggs saw his chance right away. He called the crew aft and told them what he was going to do, and a moment later I found myself being lowered in a boat into that wicked sea. I thought they were trying to drown me out of hand, till they gave me a piece of white cloth to wave. Then I got an inkling of their idea.

"Sure enough, no sooner was I fairly adrift than I saw you put over in my direction, and thinking Jeremy might be aboard, I gave him our old signal. It worked, and here I am safe enough. But meanwhile those devils

have got off into the mist, and it'll be hard to follow them."

Job sat thoughtful, pulling at his pipe. He seemed to be cogitating some of the points in Bob's narrative, and the others kept silent, unwilling to interrupt him. At length he blew a great cloud of blue smoke toward the deck-beams above and turning to the boy, asked, "Did Daggs or any of the rest ever speak of the place where they were going?"

"They never talked about it openly," Bob replied, "but from words dropped now and then by the mulatto mate I figured they were heading down for the Spanish Islands. I don't think they intend putting in anywhere first, unless they land for water in one of those out of the way inlets along the Jersey coast."

Job nodded. "That's about as I thought," he answered. "So we'll hold on this tack till nightfall--we're just off the Kennebec, now--and then we'll run sou'-sou'east before the wind, to clear Cape Cod. Daggs--if he figgers as I would in his place--won't start to leeward right away, for he'd rather have us in front of him than behind. And unless I'm much mistaken he's in too much of a hurry to waste time in doubling back up the coast. All right Bob, lad, you'll be wanting sleep now, so we'll leave you. On deck with you, boys!"

And tucking the blankets about the drowsy youngster in the bunk, Job led the way to the companion.

CHAPTER XXXIV

The mist was sweeping past in swirls and streaks, and though the wind had abated somewhat, the *Tiger* still ploughed along into the obscurity at a fair rate of speed. Jeremy stayed forward with the lookout, peering constantly into the gloom ahead, and half expecting to see the ghostlike sails of the *Revenge* whenever for a moment a gray aisle opened in the mist. But there were only the grim, uneasy seas and the shifting fog.

Before darkness fell Job shortened sail, for he did not wish to get too far ahead of the enemy. And about the end of the second dog watch he gave the order to slack sheets and fall away for the southward run.

The wind turned bitterly cold in the night, and when the watch was changed Tom and Jeremy staggered below, glad to escape from the stinging snow that filled the air.

But with that snow-flurry the weather cleared. The sun rose to a day of bright blue water and sharp wind, and hardly had its first level rays shot across the ocean floor when the watch below was tumbled out by a chorus of shouts from the deck.

Jeremy, as he burst upward through the hatchway, cast an eager eye to either beam, then uttered a whoop of joy, as he caught the gleam of white canvas over the bows. There, straight ahead and barely a league distant, raced the *Revenge* and her pirate crew.

Captain Job reached the deck only a couple of jumps behind the boys, and an instant later his deep voice boomed the order to shake out all reefs and set the top-sails.

Bob, who had slept the clock around and eaten a hearty breakfast, soon appeared at Jeremy's side, looking fit for any adventure. With Tom they went up into the bows and were shortly joined there by others of the crew, all intent on the chase.

The swells as they surged by from stern to bow seemed to move more and more sluggishly. Beneath a press of sail that would have made most skippers fearful of running her under, Job was driving the *Tiger* along at a terrific pace. Now once more Jeremy's steering-wheel was proving its worth. Job at the helm could hold the plunging schooner on her course with far less danger of being swung over into the trough than would have been the case with the old hand tiller.

But in spite of the schooner's headlong speed, the distance between her and her quarry seemed to lessen scarcely at all. The old *Revenge* with her tall sticks and great spread of canvas was flying down before the wind with all the speed that had made her name a byword, and the man with the broken nose was evidently willing to take as many chances as his pursuers.

