The Voyage of the Hoppergrass

Edmund Lester Pearson

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TO PHILIP RICHARDSON PEARSON

Dear Philip,—

This is the book you have asked me about,—once or twice. You remember "The Believing Years," don't you? That was a book about some boys I knew, and although it was written for grown−up readers, there were boys—yourself amongst them—who claimed to have read it.

This story is about boys and men. There are two kinds of pirates in it. One kind is for readers from about eight years old to, say, sixteen. The other kind is recommended from sixteen up to ninety− seven, or eight. There are other things beside the pirates, of course.

It would do no harm, I think, after you have read the book, to let your Father try it. And if Elizabeth and Katharine think they would like it, why, give them 'a chance to find out. That is an advantage girls have over us,—they usually like our books, while we seldom care very much for theirs. I have sent Constance a copy, so you will not have to lend this one to her.

Your uncle,
EDMUND LESTER PEARSON
July 28, 1913
(The anniversary of the sailing of the "Hoppergrass.")

CHAPTER I. THE BEGINNING OF THE VOYAGE

It was a lucky thing that the "Hoppergrass" was a large boat. When we started there were only four of us,—counting Captain Bannister. But we kept picking up passengers—unexpected ones— until the Captain said "we'd have the whole County on board." It was not as bad as that, but we were glad before we came home again, that we had a comfortable cabin, with plenty of sleeping room.

She was a big, white cat−boat, with her name in gilt letters on the stern. On the day when our voyage began she lay quietly at anchor, well out toward the middle of the river. It was still early,—shortly after five of a morning in July. The river was quiet, with only one or two boats moving,—as quiet as the streets of the town through which we had walked on our way to the wharf. There had been a shower just before daylight, and this had discouraged us a little, but now the sun was coming through the clouds, and there were white spirals of mist rising from the water. Across the river, on Fisher's Island, two or three men were moving about their dories, and smoke poured steadily from the chimneys of the houses. A man's head looked out of the cabin of the "Hoppergrass."

"There's someone on board her," said Jimmy Toppan.

"Yes," replied Captain Bannister, "it's Clarence. He's havin' some breakfast, I guess. He helped me bring her up river last night, and he slept on board. He aint goin' with us, but he'll help us with this stuff."

Then he shouted: "Hey! Clarence!"

The "Hoppergrass" was Captain Bannister's boat,—he had just bought her. He did not like the name, but as yet he had not found any way of changing it. Captain Bannister was a retired seaman, but I do not know whether he had ever been a full−fledged captain of a ship. In our town it was often the custom to call a man "Captain" if he had ever risen as high as mate. The Captain was a short, red−faced man, with such bowed legs that you could have pushed a barrel, end−ways, right between them. Ed Mason thought that the Captain's legs were bowed like that because he had been made to sit for hours astride a barrel. Ed believed that this was a favorite form of punishment on board ship,—especially in the navy.

I had a different idea about the Captain's legs. It was my belief that they were what sailors call "sea−legs." I had often read, in

The Captain snorted a little over the fresh bread and some of the other things.

"If you'd ever had to live for months at a time on salt−hoss an' hard tack, the same's I've done, you wouldn't bring soft bread on a boat. It spiles in no time."

That did not seem to me a good argument, for if the Captain didn't like to live on these things, why should he want us to bring them? But I could see that Jimmy Toppan—who liked everything done sailor−fashion—was rather fascinated by the idea of eating nothing but ship's food. Ed Mason and I, however, had read the books by Clark Russell, and we didn't want to eat biscuits full of weevils, bad meat, and all the other unpleasant things they gave to sailors. We agreed that salt horse, or fresh horse, either, did not strike our fancy. Anyhow, we ate up the soft bread the first day so we did not have to worry about it afterwards. We counted on getting fish and clams for chowders, and probably some lobsters at Duck Island.

By this time, Clarence was coming ashore in the tender. He did not sit facing the stern, and pull with the oars as any ordinary person would have done. Instead, he faced the bow, and used the oars to push with. He had seen the Captain doing this, and, like Jimmy, it was his aim to be as much of a sailor as possible. Why the Captain did it, I cannot say, unless it was for the reason that sailors often seem to enjoy doing things in an odd and awkward fashion, so as to puzzle landsmen. Neither of them made very good progress by it, and Clarence wabbled the boat, and caught crabs every other stroke.

At last he got alongside the wharf, and we put some of our things in the boat, and rowed out to the "Hoppergrass." It took two trips to carry everything, for we had bags of clothes, as well as rubber boots and oil−skins. Ed Mason and Clarence, between them, managed to let the water−melon slip out of the straps, so it fell into the river and went bobbing down stream with the tide. The Captain and I, who were still in the tender, went after it.

Did you ever try to fish a big water−melon out of a river? It is about the roundest thing, and the slipperyest thing, and the hardest thing to get hold of, that you could imagine. It rolls over and over, and when you get it

out—plop! it tumbles back into the water and sinks out of sight. Then it comes up again— bobbing—at some other place. Clarence and Ed were in an argument as to which of them had dropped the melon, while Jimmy stood up in the bow and shouted directions to me.

"Gaff it! gaff it! Why don't you gaff it?"

"How can I gaff it? What can I gaff it with,—you!"

"Never mind him," said the Captain. "Now, look,—I'll lay the boat right across its bows. ... Now, wait. ... Now! Can't you get it now?"

I did get it that time, and we took it back to the "Hoppergrass."

"You ought to have gaffed it, you know," remarked Jimmy.

Captain Bannister climbed on board.

"Come on, boys," he said, "we want to get under way while this breeze holds. It don't amount to much now. Sam, you take Clarence ashore, and get back as quick as you can. Jimmy, you can help me on the sail, an' Ed—you stow all these things below. I've got to have standin' room."

When I got back from shore Ed had put the clothes, and most of the food into the cabin, and the sail was going up.

"Now, the anchor," the Captain sang out; "all of yer better take hold ... one of yer coil up that rope ... now! all together! ... now! ... now!"

And with the usual and very necessary grunts and groans from the Captain the anchor slowly came out of the water. We were already moving down river.

"Swash it round, and get that mud off,—I don't want any of it on the deck. ... That's right. Now, shove these jugs under the seats, ... that's better. What's that striking?"

He was at the wheel, listening to the North Church clock.

"Four, five, six. Fust rate, fust rate,—I like to get away on time."

All the clouds had disappeared, and it was a fine, clear morning. We were sailing almost into the sun. Perhaps you think that I have forgotten to tell you where we were going, but one of the best things about the beginning of that voyage was that we didn't know exactly where we WERE going. All we had to do was to keep on down the river, turn into Sandy Island River, and pretty soon we would come out in Broad Bay. And in Broad Bay there were any number of islands,—some people said three hundred and sixty−five, one for every day of the year. Some of these islands had people living on them, but a great many of them were uninhabited. We could sail about for a week, call at half a dozen different islands every day, and still have a lot of them left over.

"Can we get to Duck Island tonight?" asked Ed Mason.

"Not 'fore tomorrer noon. We'll put in at Little Duck, tonight."

We were slipping along now beside a big, three−masted schooner—a coal schooner—which was anchored in mid−stream. The crew must have been below at breakfast, for the decks were deserted except for one man. He wore a blue shirt, and he leaned over the rail, smoking a day pipe. As we passed he spelled out the name on the stern of our boat. He did this in such a loud voice that it was clear he wished us to hear him.

"Haitch—o—double p—e—r—HOPPER—g−r−a—double s−GRASS. HOPPER− −GRASS!"

And then he scornfully spat into the river.

Captain Bannister's face turned a darker red, and he glanced over his shoulder at the man. Then he bent forward again, peered ahead and under the sail as if sighting our course with great care, and turned the wheel a little.

"Some folks don't have nothin' to do but mind other folks's business for 'em," he remarked, looking aloft as if speaking to the mast head.

There was silence for a moment. We felt that the man in the blue shirt had somehow insulted all of us.

"Not that I care what a Pennsylvania Dutchman that aint never been anywhere 'cept between here an' Philadelphy a−shovellin' coal says, anyhow," he added.

Then he was silent again.

"'Taint as though I give her the name, myself," he observed, at last. "Seein' I just got her a week ago last Saturday. I ASKED Casper Hoyt what under the canopy possessed him to give her a name like that. Said his father named her. Well, I thought his father must be plumb foolish, or something, but I didn't like to say so to HIM. Seems too bad to waste them gilt letters, or I'd a−had another name on her 'fore this. I wanted to use as

many of them letters as I could, an' I thought of callin' her for my aunt, over at Greenland."

"What is your aunt's name?" inquired Jimmy Toppan.

"Hannah J. Pettingell."

"Isn't that too long a name?"

"Too long? 'Taint as long as the 'Abbie and Elizabeth Sweetser' that I went out to Calcutta in, summer of '68. And yer see I could use some of them letters,—the H, an' the P, an' the G,—but not all of 'em."

"I don't think I like that name as well as 'Hoppergrass,'" said Jimmy.

"Anything's better'n that," replied the Captain, decidedly. "Besides, my aunt was a sort of benefactor of mine,—she always said I was her fav'rite nephew."

"Is she dead?"

"Died seven year ago this spring, while I was in New Orleans. She left me her second best ear−trumpet,—she was deef as a post. She had two of 'em. One was a rubber toob sort of thing,—pretty nigh four foot long. She only used that on Sundays, an' when the minister called. She left me the other, an' I've got it to home, over the parlor mantelpiece."

I remembered seeing it there, when I had called on the Captain. He lived all alone on West Injy Lane, in a house full of cats and curiosities. The ear−trumpet always had a bouquet of dried flowers stuffed in the big end, and I had supposed that it was a speaking− trumpet. I thought the Captain had used it to shout orders through, when his ship was going round Cape Horn in a gale. It disappointed me to hear that it was nothing but his aunt's ear− trumpet. And I couldn't see why Miss Hannah Pettingell, who had only left the Captain her ear−trumpet (and the second−best one, besides) had any right to have the boat's name changed in her honor.

"I like the name, just as it is," I said.

"Do yer?" inquired the Captain. "Well, there's no accountin' for tastes, as the man said when he found the monkey eatin' glue."

This seemed to be a joke on me. Ed and Jimmy joined the Captain in laughing, and I felt rather put down. But we soon had something else to think of, for we went on another tack to enter Sandy Island River. A bridge crossed this river, not far from the mouth, and the draw had to be turned to let us through. Ed Mason got a long fish−horn from the cabin, and began to blow it. After a while the old draw−tender, who lived in a shanty, quarter of a mile away, came hobbling up the road. He slowly swung open the draw, and then, as we approached the bridge, peered down at us.

"This yer new boat, Lem?" said he to the Captain.

"This is her, right enough," said our skipper.

"Sets kinder high in the water, don't she?"

The aged draw−tender had the air of a man who was expected to find fault, and was quite able to do it.

"Hadn't noticed it," replied the Captain, shortly.

He was attending closely to sailing the boat through the narrow gap in the bridge. The old man cackled.

"Guess you'll find, when you git her outside, that them boys 'll wish you had some more ballast in her."

Then he caught sight of the name on the stern.

"Hopper−grass! Hoppergrass! Where didger git that air name, Lem? Invent it yerself?"

"No, I didn't," said the Captain. He was very much irritated, and he did not look around.

"Well, then, if 'taint yer own inventin', I jes as soon tell yer— if yer ask ME,—that it's the most ding−busted, tom−fool name I ever see on a cat−boat in all my born days."

"Well, I didn't ask yer," shouted Captain Bannister, "an' it don't matter two cents to me WHAT you think."

The ancient cackled again. Either he was deaf, or else he was pretending not to hear, in order to thorn the Captain. He kept on with his remarks.

"Yessir, the very WUST I ever see on the stern of a boat. That's what _I_ think, Lem, an' you can take it or leave it."

There was nothing to do but leave it, for we had already left the bridge behind, and were feoon too far away to hear the critic's remarks. He continued to give us his opinion, however, for we could see his jaw move, though we could not make out a single word he said.

This river was very different from the main stream. Narrow and muddy, it ran between high banks which were covered with marsh grass. There were sudden twists and turns, so that we never knew what might be ahead of us.

Sometimes we sailed so near the shore that the boom swept along the bank, brushing the grass. Once we turned a corner suddenly, and started up four crows, who were pecking at a dead fish, and in another place a big crane jumped clumsily up from a pool, and flapped heavily away. The dark, muddy water boiled up in thousands of bubbles in our wake.

"We'll see if we can get a mess of clams at Pingree's Beach, an' then we'll have a chowder for dinner,—what d'yer say, boys?"

We all said that the Captain's idea was a good one. There was a sharp turn in the river just then, and he put the boat about to round a sort of headland, where the banks were eight or ten feet high.

"Hard−a−lee! Look out for your heads," he shouted; and when the sail had swung over he continued: "I come up through here one night two years ago, in a boat that belonged to Dave Rodigrass,—I was bringing her up from Little Duck Island, for him. It was thicker'n burgoo, an' when I got the other side o' this pint, I heard a feller sing out from this side that he was aground, an' he warned me off, an' when I got here I couldn't see him, an' pretty soon he begun shoutin' from the other side. I tell yer I thought I'd got 'em again, or something, an' I—"

The Captain's recollections stopped that instant, for a voice—a loud, cheerful voice—arose only a few feet from us. It came from the other side of the sail, and that was all we could tell about it.

"Look out there!" it shouted, "look out! Oh, I mean: ship ahoy! ship ahoy!"

This hail came so suddenly that it made us jump, and Ed Mason, who was standing up forward, nearly fell overboard. He grabbed the mast to save himself, and then we all stooped to looked under the sail. The shouting had begun again, and there was a great racket of "Ship ahoy! Ship ahoy!"

CHAPTER II. A MAN ON A DESERT ISLAND

"All right, all right!" shouted Captain Bannister, "we hear yer. You needn't ahoy so much."

But the voice continued to shout "Ship ahoy!" at a great rate, until the "Hoppergrass" drew slowly ahead, and we could see what had been hidden by the sail.

A sand−bar stuck out of the water, right in the middle of the river. Only a few feet of it showed, and the island which it made was very small. It was so small that the man who was sitting on it had his legs drawn up till his knees came right under his chin, so as to keep his feet from getting wet. He was a young man, about twenty years old. He had on white trousers and a pink shirt, and he was slowly waving a white canvas hat. His hair was sandy, and very much ruffled, and his big, pale blue eyes were wide open, as though he were surprised about something.

"Ship ahoy!" he remarked again, but in an ordinary conversational tone, this time.

Then he climbed to his feet,—carefully, so as to keep the steep sides of his little, sand island from giving way, and letting him down into the water. As soon as he was standing up straight he raised one hand in the air, as if he were in a play, and said: "Rescued at last!"

Then he turned toward us, and remarked: "Gentlemen, I thank you."

"You better wait till you're on board," said the Captain, "before you begin thankin' us. I'll come about in a minute, an' then we'll fetch yer in the tender."

Jimmy Toppan had already begun to pull the small boat alongside, but before he could get into it, the young man called out: "That's all right! I'll swim."

And he plunged into the water, and struck out toward us. Of course he could not overtake a sail−boat, and we soon left him behind. He kept on swimming, however, until his hat fell off. Turning around, he picked up the hat, and jammed it on his head again. By this time the Captain had put about, and started on a tack that brought us near the swimmer. The young man came alongside, with a smile on his wet face.

"Don't try to grab the boat," shouted the Captain, "get hold of the tender!"

So the swimmer let us pass him, seized the side of the small boat, and after one or two trials (which nearly upset the tender) managed to climb in. He stood up in the stern, and raised his hand toward the sky, again, as if he were "speaking a piece" in school.

"Safe! Safe, at last!" he cried.

At this instant the painter became taut; the small boat gave a sudden jerk, and he went overboard again like a flash, head first.

Captain Bannister turned his head to see how the young man was getting on. Of course the boat was empty.

"Where'n the nation has he got to, now?" exclaimed the bewildered Captain.

We were all doubled up laughing, but we managed to gasp out: "He's gone overboard again!"

"What's he done that for?"

"He—he—fell over!"

"Fell over? What'n the dickens did he do that for? Where is he, anyhow?"

At this moment the sandy head, and astonished face came up, once more, in our wake. He brushed the water out of his eyes, looked at us, and began to smile again.

"Say, you!" shouted the Captain, "be you comin' on this boat, or what be you goin' to do?"

The swimmer gasped.

"If you keep on at that rate," he called, "I'm probably NOT coming. If you'll wait a bit, though, I'll—"

Here he swallowed a mouthful of water, and stopped speaking. He waved one arm at us, however, and seemed to smile cheerfully.

"Well, I'll come back once more,—d'yer hear?" This from the Captain. "An' when yer get aboard, STAY aboard, will yer?"

The "Hoppergrass" turned again, and the same performance was gone through. The pink−shirted man climbed into the tender, but this time he sat down cautiously in the stern, and waited for the painter to become taut. It had not slackened however, so there was no chance for another such accident as that which knocked him overboard before. He watched the painter for a moment, and then shook his fist at it.

"Fooled you that time, you old rope!"

Jimmy and Ed pulled the tender alongside, and the wet man stepped gingerly aboard the "Hoppergrass." His clothes stuck tight to him, and his shoes made a squshy sound, wherever he stepped. But he insisted on shaking hands with us, all around.

"If you hadn't come just when you did," he remarked solemnly, "I should have been devoured by sharks. Already I had noticed a black fin circling about the island—I mean a LEAN, black fin,—or is it a low, rakish, black fin? No; that's a craft,—a low, rakish, black craft. It was a LEAN, black fin—"

Captain Bannister gave a great snort of disgust.

"SHARKS!" he exclaimed, "there aint no sharks in this river!"

"No? Well, probably you are more familiar with it than I am."

"Guess I ought to know something 'bout it," the Captain returned; "I've been on it longer than most folks 'round here."

"On it LONGER, no doubt," said the young man, politely, "but have you gone into it any deeper than I?"

The Captain smiled.

"Well, no; I guess not. You've got me there, all right."

The stranger perched himself on the house, and there was a moment's silence until the Captain spoke again.

"But how in the nation did yer git on that there sand−bar, anyway? Where'd yer come from?"

"I came from—what was the name of that place where I got off the train? I thought I'd remember it,—I remembered it by gammon and spinach—yes, that's it,—it's in that, somehow—"

' Rowley, Powley, Gammon and Spinach,—Heighho! says Anthony—'"

"Rowley!" we all exclaimed.

"That's it! that's it! Rowley. Think of living at a place so famous as that! It sounds like great fun. But nobody does live there. When I got off the train there was only one man in sight, and he was standing on a wharf watching a steamboat go up the river, or down the river, or whatever it is. That was MY boat,—I was going to Duck Island in her. But she'd gone, and the man said he'd let me take a canoe, for half a dollar, and I thought that was very trusting of him, for how did he know I'd ever bring it back? But he said I could leave it with a man named Pike, who lives on Little Duck Island, and he'd get it tomorrow. So I gave him half a dollar, and then I came away in the canoe. Aren't they wabbly? I never was in one before."

"Did you paddle down here in a canoe? And you'd never been in one before?"

"Yes. That is, I didn't do much with the paddle,—except push off from the bank every now and then. The canoe seemed to come along pretty well. How that river does twist! And it's very narrow,—I should think the steamboat would stick."

The Captain opened his mouth helplessly, once or twice.

"Gosh sakes!" he said, "you warn't in no river. You was in Pingree's Crik, or you wouldn't have got down here."

"I thought it seemed pretty narrow. But when I got out here—round that corner—and came out where it's so much broader, I couldn't make the canoe go at all, except backwards. The front end of her kept swinging round, for the river was running the wrong way. At last I ran right up on that island, and then I got out, for my foot had gone to sleep. You see I hadn't dared to move, the canoe wabbled so. And then I went to look at some critters that were crawling around in the water,—they looked like tennis−racquets, only their tails weren't quite big enough—"

"Horse−shoe crabs," said Ed Mason.

"I don't know what they were, but I got quite fascinated watching them, and the first thing I knew the island had grown smaller—"

"The tide was coming in," explained Jimmy.

"But where is your canoe?" I asked him, "what have you done with it?"

The astonished look came over the young man's face.

"Why, that's so! I wonder where it has gone?"

"Land o' libberty!" said the Captain, "don't yer know?"

"Why, yes, it floated off. While I was watching the tennis−racquet animals it got loose, somehow—"

"Naturally," observed Captain Bannister, "seein' the tide was risin', an' I don't s'pose yer pulled it up on the sand."

"And the first thing I knew it was quite a distance from the island."

"Couldn't you have swum for it?" I demanded.

"Yes; but I didn't want to get all wet,—I—"

And then we all looked at his soaked clothes, and he laughed with us.

"Somehow, I didn't think of that when you came along," he admitted.

"But don't you really know where the canoe is?"

'Why, it disappeared around that point, just before I saw your boat. I really ought to get it again, because Mr. Skeels—that's the name of the man who owns it—isn't it great? I tried to make up a poem about him as I came down the river, but I couldn't get any farther than:

There was an old person named Skeels,

Who lived upon lobsters and eels,—

and he did look as if he lived upon lobsters and eels, too. Or WITH them. Anyhow, he'll be down to Mr. Pike's tomorrow, asking for the canoe. And my bag, and suit−case, and all my clothes are in it, too. So I suppose I'll have to find it. Will it go out to sea?"

"It can't," said the Captain, "not till the tide turns. We'll overtake it 'fore long,—you see if we don't."

Sure enough, we did overtake it. We had hardly passed the point of land when Jimmy Toppan, who spent most of his time standing in the bow, peering ahead like Leif Ericsson discovering Vinland, sang out that he had sighted the canoe. It had drifted into some eel− grass, near the shore, and we had no trouble in getting it. Beside the bags, there were in the canoe some large sheets of paper, torn out of a sketch book. These were covered with pictures of the horse−shoe crabs,—drawn in a very amusing fashion. One sketch showed an old crab, wearing a mob−cap and sitting up in bed, drinking tea.

The stranger was delighted to get his belongings. He promptly changed his wet clothes for a bathing−suit, leaving the wet things in the sun to dry.

"Now," he said, "I'm all ready to go overboard, but it will be just like my luck not to fall over at all."

"You stay on the boat," said the Captain, decidedly; "I've rescued you twice, and that's enough for one day."

"All right, Captain. Though I don't mind being in the water. It's this desert island business that scares me most to death. There was the question of food. The—what−do−you−call—'em crabs had all gone away before you came, and I didn't think much of eating them cold, anyway. I had a piece of chocolate—"

He laughed and jumped up.