All morning the chase went on. At noon, when the winter sun flashed on the high white dunes of Cape Cod, to starboard, the *Tiger* seemed to have gained a little. Job, leaving the wheel for a bit, came forward and measured the distance with his eye. He shook his head. "Two miles," he said. "At this rate we can't get within range before dark." And he went back to his steering.

But for once he was mistaken. For an hour or more the buccaneers had been hauling over little by little toward the coast, possibly with the idea of running in and escaping overland as soon as night should fall. Now the lookout in the foretop of the *Tigers* gave a cheer.

"They've caught a flaw in the wind!" he shouted. "Watch us come up!"

Sure enough the *Revenge* had sailed into an area of light air to leeward of the Cape, and the boys could see that their own sloop, which still had the wind, was hauling up hand over hand on her adversary.

"By the Great Bull Whale!" roared Job, leaping forward along the deck, "now's our chance! Hold her as she is, Hawkes, while I load the long gun."

The big gunner-captain worked rapidly as always, but before he had done ramming down the round-shot, the pirate schooner was within range for a long-distance try. She lay off the *Tiger's* starboard bow, almost broadside on, but still too far away to use her own guns.

Job aimed with his usual care, but when at length he put a match to the powder, the shot flew harmlessly through the pirate's rigging, striking the sea beyond. Almost at the same moment the wind drew strongly in the sails of the *Revenge* once more, and she began plunging southward at a breakneck pace.

Job ran aft for a word with the mate, who had the wheel, then returned and again loaded the bowchaser, this time with chainshot and an extra heavy charge of powder to carry it. When he had finished he stood by the breach in grim silence, watching the chase.

It soon became apparent that though the *Tiger* could gain little on her rival in actual headway, she was gradually pulling over closer to the quarter of the *Revenge*. Hawkes, who was an excellent seaman, humored the craft to starboard, bit by bit, without sacrificing her forward speed.

At the end of twenty minutes Job gave a satisfied grunt, maneuvered the cannon back and forth on its swivel base once or twice, and fired. Above the roar of the discharge the boys heard the screech of the whirling chainshot, and then in the *Revenge's* mainsail appeared a great gaping rent, through the tattered edges of which the wind passed unhindered. There was a howl of joy from the crew, and without waiting for an order, they tumbled pell-mell down the hatches to man the broadside cannon in the waist.

Job stayed on deck, watching the enemy through his spy-glass. Handicapped by her torn mainsail, the *Revenge* was already falling abeam. When they had hauled up to within five or six hundred yards of her, Job called the men of the port watch on deck to shorten sail. This done, and the two sloops holding on southward at about an even gait, the Captain took a turn below, where he looked at each of the guns, gave a few sharp orders and ran back to his station on the after deck.

"All ready, Hawkes," he called, "bring us up to within a hundred and fifty fathoms of her!"

The mate spun the wheel to starboard, and the schooner, answering, drew nearer to the enemy.

"Close enough--port your helm," cried Job.

But even as the *Tiger* swung into position for a broadside, there came the roar of the pirate's guns, and a shot crashed through the forestays, while others, falling short, threw spray along the deck.

"All right below," shouted Captain Job, steady as a church. "Ready a starboard broadside!" And at his sharp "Fire!" the five cannon spoke in quick succession. The deck rocked beneath Jeremy's feet, where he stood by the companion, ready to carry Job's orders below.

As the dense smoke was swept away forward on the wind, they could see the *Revenge*, her rigging still further damaged by the volley, going about on the starboard tack, and making straight for the shore.

"Put your helm hard down and bring her to the wind!" roared Job, at the same time jumping toward the mainsheet.

The schooner swung to starboard, heeling sharply as she caught the wind abeam, and was in hot pursuit of her enemy before a full minute had passed.

CHAPTER XXXV

Little by little the *Tiger* pulled up to windward of the buccaneer and the men below in the gun deck could be heard cheering as their advance brought the black sloop more and more nearly opposite the yawning mouths of the *Tiger's* port carronades.