"Here it is," he said, fishing it out from a wet trousers' pocket. "I was going to divide it so as to have a piece for each day. That's the way people do when they're shipwrecked, isn't it, Captain?"

"So they say. Never had to come to that, myself."

"Well, I was stuck right off. For how did I know how many days I was going to stay on the island? The books on shipwrecks don't say anything about that. I didn't know whether to divide the chocolate into five pieces or ten,—they'd have been pretty small, if I'd had to have made it last for ten days. Do you think it would have kept me alive for ten days, Captain?"

"I dunno," replied the Captain, "but I guess yer wouldn't have stayed there so long as that. There'll be six foot of water on that bar before noon, so yer wouldn't have found the settin' quite so comfortable. Besides, some of them sharks of yours might have et yer."

"Well, then," the young man returned, "it was lucky you came when you did. The water was crowding me rather close. And now, what shall I do? Will you give me a lift as far as Little Duck Island? Or if you haven't got room enough, and I'll be in the way, why, I'll get in Mr. Skeels' canoe again, and give you an exhibition of wabbling."

He looked dismally toward the canoe, which we now had in tow behind the tender. We all told the castaway that we would be glad to have him stay with us.

"Plenty of sleepin' room on board," said Captain Bannister, "an' you said you was goin' to Big Duck, didn't yer? You stay with us, and we'll get yer there all right, tomorrer."

"Do you know many people on Duck Island, Mr. Daddles?" asked Ed Mason.

The young man turned around.

"Where did you get that name?" he asked.

"It's on that card on your bag."

The owner of the bag examined the label.

"I know who put that on there," he remarked to himself, "well, I ... why ... no, I am going to the island, I suppose, to see a Mr. Kidd. Relation of the pirate, I hope. He didn't say anything about it in his letter. Whether he was related to Captain Kidd, I mean."

"You can find out tomorrer," said our skipper, "now we're headin' for Pingree's Beach to see if we can get a mess of clams of old man Haskell. Then we'll have dinner, and we can run over to the inlet at Little Duck in an hour, any time this afternoon."

The breeze was still light, and the "Hoppergrass" made only fair progress. Soon we were out of the river, and entering Broad Bay. The sun was high by this time, the air cool and pleasant. Everything seemed so clear and fresh, that it made us think the land a poor place in comparison with the water. How hot and dusty the streets of the town must be at this same minute! We felt sorry for the people who had to stay there. We had only the clean white hull of the boat between us and the sparkling water of the bay. Toward the sky the great white sail of our boat soared up, like the wing of a giant sea gull, and we went forward as easily and smoothly as one of the gulls who were gliding through the air, and dipping to the water a few hundred yards ahead of us. The grass covered river−banks were far astern now, and the only land ahead was some low sand−dunes and beaches, hardly to be seen in the distance.

"Here goes the chocolate," said Mr. Daddles, tossing it overboard, "once it might have saved my life, but I don't care for it now. Chocolate flavored with salt−water is pretty poor stuff."

Then he commenced turning over his clothes, which were spread out in the sun on top of the cabin.

"What made yer say p'r'aps this feller named Kidd was a relation of the pirate?" asked Captain Bannister. "You'd heard 'bout Fishback Island, hadn't yer?"

"No, I never heard the name, even."

"What about Fishback Island, Captain?" asked Ed Mason.

"You never heard all them yarns, an' all that diggin' that went on over there?"

"No, I never heard of it," Ed replied, "are there pirates there?"

"Of course not," said Jimmy Toppan scornfully, "there aren't any pirates anywhere, now."

"Aren't there?" the Captain inquired. He slacked the sheet a little, and made it fast with great deliberation. "You better not be too sure of that, cos' I know where there's plenty of 'em."

"Around here?" I inquired.

Captain Bannister chuckled.

"No, not very near this place. In the China Sea."

"Have you ever seen any of them?"

"A whole junk full of 'em."

"What did they do?"

All four of us spoke at once. Mr. Daddles seemed to be as much interested as the rest of us.

"Well, they tried to ketch us. But they couldn't. That was all there was to it, then. But I see six of 'em 'bout a month later in Hong Kong."

"In Hong Kong! What were they doing there?"

"They was havin' their heads cut off, by a feller with a long sword. Anyway, I guess they was some of the same crew that chased us in the junk, cos' they was took by a man−of−war in 'bout the same place."

"How did they like having their heads cut off?" asked Mr. Daddles.

"Well, yer can't tell 'bout a Chinaman. They didn't seem to mind it much. They get used to it, yer see."

"Somehow," said Mr. Daddles, "a Chinese pirate doesn't seem like the real thing to me."

"That's so," I agreed. I came and sat down with the Captain and Ed Mason in the cock−pit. "I always think of a pirate as a man with a black beard, and—"

"A red sash around his waist," put in Ed Mason.

"All stuck full of pistols and things," added Jimmy.

"Guess that kind has all died off," said the Captain.

"All except Black Pedro," remarked Mr. Daddles.

"Never heard of HIM."

"Never HEARD of him?" This in a tone of great surprise. "You never heard of him either?" said Mr. Daddles,

turning to each of us boys, one after the other. "What have your parents been doing to let you grow up in ignorance? I'll have to tell you about him,— he's the very last of the pirates."

"Where does he hang out?" asked the Captain.

"On Rum Island or Alligator Key,—I'm not sure which. The accounts vary."

The Captain looked at Mr. Daddles in a quizzical fashion. "I guess you've got a yarn," said he,—"why don't yer let us have it?"

Mr. Daddles was perched on the cabin, swinging his bare legs over the cock−pit. The Captain was at the wheel, as usual, with his eyes fixed on the water ahead of us, part of the time, but now and then raised to look at Mr. Daddles. The latter had a serious, almost mournful expression on his face, as he told the story of the last of the pirates.

CHAPTER III. THE LAST OF THE PIRATES

"You know that a great many of the most famous pirates were really rather small potatoes. Take Captain Kidd, for instance. Why, they are still disputing whether he was a pirate or not. If he was one, he didn't take to it until late in life, and he'd been a perfectly respectable sailor up to that time. They sent him out to catch pirates, and according to one story he turned pirate himself."

"Well, they hung him for something," said Captain Bannister.

"Yes, sir. They did that because they said he was a pirate, and that he murdered his mate. He said his mate mutinied, and that he was justified in killing him. There were a lot of others who went out to catch pirates, but ended by turning pirates themselves. Then there were some who just carried on pirating as a kind of branch business, when other things were dull. What respect can you have for that kind of a pirate? Some of 'em were wreckers part of the time, and pirates the other part."

"What are wreckers?" I asked.

"Why, they," explained Mr. Daddles, "made a living by what they could steal from wrecks. Either they stayed on dangerous shores and waited for a wreck, or they would deceive sailors by building false beacons at night so as to toll the ships upon the rocks. That was a pretty mean sort of thing! They couldn't pick out a rich galleon, all full of gold ingots, and then fight for the treasure, like pirates and gentlemen! No; they had to take whatever came along, and, like as not, all they would get would be a miserable fishing−shack, loaded with hake and halibut! A real, simon−pure pirate would have refused to shake hands with a low− down wrecker, and it would have served him right, too.

"But Black Pedro was the very top−notcher of them all, the finest flower of piracy. He didn't go pirating just during the summer months, when his other business was slack. And he would have died before he'd have been a wrecker. It was a profession, with him. And an inherited one, too. He was the third of the name. He started in as cabin boy on the ship of his grand−father,—old Black Pedro the First. The old man, the grand−father, was captured once by an Admiral of the English Navy, and taken to Tyburn to be hanged. You see he was such a prominent pirate that they wouldn't just string him up to the yard arm, like a common buccaneer. He was tried with the greatest ceremony, and sentenced to death by the Lord Chief Justice himself. That was a great feather in his cap. But when they tried to hang him the crowd around the gallows liked him so well that they started a riot, and in the excitement he got away, and a year later he was back on the Spanish Main, pirating again, with all of his old crew who were still alive,— about eight of 'em.

"He had to get a new ship, for his old one—the 'Panther,'—had been sunk in the fight with the English Admiral. So he had one built for him by a firm in San Domingo, who made a specialty of pirate ships. It was the very latest thing in that kind of vessel, strong, swift, heavily armed, and luxuriously furnished. The crew had a social hall for holding their revels and the cabins were fit for a king. Even The Plank was solid mahogany."

"What plank?" This from Ed Mason.

"WHAT plank? Did you ever hear such a question? I shouldn't think you'd ever been to school. Why, THE PLANK,—the one that the pirates' victims have to walk. Didn't you ever hear of walking the plank?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, old Black Pedro the First named his new ship 'The Angel of Death' and he had a picture of the Angel embroidered in black velvet on his foresail. He was a proud man, I tell you, when he sailed out of San Domingo on his first voyage. He had a black velvet suit—made out of some that was left over from the picture of the Angel—and a red sash around his waist, in the proper style. This was stuck full of cutlasses and flint−lock pistols,— four cutlasses and eight pistols. And he had two or three more pistols in each boot. He had a fierce, black beard, and the most ferocious face you can imagine. He scared some people to death by just GLARING at them. And his own son was first mate,—he was almost as ferocious as old Pedro the First. And HIS son—the grandson, that is, of Pedro the First—was cabin boy. It was the boy's first voyage. Before they had been out a week they fell in with 'El Espiritu Santo,' a private galleon belonging to the King of Spain. It was loaded with bars of solid gold, and fifteen chests of gold doubloons. Black Pedro ordered the Jolly Roger hoisted at all three mast−heads, and went down to his cabin and stuck six more pistols in his boots. Then the two ships opened fire on

each other with their big guns, and fought for about half an hour. At the end of that time, the first mate came to the captain and said:

"'Father, I think it's about time to board her.'

"'Are the scuppers running with blood yet?'

"Pedro the Second went and inspected the scuppers.

"'No,' he said, 'not yet.'

"'Continue firing till they are,' ordered the Captain.

"After about ten minutes more, the mate reported the scuppers running with blood in the regular manner. Then, and not till then, did old Pedro give orders to board. That was why he was the prince of pirates,—it was his attention to details, to the little things that make up the difference between a real pirate and a mere sea− thief. You can see what an inheritance the third Pedro had,—how he was brought up to reverence the best traditions of his calling.

"They laid the 'Angel' alongside the Spanish galleon, and grappled the two vessels together. Old Pedro led the boarding party, and when they got to the poop−deck of the galleon they found the Spanish captain, the first mate, and the cabin−boy waiting for them with cutlasses. The three Pedros, father, son, and grandson, engaged them according to rank, and finished them off at the same moment. The rest of the Spanish crew had been subdued in the meantime, and it only remained to make them walk the plank, then transfer the treasure to 'The Angel of Death,' and sail away, leaving 'El Espiritu Santo' on fire, so she would blow up when the fire reached her powder magazine.

"When the officers were killed, and the crew and passengers of the galleon were lined up on deck, awaiting their fate, old Pedro strode down from the poop−deck, wiping his cutlass.

"'Now,' he said, knowing that all eyes were on him, 'we'll feed 'em to the sharks!'

"And he roared: 'Fetch out The Plank!'

"There was a pause. No one moved.

"'Blood and Bones!' roared old Pedro, 'don't you hear me? Fetch out The Plank!'

"At this the bo's'n, Aaron Halyard, stepped forward.