The shore was now less than half a mile distant. Though making all possible speed, the pirate schooner seemed to rise on the waves with a more sluggish heave than before. Job, watching her through the spyglass, turned to Isaiah Hawkes.

"Don't she look sort o' soggy to you?" he asked. "I can't quite make out whether that's a hole in her planking or--by the Great Hook Block! See there, now, when she lifts! One of our shots landed smack on her waterline. No wonder they're trying to beach her!"

A moment later the *Tiger* had hauled fairly abreast and the two schooners plunged along a bare hundred yards apart. Not a head showed above the high weather bulwark of the *Revenge*. Only the muzzles of her guns peered grimly from their ports in her black side. There was something sinister about this apparently deserted ship, lurching drunkenly shoreward, with her torn sails and broken rigging flapping in the breeze, and the pirate flag flying at her peak.

Job made a megaphone of his hands and raised his voice in a hail.

"Ahoy, *Revenge*!" he boomed. "Will you surrender peacefully, and haul down that flag?"

There was silence for a full ten seconds. Then a musket cracked and a bullet imbedded itself in the mainmast by Job's head.

"All right, boys," he said, without moving, "let 'em have it! Ready, port battery? Fire!" Jeremy and Bob, clinging side by side to the hatch-combing, felt the planking quiver under them at the series of mighty discharges, and saw the pirate schooner check and stagger like an animal that has received its death wound.

Only one of her guns was able to reply, the round-shot screaming high and wide. But on she went, and the steep beach below the dunes was very close now.

Captain Job stood by the hatchway. "All hands up, ready to board her," he ordered, and the crew, swarming on deck, ran to their places by the longboat amidships.

The *Tiger* was now in very shallow water, but Job waited till he saw the other craft strike. Then, "Bring her head to the wind, Hawkes!" he cried, "And over with the boat, lads! Lively now, or they'll get ashore!"

Hardly was the order given when the boat shot into the water. During the scramble of the seamen for places on her thwarts, Jeremy and Bob jumped down and crouched in the bows, unseen by any but those nearest them. Ten seconds after she hit the waves the boat was filled from gunwale to gunwale with sailors, armed to the teeth with pistols, cutlasses and boarding-pikes. Job, last to leave the deck, spoke a word to Hawkes, who remained in command, and jumped into the sternsheets.

"Now, give way!" he roared.

The eight stout oars lashed through the water and the boat sped shoreward like an arrow. Up in the bows the two boys clutched their weapons and waited. Neither one would have admitted that he was scared, though they were both shivering with something more than the cold. Besides his precious pistol, Bob was gripping the hilt of a murderous-looking hanger, which he had picked up from the pile on deck in passing. Jeremy had

been able to secure no weapon but a short pike with a heavy ashen staff and a knife-like blade at the upper end. They peered over the bows in silence. The longboat was close to the *Revenge's* quarter now, but there was no sign of the pirates along her rail.

"Suppose they've got ashore?" asked Bob. "I don't see--"

"Down heads all!"

It was Job's voice, and the boys together with many of the seamen ducked instinctively at the words. As they did so there came a crash of musketry, followed by intermittent shots, and splinters flew from the gunwale of the boat. Jeremy heard a gasping cry behind him and a young sailor toppled backward from the thwart. He fell between the boys, and as they raised him in their arms he died.

Another seaman had been killed and three more wounded by the pirate volley, which had been fired from a distance of barely a dozen yards. Seeing the effect of their fusillade, the buccaneers rose cheering and yelling from behind the bulwarks of the sloop in the evident belief that they had succeeded in demoralizing the attacking force. But the speed of the boat had hardly been checked. In another instant the rowers shipped their oars and the gunwale scraped along the free-board of the schooner.

"A guinea to the first man up!" cried Job, himself reaching up with powerful fingers for a grip by which to climb.

There were no rope-ends hanging, and as the *Revenge* in her stranded position lay much higher forward than aft, the boys, standing in the bows, found themselves faced by smooth planking too high to scale.

Jeremy started back over the thwarts, but heard Bob calling to him and turned.

"Here's a place to board!" the Delaware boy was saying, and pointed toward the forward gun-port which stood open just beyond and above the bow of the longboat. In a twinkling Bob had straddled through the hole, with Jeremy close after him. It was dark in the 'tween-decks and the two boys made their way forward on tiptoe, waiting breathlessly for the attack they felt sure would come. But apparently all the buccaneers were busy above in the fierce fight that they could hear raging along the rail. They moved on, undeterred, till they reached the foot of the fo'c's'le ladder, where Jeremy feeling along the bulkhead, uttered an exclamation.

"This is their gun-rack," he said. "And here's a musket all loaded and primed! I'll take it along!"

The hatch cover had been drawn to, but Bob, trying it from beneath, decided it was not fastened. Both boys tugged at it and succeeded in sliding it back an inch or two, where it stuck.

The hubbub on deck was now terrific. They could hear, above the general outcry, an occasional sharply gasped command in Job's voice, or a snarling oath from one of the buccaneers, but for the most part it was a bedlam of unintelligible shouts with a constant undertone of ringing steel and the thud of shifting feet. Most of the firearms, apparently, had been discharged, and in the *mêlée* no one had time to reload.

Bob, straining desperately at the hatch-cover, spied Jeremy's pike-shaft, and thrusting it through the narrow opening, pried with all his strength. The hatch squeaked open reluctantly and the boys squirmed through on to the deck.

They gasped at the sight which met their eyes as they emerged. Both of them had confidently expected to find the pirates already beaten, and fighting with their backs to the wall. But such was far from being the case.

On the deck amidships lay two men from the *Tiger*, sorely wounded, while Job and two others stood at bay

above them, swinging cutlasses mightily, and beating off, time after time, the attacks of a dozen fierce pirate hanger-men. A number of buccaneers had fallen but all who were unwounded were raging like a pack of dogs about the figures of Job and his two supporters.

"They can't get up!" cried Bob, "The men can't climb the side! Here, help me bring that rope!" It was a matter of seconds only before the boys had dashed across the deck and thrown a rope's end to the men below in the longboat. Then Jeremy turned and ran toward the waist. Another man was down now. Job and a single comrade were fighting back to back, parrying with red blades the blows of half a score of the enemy. Jeremy saw a gleam of yellow teeth between wicked lips, and a flash of light eyes in the thick of the assault. Then for a moment he had a glimpse of the whole face of Pharaoh Daggs, scarred and distorted with frightful passion--a cruel wolf's face--and even as he looked, the dripping sword-blade of the man with the broken nose plunged between the ribs of Job's last henchman. The wounded seaman staggered, leaning his weight against his captain, but still kept his guard up, defending himself feebly. Job hooked his left arm about the poor lad's body and backed with his burden toward the mainmast, slashing fiercely around him with his tireless right arm the while. When they reached the mast, Job leaned his comrade against it, set his own back to the wood, and battled on.

But now a cheer resounded, and the buccaneers, turning their heads, found themselves face to face with the rush of half a dozen men from the *Tiger*, while more could be seen swarming over the rail.

The knot of pirates broke to meet the attack, but some of them stayed. Daggs and three others, including the huge mulatto mate, closed in on Job, cutting at him savagely. The wounded sailor had fainted and slipped to the deck. Jeremy saw the saddle-colored mate step swiftly to one side, then come up from behind the mast, drawing a long dirk from his sash as he neared Job's back. He had lifted the knife and was stepping in for a blow, when Jeremy pulled the trigger of his musket. There must have been an extra heavy charge of powder in the gun, for its recoil threw the boy flat on the deck, and before he could regain his feet he saw a man close above him and caught the flash of a hanger in the air. Desperately Jeremy rolled out of the way, and none too soon, for the blade cut past his head with a nasty *swish*. He scrambled up and caught a boarding-pike from the deck as he did so. The pirate followed, hacking at him with his cutlass, and for seconds that seemed like hours the boy fought for his life, parrying one stroke after another, till the pike shaft was broken by the blows, and he was left weaponless. As he ducked and turned in despair, a man from the *Tiger* ran in and caught the buccaneer on his flank, finishing him in short order.