"'Oh there you are, are you, Halyard?' bellowed the pirate chief, 'well, why don't you fetch out The Plank? It's your duty,—you're in charge of it.'

"The bo's'n pulled at his forelock, and bowed to his commander.

"'Beggin' yer pardin, Cap'n,' said he, 'kin I have a word with yer private−like? Lemme whisper in yer ear, if I may make so bold—'

"'No whispering,' returned his chief, 'no whispering here. What's the matter with you anyway? And why don't you fetch out The Plank?'"

"'Well, Cap'n,' said the bo's'n, rubbing his hands together, nervously, 'you know ME. I've been with you ever since you begun. I was with you in the days of the old 'Panther,' an'—' "'Cut it short!' shouted Pedro.

"'Well, Cap'n,' the bo's'n repeated, with his knees knocking together, 'I never was so mortified in all my life—specially in front of all the gentry here,' pointing his thumb toward the Spanish prisoners, 'but the fact is, Cap'n, I've clean forgot where I put The Plank!'

"'Forgot!' screamed old Pedro.

"'Yessir, plumb forgot. I jus' can't remember for the life of me, where I put her. I know I brought her aboard myself, an' I'd a− taken my affydavy I put her under my bunk, but when I looked for her, when we fust sighted this here galleon, strike me foolish if she was there at all! I asked the cook about it. He'll tell yer so hisself—an' he—'

"'Cut it short!' Pedro roared again.

"He glared around him—did old Pedro—like an infuriated lion. Once he raised his cutlass and seemed about to sweep off the bo's'n's head with it. At last he said in a choked voice—

"'Well, for goodness' sake, think! Can't you remember what you did with it?'

"Aaron shook his head dumbly. Then as he stood there, quaking, a sudden gleam of intelligence came into his eye.

"'That's it!' he said,'that's it. The cook wanted an ironin' board, he said, and he borrowed it—'

"He broke off, and scrambled hastily over the side of 'The Angel of Death.' Then he rushed below, and in a

few minutes came back, nervously tearing off some sheets of white cloth, which surrounded the handsome, hand−carved, mahogany Plank.

"'Lucky for you!' bellowed Pedro, 'now put her in place, boys!'

"His men put her in place and the Spanish crew had the pleasure of starting the long procession of victims who were to go overboard by that route in the years to come.

"Such was the first fight of 'The Angel of Death' and just such success (excepting, of course, the hitch about The Plank) rewarded the efforts of old Pedro for over twenty years. Up and down the Spanish Main he sailed, and the sight of that foresail, with its terrible picture of the Black Angel, struck terror to the heart of every man afloat. Even men−of−war fought shy of the three Pedros. Once 'The Angel of Death' rounded the Cape of Good Hope and attacked a treasure fleet on its way back from the Indies. On that occasion it captured so many chests of gold doubloons that they quite blocked up the social hall, where the crew used to hold their revels, and they had to revel on deck, until 'The Angel of Death' got back to Rum Island, where they buried their treasure.

"Finally, old Pedro the First was taken sick. There was a fight, early one morning when the air was very damp, between the 'Angel' and a rich merchantman. The pirate captain got rather over−heated, during his usual duel with the captain of the merchantman, and then he foolishly sat down in a draft while he ate his breakfast. He had a bad attack of rheumatism, and it made it very hard for him to scramble over the bulwarks when he led a boarding party to the enemy's decks. The next time they put in at Rum Island the old man took his bed, dolefully predicting that his end was near.

"'Just at this season, when the plate−ships are all sailing for Spain,' he grumbled, 'I don't see what I've done to be put upon this way.'

"He got worse and worse, however, and the best doctors shook their heads over his case. He called in his son and grandson, and old Aaron Halyard, the bo's'n,—the same one who came so near to botching everything in the first fight. He said good−bye to them all, and gave some good advice to the youngest Pedro,—who was a fine, promising boy, by this time. Then he passed away, and they gave him the biggest funeral that had ever been seen on Rum Island.

"Of course, Black Pedro the Second took up the work right where the old pirate had left it. It was the season when the galleons were starting for Spain, loaded down with gold, and as soon as the funeral was over, the 'Angel' sailed on her regular autumn trip. Some of the Spanish captains had heard of the death of old Pedro, and so they weren't quite as cautious as they should have been. They found out their mistake very quick, however, and the 'Angel' had a most profitable voyage. Gold and silver from the mines of Peru, diamonds from Brazil, rubies and other kinds of precious stones,—oh, I tell you, the pirates sailed back to Rum Island that winter, chuckling with glee at the thought of the wealth they had won. They had with them the Governor General of the Antilles, a Spanish grandee of the very highest kind. They held him for ransom, and made the King of Spain pay fifty thousand dollars to get him back. 'The Angel of Death' got to be such a scourge of the seas that half a dozen men−of−war were sent out by England, Spain and Portugal to try to catch her. But she was the fleetest ship on the ocean, and she always gave them the slip. Once she got caught in a tight place, between Rum Island and Alligator Key. The pursuer was a Portuguese man−of−war, and the pirate vessel turned and fought so fiercely that the enemy was put to flight.

"So it went on for many years. The boy, Pedro, had worked his way up, by sheer merit—no favoritism—until he was now first mate. Then it came his father's turn to pass on, as the first Pedro had passed. The 'Angel' had put in at Alligator Key, for a few weeks one summer, and while they were there some friend presented the captain with a water−melon. He ate it at supper that night, and as it was unripe, it disagreed with him. Several glasses of ice− water, which he drank with the melon, had the effect of making him still worse. Next morning another of the Pedros was gone, and Pedro the Third was now captain of 'The Angel of Death' and leader of the pirate crew."

Mr. Daddles paused in his story and came and sat down with Ed and me in the cock−pit.

"When 'The Angel of Death' sailed on her next trip, she was probably the most dangerous pirate ship that was ever afloat. You see they were all of them experienced men. They had years of practice behind them. They knew their ship, and they knew the ocean. There wasn't a shoal or a passage, an inlet or a creek from one end of the Spanish Main to the other that they didn't know. Black Pedro spread terror into far corners of the ocean, where neither his father nor grand−father had ever been heard of. They would have been proud indeed, if they could have seen their son. He wore a black velvet suit, with a red sash, just like his grand− father before him. That had

become the official costume in the family. He had made no change in it, except to add one or two more pistols in the sash.

"One autumn, after Black Pedro the Third had been captain for about a dozen or fifteen years, 'The Angel of Death' had a terrible fight with the biggest galleon she had ever tackled,— 'The Santa Maria Sanctissima,' a ship so huge that she towered far above the pirate vessel. While the great guns were roaring, and the cannon−balls flying, Black Pedro stood amid the smoke, in his velvet suit, his black beard bristling with rage, and his face bearing an expression ten times more ferocious than his grand− father's at its worst. He noted carefully the precise moment when the scuppers were running with blood, and then gave the signal for boarding. 'The Santa Maria Sanctissima' was so high that they had to use scaling−ladders to reach her deck, but the pirates soon swarmed on board, the captain was slain by Black Pedro, the rest of the crew walked The Plank, and 'The Angel of Death' sailed back to Rum Island with her booty.

"It was the richest she had ever captured. 'The Santa Maria Sanctissima' carried an enormous cargo of gold, intended for a great castle in Spain, and it took four days to unload the treasure at the pirates' lair, and six more days to bury it in the ground. Think how they felt when the last shovelful of earth was put in, how the sense of work well done filled their breasts with satisfaction! But on that very day disaster of the most terrible kind was hanging over them, and less than twenty−four hours lay between them and dire calamity.

"Early in the evening, on the day after they had buried the last gold bar, Black Pedro sat on the veranda of his cottage, smoking his pipe. This cottage was his regular dwelling place, while he was at Rum Island. From the veranda he could look out over the bay, where 'The Angel of Death' lay at anchor. The men's quarters were down the hill, near the beach.

"Black Pedro noticed that the men seemed unusually quiet that night. He did not hear the customary yells and cries. Suddenly he was surprised to see old Aaron Halyard, the bo's'n, come over the top of the hill, leaning on his cane. Behind him walked the entire crew of the 'Angel,' two by two. They were heading toward their Captain's cottage. This was not only astonishing, but it was strictly against the rules, as all interviews with the Captain, while on shore, were limited to the hours from 4 to 6 P. M. It was now 7.30. Black Pedro leaped to his feet in surprise. The men formed a line in front of the cottage—thirty−four of them—while old Aaron tottered forward.

"'Cap'n,' he said, 'we'd like to have a word with you.'

"'Well,' replied Black Pedro, 'what do you want?'

"'Cap'n, it's this way. You know ME. I've been your bo's'n an' yer father's an' yer grand−father's afore HIM, ever since the 'Angel' was built, an' afore that, too. Why, some on us can remember way back to the days of the 'Panther,' when you wa'n't knee−high to a cutlash. Me, an' Mike the Shark, here, an' Sandy Buggins, an' Roarin' Pete, an' some on us has stuck to the 'Angel' since the day she was built. There aint any on us but has seen more'n twenty years sarvice with you or yer father. Now some on us got talkin' over things today, and talkin' 'bout the big haul o' treasure we made last v'y'ge from that there 'Santa Maria.' An', o' course, big haul as it was, it aint nothin' at all to what's buried right here on this island. Why, all the loot that we've taken for sixty− five year is in the ground within half a mile of where we stand— all on it, way back to what we took outer that there 'Spirito Santo."

"And old Halyard paused, and blushed a little, as he remembered the embarrassing incident of that day.

"'Well,' said the Captain, 'go on.'" "'Well, sir, all on a suddent like, it come over us: what good is that there plunder a−doin' of?'

"'What good?' asked Black Pedro.

"'Yessir, what good? There's all that there gold an' silver, an' all them jooels an' preshis stones an' all them fine clo'es an' what not, an' what good is it all a−doin' of, a−buried in the ground? The book−keeper here, Mike the Shark, was a−reckonin' up this morning, an' a−addin' this last lot o' gold, an' he tells us that 'cordin' to the 'greement the share of ev'ry man jack on us reckons up to a powerful big figger.'

"The book−keeper stepped forward. 'For each man,' said he, 'the precise sum to date is nine hundred and sixty−six thousand, seven hundred and forty−three dollars, and twenty−two cents.'

"'An' all hard−earned money, too,' said old Aaron; 'we've been a− sailin,' an' a−fightin', an' a−shootin' folks, an a−stabbin' on 'em, an' a−slittin' of their wind−pipes, an' a−walkin' 'em on The Plank, for sixty−five year come the sixteenth o' next August.'

"'Well, what do you want?' asked Black Pedro again. His voice was low, but terrible.

"'Why,' said the bo's'n, 'we'd like some of our share of the money, if it's all the same to you.'

"'And when you get it,' continued the pirate chief, 'what do you propose to do with it?'

"'Why, spend some on it, an' buy some o' the good things o' life. Look at us. Like a lot of scare−crows, we be. In rags, ev'ry one on us, 'cept you,—an' your black velvet suit is lookin' a leetle mite rusty, if you'll 'scuse an ol' sailor−man, for speakin' right out. An' we'd like somethin' good to eat, an' somethin' good to drink. Look at me: risin' eighty−six year, I be, an' aint never tasted nothin' all my life 'cept salt−hoss, an' ship−bread, an' rum; never slep' nowheres 'cept in a hammock, an' had to turn out on deck an' stand watch in all kinds of weather. An' wuth today nine hundred an' sixty−six thousand, seven hundred an' forty−three dollars, an' thirty−two cents.'

"'Twenty−two cents,' corrected the bookkeeper.'

"'Twenty−two cents,' said Aaron. 'An' what good does it do me? Nothin' 't all. What can I buy with it, here on this here island? Nothin'. Here I am—an' here we all be—scorched an' burnt by the sun, and bit by these here scorpions, an' other varmints, an' dressed in rags an' tatters, an' all the while, all that loot of our'n lyin' there idle in the ground.'

"At this moment Black Pedro leaped four feet into the air, and gave a bellow like an infuriated tiger.

"'What?' he yelled, 'what? you dogs! you scoundrels! you miserable, low−down ruffians you! Oh, that I should have lived to see this day! Thankful am I that my father and grand−father are safe in their graves! This would have broken their hearts. Why, you horrible villains,—do you mean to tell me that you have been doing all this pirating for money?'

"Aaron Halyard scraped his feet in the sand, and shuffled about uneasily.

"'Beggin' yer pardin', Cap'n, but what in Sancho HAVE we been doin' of it for, else?'

"Black Pedro gave a moan, and then another bellow of rage.

"'Out of my sight, you miserable, sordid scoundrels,—out of my sight! What? You defy me, do you? This is mutiny! Take that! And that!'

"He snatched two pistols from his sash and commenced firing, right and left. The first shot hit Mike the Shark and doubled up the book−keeper like a jack−knife, and the second one did the same for Sandy Buggins.

"'Hold hard, Cap'n!' cried the old bo's'n, 'p'r'aps you'll tell us what all this pirating WAS for, if it wa'n't for money.'

"'It was for the joy of pirating, you old rascal, as you ought to know. It was for the pure love of the thing. And to think that all these years I have been leading a base gang of money−getters!'

"And he grabbed another couple of pistols out of his boots, and began firing once more. At this, the pirates lost their patience. They gave a deep roar, like a herd of angry buffalo, and closed in on their Captain. He jumped back, and continued to fire. They swarmed around him, and in a few minutes that group of pirates, who had always lived together like brothers, had changed into a blood−thirsty mob. Knives flashed and pistols cracked. Some of them hit each other in their excitement, and that made them so angry that they turned and fought amongst themselves. In the meantime, the Captain was firing his pistols and slashing with his cutlasses, and making terrible havoc amongst his followers. In ten minutes all was over. Of that proud band of pirates, once the terror of the Spanish Main, only two men were left alive. These were Black Pedro himself, slightly wounded in the leg, but still able to walk, and old Aaron Halyard, the bo's'n. Aaron was running at top speed toward the beach, trying to get to a small boat. A little way behind him came the Captain.

"'Don't you tech me! don't you tech me!' screamed old Halyard.

"Black Pedro stopped and took careful aim, with the last of his fourteen pistols. He pulled the trigger, but there was no report. Something had gone wrong with the priming. The bo's'n reached the boat, shoved off, and started to row for the ship. There was no other boat, and Pedro could only watch him. The old man rowed to 'The Angel of Death,' climbed aboard, and commenced, with the help of the boy, who had been left there, to get up the foresail. Then they hoisted the anchor, and the 'Angel' moved slowly out of the harbor. Black Pedro sat down on the beach, and watched it fade from sight. When night fell 'The Angel of Death' was only a speck on the horizon. Then the pirate chief returned to his cottage.

"On the following day a dreadful storm arose. Black Pedro knew that no ship, manned only by an aged bo's'n and a cabin−boy, could live through such a tempest. A few days later his worst fears were realized, for by the wreckage that was washed ashore, he knew that 'The Angel of Death' had gone to pieces in the storm. When The Plank itself, worn smooth on its upper side by the hundreds of feet that had passed over it, was tossed upon the shores of Rum Island, the pirate sat down on the sand and sobbed aloud. He knew that old Halyard and the

cabin−boy must have perished, and the noblest crew of buccaneers on whom the sun had ever shone, were forever disbanded, and that he, their chief, was now the last of the pirates, alone and deserted on an undiscovered and unknown island.

"And there he lives to this day."

CHAPTER IV. WELL BURIED TREASURE

When Mr. Daddles finished his story there was a moment's silence. Then Ed Mason asked:

"Is that all?"

"Isn't that enough?" inquired Mr. Daddles, "isn't that sad enough, just as it is?"

"It's sad enough," said Captain Bannister, "it's sad enough, all right. Once or twice I thought I'd bust right out cryin'."

And the Captain chuckled a little, choked, and wheezed.

"What beats me," he went on, "is where you picked up a yarn like that,—for you haint follered the sea very much, I take it?"

"Not very much," said Mr. Daddles.

"Not that yer troubles with that there canoe proves anything," returned the skipper, "for foolisher things was never invented. I wouldn't git into one of 'em not if you was to give me a thousand dollars. No, sir."

"Oh, my experience of a sailor's life has been limited," said the new passenger. "To tell the truth, I've never been as far East as this but once before. I was here for a few days, summer before last. My uncle lives at Bailey's Harbor, on Little Duck Island."

"Does he?" asked Jimmy Toppan,—"What's his name?"

"Alfred Peabody."

"Is HE your uncle?" exclaimed the Captain. "I know his house,—up there on the hill, aint it?"

"Yes, but he isn't there now. My aunt was there for a while, but she went away, about two weeks ago. The house is closed, I suppose."

Jimmy, who had been looking toward the shore, turned to the Captain.

"This is Pingree's, isn't it, Captain?"

"Yessir; this is Pingree's Beach. Two of yer better go ashore an' see old man Haskell. That's his shanty,—the one with the red door. Ask him to let yer have a basket of clams. Tell him I sent yer."

Pingree's Beach was a short strip of sand, bordered with eel− grass. There were two small cottages, set above high−water mark, three dories drawn up on the shore, and a heap of lobster−pots and nets. Mr. Haskell could be seen moving in and out of his shanty.

Jimmy Toppan and Mr. Daddles went for the clams, after the latter had changed his bathing−suit for a shirt, and a pair of duck trousers. Captain Bannister sailed the "Hoppergrass" quarter of a mile below the beach, put about, and came back in time to pick them up when they returned in the tender. Mr. Daddles was interested in the idea of a clam−chowder. He had already noticed the funny little noise which the clams made, as their shells opened and shut.

"It seems rather hard−hearted to make them into a soup," he observed, "when they sing all the time like that."

The Captain was not troubled by the song of the clams, however.

"Here, Jimmy," he said, "you take the wheel while I shuck them clams."

"Do what to 'em?" asked Mr. Daddles.

"Shuck 'em," the Captain replied.

Mr. Daddles still looked puzzled.

"Take 'em out of the shells," explained Jimmy.

While the Captain worked over the clams, he had an oil−stove lighted down in the cabin, and he tried out some pork. Ed Mason hunted up a pail of fresh milk and some crackers, while I washed and peeled the potatoes. In about half an hour the dinner was ready. The Captain brought up the steaming kettle of chowder, and from it we filled our bowls. We also had coffee and bread and butter, and some of the mince turnovers which Ed Mason had brought. Then we remembered the water−melon.

"Don't think 'twill give yer the stomach−ache, do yer?" asked the Captain, as he prepared to cut the melon. "You remember how it killed one of them Black Pedros, don't yer?"

We all voted that it could not possibly give us the stomach−ache. And it didn't. Then we drew lots to see who would have the unpleasant job of washing the dishes. Ed Mason and I lost, and retired below to do the work. We

could hear them talking on deck. Jimmy was still at the wheel; the Captain and Mr. Daddles lighted their pipes.

"I thought, when yer begun to talk 'bout pirates," said Captain Bannister, "that yer meant something 'bout the diggin' for treasure on Fishback Island."

"No; I never heard of it."

"Why, they've been diggin' an' blastin' there for years. Some folks was doin' it when my father was a boy. He had a try at it, an' so did I, one summer 'bout nine or ten year ago."

"Who put the treasure there?"

"Cap'n Kidd, they said. They lay everything on him. Why, folks has come from all round. One crowd formed a jint−stock company, an' sold shares, an' skun a whole pile of money outer people. Another man come in his yacht, an' he fetched a feller with him who could find treasure with his eyes shut, so he said. He was one of these wizards, an' he had a divinin' rod. His divinin' rod led him right up to a hummock in the middle of the island, an' they dug there, an' fetched up against the skeleton of an old dead hoss. That got 'em all excited, an' they pitched in an' dug like Sancho. But they never found nothin' 'cept the old hoss, an' so the wizard went back to town, an' took his divinin' rod with him. Then there was a lot of college fellers come an' camped out there all summer, once. I see 'em at it, two or three times. They was playin' base−ball, mostly. One of 'em had a map that he'd got outer some old book, an' he let me look at it. Accordin' to the bearin's of the island it might have been most anywhere between Fundy an' Key West, but it was good enough for this feller. He was sure it meant Fishback."

"Where did you dig?"

"Oh, round anywhere. I just did it for fun, between two fishin' trips. You can go over an' see the island this afternoon, if yer want to. Just go over to the mainland, an' take the hoss−car to Squid Cove. There'll be someone that will let yer take a boat across to Fishback."

An hour later we sailed into Bailey's Harbor. This was the only village of any size on Little Duck Island. A number of huts and houses, with one or two shops, stood about the head of the inlet. Behind them a road led up a hill, and then branched,—one road going off to the north−east, for the island was three or four miles long. The other road joined the causeway which had been built across the marsh in the rear of the island. Only this marsh separated the island from the mainland,—it was only an island in name, now.

We came to anchor, and the Captain started us off on our trip to the place where the treasure was supposed to lie. He rowed us in to the wharf.

"You ought to be back here by six o'clock. I'll leave yer canoe with Pike, all right,—I know where he hangs out, I guess. Take a good look round the island, an' if yer find any of the loot, don't forget me!"

And then as we started up the wharf he called out:

"Got any money with yer? There'll be hoss−car fares to pay, yer know."

I felt in my pockets.

"Mine's on the boat," I said.

"So's mine," said Jimmy.

"And so's mine," said Ed Mason.

"That's all right," said Mr. Daddles, "I've brought some,—all the change we'll need."

We went through the village and crossed the causeway. It was only a short walk to the end of the car line. Here was standing an old horse−car. The car was old, the horse was old, and the man who drove the horse was older still. He was sitting by the side of the road, and he eyed us suspiciously as we came up.

"Didn't see no one else coming across the causeway, didger?" he inquired.

"Not a soul." I

"Guess I might's well start, then."

He pulled a watch out of his pocket.

"What do you make it?"

Not one of us had a watch, so we couldn't make it anything at all. We thought it was about two o'clock.

"'Taint," said the car−driver decidedly, with the air of a man nipping a fraud in the bud. "It's one fifty four. Didn't know but what Ike Flanders would be coming over, an' trying to bum his way with me as usual. Well, climb aboard, an' we'll get under way."

All the way to Squid Cove he entertained us with an account of Ike Flanders' many attempts to get a ride for nothing. He had never succeeded, owing to the watchfulness of the driver. His whole life—the driver's—seemed

to have consisted of a warfare against rascals and swindlers. People were always coming around with some scheme to cheat him, but he had defeated them all. When he found that we were going to row across to Fishback Island, he said he guessed he could let us take a boat,—for fifteen cents. It came out that he not only drove the horse−car, but sold fish and lobsters, ran a boarding−house, and had one or two boats to let. He left the horse−car standing in front of his house, and came down to the water to show us the boat.