The deck was now full of struggling groups, for though a score of the longboat's crew had climbed aboard, the pirates were putting up a fierce resistance. Jeremy, panting from his encounter, cast about for a weapon and soon found a cutlass, with which he armed himself. He turned toward the mainmast foot once more, and to his joy discovered that his shot had taken effect. The mulatto had disappeared under the trampling mass of fighting men, and Job's tall figure still towered by the mast. It took the lad only a second, however, to realize that his Captain's plight was serious. The big Yankee was fighting wearily with a broken cutlass, and his face was gray beneath the red stream of blood that ran from a wound above his eye. Jeremy plunged into the ruck of the battle, careless now of danger. A sort of berserk rage possessed him at the sight of that wound. He hewed his way frantically toward the mast, and suddenly found Bob there beside him, cutting and lunging like a demon. He gasped out a cheer. But even as it left his throat, the Captain's arm flew up convulsively, then dropped out of sight in the mob.

"Job's down!" cried Bob wildly, but the New England boy's only reply was a half-choked sob.

Now the tables were turned of a sudden, for three stout sea-dogs from the *Tiger*, finishing their first opponents, dashed into the fray with a yell, and Daggs, hewing his way to the mast, turned to face the new attack with only two men left on foot to back him.

The fight was short and fierce. First one, then the other of the buccaneers went down before the furious assault

of Job's seamen. At length only the pirate chief was left to battle on, terrible and silent, his face set in a ghastly grin, like the visage of a lone wolf fighting his last fight.

But the odds were too great. The men of the *Tiger* pressed in relentlessly till at last a dozen sword-points found their mark at once. And so died Pharaoh Daggs, violently, as he had lived.

CHAPTER XXXVI

It was Jeremy who, five minutes later, held Job's head on his knees, while the weary, bleeding sailors stood silently by with their hats off.

The bo's'n, a grizzled veteran of many sea-fights, was kneeling beside his Captain with an ear to his side. There was hope in the man's face when at length he looked up.

"He's breathin' yet," was his verdict, "breathin', but not much more. There's half a score of cuts in him, different places. Here, lads, rig a stretcher, an' let's get him back to the ship."

When the unconscious body of their big friend had been placed gently in the boat, Bob and Jeremy turned to each other with sober faces.

"It was a costly sort of victory," said Bob. "This deck's not a pretty sight, and there's nothing much we can do to help. Let's have a look at the cabin."

They went below and forced open the door of the after compartment, which had once housed the great Stede Bonnet. Instead of its old immaculate and almost scholarly appearance, the place now had an air of desolation. It reeked of filth, stale tobacco-smoke, and the spilled lees of liquor. In the clutter on the cabin table lay two bulging sacks and a small box.

"Well," said Bob, as he felt the weight of one of the bags, "here's the rest of Brig's gold!"

But Jeremy's attention was occupied. He had picked up the box from the table and was examining it curiously.

"See here, Bob," he cried, "this is the little chest I was carrying the night we ran through the woods. I dropped it when that pirate tackled me. What do you suppose is in it?"

The box was leather-covered and heavily studded with nails. Jeremy tried the small padlock and found it rusty and weak. A hard pull on the staple and it came away in his hand. He threw open the cover and the two boys stood back, gasping with astonishment.

There on the lining of soft buckskin lay twelve great emeralds, gleaming with a clear green light even in that dark place. They were perfectly matched and as large as the end of a man's thumb, each cut in a square pattern after the oldtime fashion. Such stones they were as could have come only from the coffers of an oriental king--the ransom, perhaps, of a prince of the blood, or of the favorite wife of some Maharajah, seized in one of Solomon Brig's daredevil raids.