"Better row round to the west'ard a little, when you get to Fishback," said he, "it's kinder choppy on this side sometimes, an' if my boat got all stove to pieces on the rocks 'fore you got ashore, why, where'd I be?"

"You would be right here," said Mr. Daddles; "where do you think we'd be?"

"You? Oh, huh! Yes, that's so. Well, p'r'aps you might as well give me the fifteen cents now, if it's all the same to you."

"It's exactly the same to me," replied our friend. And he handed over the money. The man looked at it carefully, and then went back to his home.

"What do you suppose he's going to do with that money?" I wondered.

"I know," said Jimmy Toppan, "he's going to hurry off and put it in the bank, before Ike Flanders tries to get it away from him."

"No," said Mr. Daddles, "he's going to bury it in his garden." "First," remarked Ed Mason, "he'll take it into the house and test it with acid, to see if it's genuine."

"He thinks we're a gang of bunco men," Mr. Daddles reflected. "I wonder why he trusts us with his boat."

"He knows that no one would be foolish enough to steal it," said Jimmy; "look at it!"

It was a shabby and ill−kept dory, dirty, and with half an inch of dirty water washing about in it. But we didn't care. Almost any boat is good enough when you are looking for buried treasure. We set out, with Mr. Daddles and Jimmy rowing. A breeze had sprung up and the bay was a little choppy, so we splashed and bumped along at no great speed. Mr. Daddles did not pay much attention to the management of his long oar, but got into a discussion with Jimmy about what they would buy with their share of the treasure. Jimmy said his first choice would be a sailing yacht. Next, after that, he thought he should buy a steam−yacht. Mr. Daddles said he should buy a piano.

"A piano! That's funny. What would you buy next?"

"A stick of dynamite."

"Dynamite! What for?"

"To blow up the piano."

"Why do you want to do that?"

"Well, you see the piano I'm going to buy belongs to a girl who lives next door to me at home. She practises on it all day long. Sometimes I get so I almost wish that she didn't have a piano at all."

Ed Mason voted for a horse, and I for a bicycle.

"I don't see how we can dig up much treasure, anyway," was Ed Mason's comment, "not even if we find where it's buried."

"Why not?"

"What have we got to dig with?"

That was true,—we had forgotten to bring shovels.

"Never mind, this is only prospecting," Mr. Daddles reminded us. "We'll look around, and if we see any place that looks treasury, we'll come back another time."

We rowed around to the westerly side of Fishback Island, as the car−driver had suggested, and landed in a little pebbly cove.

Mr. Daddles was delighted with the appearance of the island. "I don't wonder they came here for treasure," said he. "It's the most likely looking place for a pirate's lair I ever saw in my life. Look at that tree on the hill,—a regular landmark. And look at the smuggler's cave!"

He pointed to a rocky cave on the shore, just above our landing− place. We walked over to examine it, but we couldn't find anything there except some egg−shells and paper boxes, where someone had eaten luncheon. Then we started on an exploring trip around the island. It was almost bare of trees, rocky in many places, and partly covered with scrubby grass. We found half a dozen pits and shafts where the treasure−seekers had been at work. We climbed the little hill where the tree stood,—it was gnarled and broken, "a blasted tree" declared Mr. Daddles in rapture.

"Here's where the treasure chest ought to be buried," he remarked, "with the skeleton of a pirate or two on top of it."

"This is where the old dead horse was buried," Ed Mason observed, digging into some loose earth with his foot.

"That must have meant something," I said. "Why should they bring a horse way up here to bury him?"

"Perhaps they didn't," Ed replied, "perhaps the horse lived up here."

"I'm afraid you were never made for a treasure−seeker," said Mr. Daddles.

Jimmy Toppan pointed to the beach on the other side of the hill. There was a smooth, sandy shore.

"Why not go in swimming down there?" he suggested.

The idea was a good one; we were not making much progress toward finding any treasure, and the beach certainly looked like a good place for a swim. The three of us ran down the hill, pulling off our clothes as we ran. Mr. Daddles lingered for a while, but presently joined us, and we all had a swim.

After we had dressed we walked around the island, keeping near the water. Everywhere there were signs of digging, but no signs of treasure. We were in no hurry, so we strolled along, on the watch for anything we might discover. The shore of the cove where we landed was covered with flat stones, and we spent some time skipping them on the water, and a still longer time throwing stones at an empty bottle which we found and set afloat. After a while Jimmy Toppan thought we ought to be going.

"There's a fog−bank out there," said he, "and it will be awful thick if it comes in."

We all looked out to sea, where a gray mass hung over the water.

"Let's have one more look on the hill," said Mr. Daddles, "remember how sorry we'd be if someone else came here after us, and found a chest of golden guineas."

So up to the hill we went again, and prowled around, kicking at loose rocks, and stamping wherever the earth sounded hollow.

"Under the tree is a more likely place," Mr. Daddles reminded us, "they always bury it under a tree."

"We ought to start," said Jimmy, "the wind has come out east, and that fog will be here before long."

"Just a minute—look around here, boys,—we'll find it, if you'll only look around."

And he scrabbled around at a great rate.

"Leave no stone unturned," said he, turning over two of them.

But we found nothing at all. Nothing, that is, except dirt, grass, mullein−stalks, and beetles or crickets under the stones. Mr. Daddles hunted energetically, pulling up grass by the roots, digging in the soil with his fingers, and kicking at stones with the toes of his tennis−shoes, until he shouted "Ouch!" and jumped about holding his foot in his hand. Then he set to again, so excitedly that we looked at him in astonishment.

"P'r'aps we'd better start," said Jimmy again.

"In a minute, in a minute," exclaimed Mr. Daddles, poking about. "Hunt, boys, hunt,—I feel sure we'll find something if we only hunt."

We hunted, scraped over the earth and sand around that tree, and moved every stone and pebble.

"I tell you we must find some treasure here,—we MUST!"

"How can we?" asked Ed, "if there isn't any to find."

"But there is. I know there is!"

We stared at him.

"I know there is, because I buried it myself."

"You did? When? How? Where? What for?"

"When you all went down to swim. I thought you would feel disappointed not to find any treasure, so I buried all I had,—a dollar and a quarter,—two halves, two dimes, and a nickel. And now we've got to find it, or we can't get back on that horse−car. We'll have to walk,—or else be as bad as Ike Flanders."

Then we began to hunt in dead earnest. We pulled up every blade of grass, felt in all the crevices of the rocks, and dug a toad out of his hole. He looked highly surprised and indignant, but he gave us no help about the money.

"Well, I'm sorry,—sorry to get you into all this mess," said Mr. Daddles. "We'd better leave it, I suppose, and go back to Squid Cove. We can walk—and if that really is fog—"

"It's fog, all right," said Jimmy.

There was a sea−turn. The wind smelt salty and damp, and the fog was creeping in. It was not more than a

mile distant. We all knew enough about fogs not to want to be out in the bay in one, without a compass, and when it was nearly sunset. So we hurried down to the boat, and pushed off.

"If anyone ever asks me if there is treasure on Fishback Island," reflected Mr. Daddles, "I'll know what to tell 'em."

The fog shut down thick before we got to the Cove, but we were already so near that it didn't make much difference. We left the boat at the slip where we had first seen it. The horse−car was standing at the house, but we did not look for the driver. Instead, we set out on our tramp back to Little Duck Island.

That was a dismal and tiresome walk. It was almost dark when we started, and quite dark in half an hour,—a thick, foggy night. Not one of us had looked at the road much on the way over; we had been listening to the car−driver's battles with crime. It would not have done us much good if we had looked, for everything changes on a foggy night. After a while we came to a fork in the road.

"Which of these is ours?" asked Jimmy Toppan.

"That's easy enough," said Ed Mason, "follow the car−track."

"Yes," said Mr. Daddles, "but there's a track leading up both of 'em."

"Toss up a coin," I suggested.

"I will, if you'll go back to that isle of treasure and find me a coin."

So we chose the left−hand road. In doing so we chose wrong, for after we had gone about a mile we met a man in a wagon, who told us that the road led to Dockam's Hole.

"We don't want to go to Dockam's Hole," said Mr. Daddles; "back to the cross−roads! I begin to think I'll never see my home and mother again. This treasure−hunting is all it's cracked up to be, —and even worse."

The man peered out of his wagon.

"Say, I'd give you fellers a ride, if there wa'n't so many of ye."

And he whipped up his horse and drove away into the darkness. In an hour or more we reached the beginning of the causeway, and fifteen minutes later we were in Bailey's Harbor.

"I wouldn't mind something to eat," said Ed Mason.

"Some ham and eggs," I suggested.

"And some of those mince turnovers," remarked Jimmy Toppan, almost breaking into a run.

"And some coffee," said Mr. Daddles.

"Do you suppose there is any of that chowder left?" asked Ed Mason; "it's always better warmed over."

"The Captain must have had his supper long ago," said I. "And gone to bed, too," put in Mr. Daddles,—"say, do you know, it's pretty late?"

To judge by the looks of Bailey's Harbor it might have been midnight. There was not a soul on the street, and only one or two houses had a light.

"Oh, well, they go to bed early here."

"Don't want to worry the Captain. He expected us back before supper."

"We'll relieve his mind now, all right."

"Gee!" said Jimmy, as we tramped down the hill, "but I'll be glad to get aboard the 'Hoppergrass.' There's nothing in the world so cosy as the cabin of a boat, on a night like this."

The same idea struck all of us, and we hurried down the wharf. The fog had lifted a little, and blew by us in wisps and fragments.

"For one thing," remarked Ed Mason, "I'd like to get into some dry clothes. I'm beginning to be soaked."

"Oh, we'll be all right again," I said, "when we're aboard. The Captain—"

I stopped suddenly. We all halted on the end of the wharf, and stared across the inlet. We looked at the spot where our boat had anchored, and then we looked up and down the inlet. The "Hoppergrass" was gone!

CHAPTER V. MIDNIGHT BURGLARS

"What!" exclaimed Jimmy Toppan, "gone?"

"Gone," replied Ed Mason, "sailed away and left us. Like old Aaron Halyard, in 'The Angel of Death'."

Mr. Daddles looked at him and grinned.

"At least, you remember your classics," he said, "you can fall back on the consolations of literature in a time of sorrow."

"But he can't be gone," put in Jimmy, "he wouldn't sail off and leave us like this. He must be somewheres about."

And he commenced to shout "On board the 'Hoppergrass'!" He got us to shout the same phrase. The sailor−like way of putting it did not please Ed Mason.

"Oh, I don't see any sense in shouting 'On board' of anything, when the whole trouble is that we're not on board."

There was an echo from a building across the inlet—an insulting echo—which repeated the phrase, or rather the last three letters of the last word in an irritating fashion.

"I feel like one," said Mr. Daddles, "but I don't like to be told so by a blooming old echo."

Then we all stood and looked at one another, and wondered what we should do.

"Friendless and alone, in a strange place," said Mr. Daddles.

"Wet," said Ed Mason.

"Hungry," I added.

"Tired," said Jimmy.

"With no money," remarked Mr. Daddles.

"And nothing that we could do with it, if we had it," Jimmy Toppan gloomily reflected, shoving his hands deep into his trousers pockets.

"And it's ten o'clock," I suggested.

"Eleven," said Jimmy.

"Twelve," thought Ed Mason.

"Our case is desperate," said Mr. Daddles, "but we'll pull through, somehow. Perhaps the Captain went treasure−hunting himself, and has got lost in the fog. This has been a busy little day. Now, let's see. I think I remember a woman up the road here, who used to let rooms, or—"

He broke off, and slapped the back which was nearest him,—it was mine.

"Well, Great Scott! That echo was right!"

"Why? What's the matter?"

"The idea of our standing here for a second, when there is a house, and maybe things to eat, and beds to sleep in, anyhow,—all waiting for us!"

"Where?"

"My uncle's, of course!"

"That's so!"

"That's bully! Come on!"

"And that's not the best of it, either," he said. "We can make an attack on that house like a real gang of burglars, and enter it in true burglar style. I've always wanted to have a chance to commit a burglary. There's nothing so exciting in the world as a burglar's life,—but what chance do you get to lead one? None at all. I was brought up to believe that it's all wrong,—many's the time my poor old grandmother told me: 'Never be a burglar.' And the effect of that teaching has not worn off. I still believe that it's wrong to be a burglar. Besides, they put you in jail for it. But this,—they can't object to our breaking into my own uncle's. Even my grandmother would approve, I'm sure. Of course, there won't be as much plunder as if Aunt Fanny were at home,—she's probably taken all the pie away with her. But there'll be something in the pantry, even if it's only pickles. What do you say,—shall we burglarize the house in style?"

We all agreed in delight. Mr. Daddles's enthusiasm, and his curious ideas made us quite forget how tired and

wet and hungry we had felt. The fog had settled down thick again, and the air and earth were damp with it. Great drops of moisture gathered on the wood−work of the wharf, and on the burdock leaves that grew between gaps in the planking. High overhead the sky must have been cloudless, for we could see the moon, now and then, like a dim dinner−plate, when there was a moment's rift in the fog.

"Just the night for a deed like this," said Mr. Daddles; "come on! But wait a minute—there's no sense in being burglars way off at this distance, we'll be,—let's see,—we'll be smugglers, first, —a gang of smugglers."

He insisted on forming us in single file. He led, followed by Jimmy, then I came, and Ed Mason brought up the rear.

"Remember!" whispered our leader, "we are smugglers till we get to the top of the hill. After that,—burglars."

We started up the wharf on tip−toes. This was rather unnecessary, for as we all had on rubber−soled shoes we could walk very quietly even if we went in the usual manner. Besides, it gets tiresome to walk on your tip−toes after a few minutes. But Mr. Daddles kept on that way almost to the end of the journey. When we reached the head of the wharf he turned around, and spoke again, with one hand held mysteriously at the side of his mouth, so not to be overheard.

"Now, boys," said he, "if we meet any King's officers,—GIVE 'EM THE COLD STEEL! If you haven't got any cold steel, give it to 'em luke warm. Give it to 'em somehow, anyhow. Remember, it's them as try to keep us honest fellows from a livelihood, just because we run a few casks of brandy and some French laces without paying anything to King Jarge,—bless him!"

And Mr. Daddles solemnly took off his hat.

"Now, are you ready, boys?"

"Yes," we all whispered.

"No, no! Not 'yes'," returned Mr. Daddles, with an agonized expression; "you must say 'Ay, ay,—heave ahead,' and you must GROWL it."

We all tried to growl: "Ay, ay,—heave ahead," but we didn't make much of a success of it.

"That's fair," said Mr. Daddles, "only fair. You need lots of practice. We ought to have rehearsed this before we started. It's embarrassing to do it here, with the eyes of the world upon us, so to speak. Now try again."

We tried again, and our leader said we had done much better.

"Ed," he said, "walk with more of a roll in your gait,—a deep−sea roll. See—this way. And pull your hats down low over your eyes, and glance furtively from right to left."

"I can't roll, nor anything else," Ed remarked, "until I get this pebble out of my shoe."

And he sat down on the door−step of a house, and took off one shoe. As he did so, the clock in a church belfry struck eleven.

"Eleven," reflected Mr. Daddles. "I mean: 'tis the signal, men! If the Cap'n has not failed us the lugger should be in the cove at this hour,—and we coves should be in the lugger, too. Ha! how like ye the pleasantry? 'Tis a pretty wit I have, as no less a man than Mr. Pope himself told me at the Coca Tree—No; I don't believe Mr. Pope would know the mate of a gang of smugglers,—do you?"

Jimmy Toppan and I assured him that the only Mr. Pope we knew was librarian of the Sunday School at home, and that if he knew any smugglers he had kept it a secret. Ed Mason had got rid of his pebble, and he now joined us again.

"Are you ready, men?"

"Ay, ay,—heave ahead!"

So we started once more. The streets were black as ink. They were paved with cobblestones, and there did not seem to be any side− walks. The buildings were fishermen's and clammers' huts, boat− houses, and small shops,—all dark and deserted. The fog shut out everything at a short distance. At the top of the hill there was one dim light in the rear of a little shanty.

"Hist!"

Mr. Daddles stopped us.

"It's the lair of the old fox himself!"

"Who?"

"None but black−hearted Gregory the Gauger. Him it was—or one of his minions—that killed old Diccon, our messmate, but a hundred paces from the cave, last Michaelmas. Shall we go in and slit his weazand?"

We crept up to the window and looked in. A little man, with chin−whiskers like a paintbrush, sat inside, shucking clams by the light of a lantern. We decided not to go in and slit his weazand. Suddenly he looked up, as if he had heard us, and then rising, started for the door. We all darted back hastily, and hid in the shadow of the next building. He came out, emptied the pail of clam−shells, looked toward the sky, yawned, and went in again.

As soon as he had closed the door, we were on the march. We turned the corner and took the road to the right. The walking was smoother here, and the street broader. We were soon past most of the shanties, and following a country road, where the buildings were far apart. They seemed to be large houses, set back from the road, with carefully kept lawns. Mr. Daddles stopped and peered at one of them through the fog.

"Here it is, I think. This one—or the next. No; it's this one, I remember the fence. It would never do to walk right up the front path when you're going to crack a crib. We'll have to get in a back window, anyway, so we'd better go a little farther down the road, get over the wall, circle round, and come up from the rear."

We carried out this plan, so far as getting over the wall, and then set out across a field. This was high ground, but the village behind us was still covered with the fog, and all we could see in its direction was a white cloud of vapor. The road we had just left wound on, down the hill again, and toward what might have been a dark clump of trees. The grass in the field was short and scrubby, and worn quite bare in places. There was a path which Mr. Daddles knew, and this we followed in single file.

All of a sudden we heard a strange, thumping sound, right in front of us. We stopped short. There was a dark, indistinct mass of something moving slowly toward us. It seemed to be humped up, like a man crawling forward on his hands and knees. Almost as soon as we stopped, it—whatever it was—stopped too. It was a very unpleasant thing to find in a lonely field, in the middle of the night, and as I stared at it, I felt a curious prickling sensation run all over me.

We all stood in perfect silence. So did the thing. It looked like a man, only it was a very big and broad man, and also a very low and stumpy one, as I said. Why he should be crawling along in that open field, on his hands and knees, was something I could not understand. Unless,—and this gave me another chilly feeling— unless he were a real burglar. I wanted to run, but I was ashamed to do so for fear of what the others would think. Moreover, although I was afraid to stay there, I was also afraid to run, for I didn't like the idea of that thing chasing me through the fog.

So we all stood there in a group. At last Mr. Daddles stepped toward the thing.

"What do you want?" he said, in a low tone.

There was no answer. The thing stayed perfectly motionless. This was getting terrible. I could feel my heart thumping away, and my temples seemed to be bursting with the blood which was pumped into them.

"What do you want?" said Mr. Daddles again; "come, who are you and what do you want?"

He took another step toward the thing, and then suddenly jumped back. The thing seemed to sway toward us, and then it uttered a horribly loud:

"Moo−o−o−o−o−o!"

It was a second or two before we could laugh.

"Well, you miserable old cow!" exclaimed Mr. Daddles, "you nearly scared a crowd of burglars to death!"

And he walked up to her, where she had already begun to feed again, and slapped her fat side. She paid no attention to him, but kept on cropping the grass.

"Come on, now, boys. I thought we were attacked by a hippopotamus, at least."

"I thought it was a man without any legs," said Jimmy.

"I thought it was a real burglar," said I.

"I dunno what I thought it was," said Ed Mason, "and that was the worst of it."

And if any of you who read this think we were a silly lot to be frightened by an old cow, it is because you have never met one at night, in a thick fog. You try it some time, and see.

We went down a little slope, and came up behind the house and barn. We crossed a vegetable patch, and then a flower−garden.

Jimmy stopped Mr. Daddles.

"We'd better look out for the dog."

"No; my uncle never keeps one,—he doesn't like 'em."

In a grape−arbor, right back of the house, we paused to decide on a plan of action.

"We'll try that window first," said our leader, pointing, "and then the others on the veranda. I don't want to break one if we can help it. If we have to, we'll take a basement window. You stay here a second."

He darted out of the arbor, and ran noiselessly up the steps. He tried a window, gave it up, and tip−toed along the veranda to another. No sooner had he started to raise the sash than he turned and beckoned to us. In an instant we were out of the arbor, and at the window with him.

"This is great luck,—look!"

He raised the window without any trouble at all.

"Very careless of Aunt Fanny,—but it saves us from having to smash one."

We all climbed inside a small room. When he had closed the window, and pulled down the shade, Ed Mason lighted a match.

"The pantry!" we all exclaimed.

"Yes, we've landed on our feet at last. Is that shade down? Light the gas ... keep it turned low,—that's right. Now, let's see. We won't find much,—family's gone away ... taken all the pie with 'em, as I said, still, there ought to be something—"

We were all rummaging amongst the shelves and cupboards.

"Hum!" said Mr. Daddles, "stove−polish. Anybody want any stove− polish? Raw oatmeal,—that's a little better, but not much. Not much choice between 'em. What's this? ... Starch. Nice lot of nutritious food Aunt Fanny leaves for her burglars. Now, with some flat−irons and a couple of stove−lids we could make up a jolly little meal. What have you got there?"

I had found some dried currants in a tin box, Jimmy had a bottle of vanilla extract, while Ed Mason exhibited a box of tapioca, or something of the sort.

"Well, well,—this is more careless of Aunt Fanny than leaving the window unlocked. No wonder she left it unlocked,—she wanted burglars to come in, and choke to death. I never saw such a lot of foolish food. Here's some raw macaroni,—another toothsome dish— nutmegs—pepper—sticky fly−paper,—better and better. Perfectly delicious!"

"Here you are!" said Ed Mason.

He had found a cake−box, with half a loaf of pound−cake,—the kind that keeps for years. Just at the same instant I had climbed up on a shelf and captured two glass tumblers whose contents seemed promising. Sure enough,—their labels bore the fascinating words: "Raspberry Jam." Jimmy Toppan presently discovered a can of soda− crackers. Mr. Daddles plunged once more into a cupboard and came forth with a can of the stuff you shine brass with,—the kind with the horrible smell.

"Always fortunate," he murmured; "well, this will do,—what you've discovered. I don't seem to have contributed much to the picnic. We'll get some water to drink, and take this into the dining−room. I'm about ready to sit down and rest. Come on,—softly, now. Turn out the light. ... Here's the kitchen ... no, it isn't, either,— it's a laundry. ... That's funny ... been making improvements, I guess. Here we are—give me another match. No, don't light the gas,—no need ... and here's—what's this? Butler's pantry ... yes ... passage ... here's the dining−room. Here we are. Shades down? Yes ... light the gas ... hullo! Where's the old stuffed sea gull gone? New paper! Oh, well, it's two years since I was here."