Bob found breath at last.

"It's a fortune!" he cried. "They're worth more than all the gold together! And they're yours, Jeremy--yours by right of discovery twice over. You're rich--you and your father and Tom! Think of it! You can buy a whole fleet of big ships like the *Indian Queen*, and become a great merchant. You and I'll be partners when we're grown up!" Jubilant, he picked up one of the sacks of gold and made his way to the deck, followed by the half-dazed Jeremy, who carried the rest of the treasure.

The sun was close to setting when the *Tiger's* boat made its last trip to the pirate sloop. This time its errand was a sad one. Silently the crew passed long, limp bundles across the rail, rowed with them to the beach, and clambered up the desolate dunes with picks and shovels in their hands. There, where the wind moaned in the beach-plum thickets and the white gulls wheeled and screamed, they dug a long grave and laid the dead to rest, pirates and honest men together under the wintry sky.

The boat returned and was hoisted aboard. Just as the mainsail had been run up and the schooner was filling away for her northward beat, a single shout from the crosstrees caused every man to turn his gaze shoreward into the gathering dark. A faint glow seemed to hang in the air above the pirate sloop. A little snaky flame wriggled its way along a piece of sagging cordage, licked at the edges of a torn sail, and flared outward in a burst of red fire. A moment later, and the whole schooner was ablaze, from waterline to masthead. Jeremy, watching, fascinated, from the *Tiger's* rail, thought of the night when he had first seen that black hull, and of the burning brig that had lit up the sky as the pirate sloop now illumined it. Her fate was the same that she had meted out to many a good ship.

They were rapidly drawing away, now. The great glare of the burning schooner faded out as the flame devoured her fabric. The foremast toppled and fell in a shower of sparks. The mainmast followed. Only a feeble light flickered along the edges of the low-lying hulk. The faint gleam of it was visible, astern, for some time before it was swallowed by the dark sea.

The *Revenge* was gone.

* * * * *

This is the end of my story.

Of the voyage to Boston town; of how Job was nursed back to health by Phineas Whipple, the best surgeon in all the colonies; of the glorious reunion when Amos Swan and Clarke Curtis rejoined their sons; of the many pleasant things that Bob and Jeremy found to do together, after the Swans had come to live in Philadelphia--of all these things there is not space enough in this book for me to tell.

Jeremy Swan grew up to be one of the great Americans of his day: a man strong, wise and independent. And although he became rich and highly honored, he never lost the simplicity of his ways.

Sometimes when he was a hale old man of seventy, he would take his grandson, who was named Job Cantwell Swan, on his knee, and tell him stories. But the story that young Job loved best to hear and that old Jeremy loved best to tell was about a boy in deerskin breeches, and the wild days and nights he saw aboard the Black Buccaneer.

THE END.

Transcriber's Notes

Page 43, 2nd paragraph - changed "broad-side" to "broadside" to match other instances

Page 63, next to last line - added opening quote before "Herriot"

Page 73, first line - corrected typo "priate" to "pirate"

Page 88, 3rd paragraph - corrected typo "fidgetted" to "fidgeted"

Page 91, 1st paragraph, next to last sentence - changed "a a man" to "a man"

Page 102, second paragraph, 6th line - corrected typo "showly" to "slowly"

Page 120, line 21 - added missing end quote at the end after "pirate."

Page 164, 2nd paragraph, line 8 - added opening quote to "Daggs' chest!"

Page 189, line 4 - corrected typo "something" to "something"

Page 196, last line - removed second "and"

Page 231, 5th line from bottom - corrected typo "neck" to "deck"

Page 268, 6th paragraph - changed "round-shot" to "roundshot" to match other instances

Page 273, 2nd paragraph, line 2 - corrected typo "thmselves" to "themselves"

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