Mr. Daddles wandered around the room for a while, with a puzzled air, but the rest of us were too hungry to pay much attention to him. Ed Mason filled a water−pitcher in the butler's pantry, and Jimmy brought some tumblers from a closet. I opened the jam, and got some plates and knives. Then we all sat down and began to eat. I have never tasted anything better than the crackers and jam. Nobody said anything for a few minutes: we just ate.

Suddenly Mr. Daddles held up his hand,—

"Sh−h−h−h−h!"

We stopped everything and listened. For a minute or two we had quite forgotten that we were midnight burglars, and we were going on as if we were right at home.

"Sh−h−h−h−h−h−h!" said Mr. Daddles again, "don't you hear something?"

We all did hear something that very instant. No one could help hearing it. It was the strangest sound,—as much like the sawing of wood as anything I can think of. Except that toward the end of the stroke it seemed to run into some tough knots in the wood, for it made two or three funny, little noises, like "yop, yop, yop." Then it stopped for a second or two, and then there was another long stroke, with "yop, yop" on the end.

"Do you s'pose it's another cow?" whispered Jimmy.

Mr. Daddles shook his head, and held up his hand again for silence. The noise continued with perfect regularity for half a minute,—then it stopped altogether.

"It's in the wall," I suggested, pointing. "P'r'aps it's a mouse gnawing."

"It's more like a buffalo gnawing," said Ed Mason.

"Sh−h−h−h−h−h!" said Mr. Daddles, "we ought to have looked about the house a little before we began to eat. I think that's only the branch of a tree, or something like that, scraping against the house outside. Anyhow, we'd better investigate."

He got up, and lighted one of the candles on the side−board. Then he very carefully opened the other door of the dining−room, and we all followed him out into a hall. There we listened again, but could hear nothing. He led the way up the back−stairs, and we tip− toed behind him. The candle which he carried flickered, and cast a dim light into two rooms which opened off the landing. One was a nursery, with children's blocks, stuffed elephants, and Noah's Ark animals on the floor, and on a couch. The moon, which had come out of the fog, shone in at a window, and its light fell right on a white rabbit sitting under a doll's parasol. He had tea−cups and saucers on the floor in front of him, but he was perfectly quiet. The noise did not come from him. The room on the other side of the landing was an ordinary bed−room, quite empty.

We stole along the landing toward the front of the house. Here were two more large bed−rooms. The beds were smooth and undisturbed, and both rooms were quiet as the grave.

"Nothing here," whispered Mr. Daddles, "we'll go down the front stairs."

He spoke in the lowest kind of a whisper,—I could hardly make out what he said. But he beckoned toward the stairs, and we all tip−toed in that direction. I can see how that hall looked,—I can see it now, just as I saw it, as we came down stairs. The wood− work was all painted white, some little moonlight came in through the glass over the front door, and that, with the candle, made it fairly clear. The stairs were broad, and they sloped gradually. There were two big portraits on the wall, one of them over the stairs. Rooms opened to right and left of the front door, and in the corner of the hall, to the right, stood a big clock. It ticked slowly and solemnly, and a little ship, above the dial, rocked back and forth on some painted waves. I caught Mr. Daddles by the sleeve.

"The clock is going," I whispered.

He nodded. "Eight day clock," he whispered back.

Then we continued down stairs, still walking without a sound. Just as Mr. Daddles reached the foot of the stairs, the noise began again. The long−drawn, sawing sound, and then the "yop, yop, yop" so loud that it nearly made us fall over backwards in surprise. There was no possible doubt from what place it came. It was from the room nearest the tall clock.

Mr. Daddles instantly blew out the candle, and then we all stepped very carefully to the threshold, and looked in. The room was a library, with books from the floor to the ceiling. The gas was lighted, but turned down low, and there were the smouldering embers of a fire on the hearth. Seated in an arm chair in front of the fire, with his feet up in another chair, was a big, fat policeman. He was sound asleep, with his coat unbuttoned, his gray helmet on the floor beside him, and his brass buttons and badge glittering in the gas−light. On a couch at the other side of the room lay another policeman, in his shirt−sleeves. He, too, was asleep, his mouth was open, and from it came the most outrageous snores I ever heard.

"Whee−e−e—yar−r−r−r—yaw−w−w—yop, yop, yop," he would go. And then he would begin it again, and go through it once more.

We looked at this spectacle for about twenty seconds. Then we all turned around, and tip−toed back, through the hall, and into the dining−room.

"Somehow," said Mr. Daddles, "I think we'd better get out of this house."

"So do I," came from all the rest of us, like a chorus.

There was no dispute about it at all. Mr. Daddles and Ed Mason started for the pantry without delay.

"P'r'aps we'd better put back these dishes," whispered Jimmy; "they might find 'em, and that would start 'em after us."

But neither Mr. Daddles nor Ed heard him at all. The latter merely said "Hurry up!" and then disappeared toward the kitchen. It struck me that Jimmy was right, and although I was anxious to get out of the house as quick as possible, it did not seem likely that anything would wake up those policemen for hours to come. So we put the

dishes back into the butler's pantry, set back the chairs, and fixed the room, as well as we could, in the way that we had found it. Just as I put out the gas Jimmy slipped the pound−cake into his pocket.

"We might as well have this," he said.

Then we hurried through the kitchen, and into the pantry. The others had left the window open. Jimmy went through it first, and I followed. As I stepped out into the moonlight I felt someone grab my arm. I looked up, expecting to see Mr. Daddles. But it was not he. Instead, I looked into the face of a big man, with a long beard. He had a pitchfork in his other hand. Two other men had Mr. Daddles by the arms, and some others were holding Ed and Jimmy. There seemed to be quite a big crowd of people on that veranda.

CHAPTER VI. WE ARE OFFERED LODGINGS

The man with the pitchfork bent down and squinted in at the window, still holding me tight by the arm.

"Any more on ye comin' out?" he inquired.

"No, there aren't any more of us," said Mr. Daddles, "you've got the whole gang now."

"Better wait a second, Eb," said one of the men who was holding Mr. Daddles. He was a fat man, with ears that stuck out the way an elephant's do, when he waves them. "Better wait a second,—yer can't tell."

"You'll waste your time," said Mr. Daddles, "there's no one left in there but the policemen,—and you can't wake them up from here."

"P'licemen?" queried the fat man.

"Whatcher talkin' about?" asked the man with the pitchfork.

"I'm talking about the two policemen who are getting their eight hours in the library," Mr. Daddles replied, "Poor things! I hope we didn't disturb them."

"Don't yer believe him, Eb," said another man, "it's some gum game."

"Look here," I said, "this is all a mistake. We're not burglars. This house—"

"Yes, we know all about that," said a man, "we've heard this feller tell all about his Uncle Alfred Peabody's house. It's a fust−rate story,—only Uncle Alfred's is next door. This is T. Parker Littlefield's, an' you know it, too."

"I'm afraid we did strike the wrong house, Sam," said Mr. Daddles, "you see—"

"You betcher struck the wrong house,—you're right there, fast enough," said a little man, who was hopping up and down in his excitement. He was the only one of them who was not holding one of us. He had short, paint−brush whiskers, and I remembered him as the man in the shanty,—the one whom Mr. Daddles called "black− hearted Gregory the Gauger."

"You ought to be ashamed of yerself," said he, "leadin' boys into crime!"

"Do you mean me?" asked Mr. Daddles.

"Yas—I mean you,—in the white pants," he replied, looking with great scorn at Mr. Daddles's duck trousers, "I've heard how you perfessional crooks git boys to climb up on water spouts an' let yer in. I seen yer jest after yer passed my place, an' I knowed what yer was up to."

"Well, you are quite wrong,—you're way off," said Mr. Daddles, very seriously. "I don't suppose it will do any good, but it will save you people from making yourselves ridiculous. It's all true, —what I told you. I thought we were getting into Mr. Peabody's house, and he IS my uncle. See here,—do you think we LOOK like burglars?"

"Can't tell what yer look like," said a man, "'we caught yer in—"

"In partiseps criminy," said Gregory the Gauger, "that's what it was. An' whatever you look like, you'll look different tomorrer mornin'. I don't cal'late you know anything about breakin' an' enterin' Dr. Bigelow's last night?"

"No, we don't. We weren't here last night."

"Course not, course not. Nor about bustin' into the Ellis place last Sat'day night?"

"No, nor about that either."

"Course not!"

The men who were holding Ed Mason had been seized with the idea of searching him. So they made Ed turn out his pockets in the hope of finding some stolen goods. They examined the jack−knife, cork− stopper with three fish−hooks in it, and lead sinker which they found, and argued whether this was plunder from the house or not. Then they started to search the rest of us, and we all had to empty our pockets. Not until they came to the pound−cake, in Jimmy Toppan's pocket, did they find anything of consequence, and as he admitted that he had taken that from the house, they felt that they had made a real discovery. They handed it over to the pitchfork man.

"Here, Eb," said Gregory the Gauger, "yer want to keep this—it's everdence."

At this moment one of the policemen put his head out the window, and Eb promptly dropped the cake, and grabbed the policeman by the shoulder, remarking: "I thought there was another one on ye!"

Then he tried to drag the policeman out of the window by force. The policeman planted his feet firmly, and, as he weighed about three hundred pounds, he successfully resisted all efforts to drag him.

"What in thunder you tryin' to do?" he asked in a high, squeaky voice.

"TRYIN' TO DO? I'll show ye,—resistin' a officer! Here, Justin, give us a hand here, won't ye?"

In the meantime the policeman was blowing a whistle to summon his mate. Eb stooped down again, and he and the policeman looked in each other's faces,—their noses only half an inch apart. Eb had seen the brass buttons.

"Be you a officer?"

"You'll find out whether I am or not!" said the furious policeman, standing up and blowing his whistle again.

"Then watcher doin' here?"

"I'm here mindin' my own business,—I was sent here to look after this house—orders of the Chief. Who in thunder are you?"

"This here's the Kunsterble," said Gregory the Gauger, nodding his head toward Eb, "an' we've ketched the burglars. Here they be!"

The policeman blinked at us, and once more blew his whistle. At last the other policeman came, looking about half awake. He was the one who had been snoring so loud.

"What's all this ruction about?" he asked in a very cross tone. The big policeman said something to him in a low voice, and they both stepped out on the veranda. The first thing that the sleepy policeman started to do was to cuff all of us boys. But Mr. Daddles spoke up sharply, threatening to get him into trouble for it, and even Eb protected us.

"No call to do that, Mister," he said, "we'll see to gettin' these young fellers put where they belong for tonight. Tomorrer we'll hold Court, an' find out what's what."

Everyone began to talk at once. It came out that the policemen had been sent there from the town on the mainland, at the request of Mr. Littlefield, who owned the house. He had gone away the day before, and as there had been two burglaries in Bailey's Harbor, or its vicinity, he did not like to leave his place unprotected. Eb and Gregory the Gauger wished to enter the house, "an' go over it to see if it's all right." The policemen refused to allow them to enter,—probably because they did not wish it to be seen how they had been keeping watch.

This made Eb very angry. He seemed to feel that the dignity of his office, "Kunsterble of this here island," was not getting its proper respect. But I think that the uniforms and brass buttons of the policemen rather frightened him. The only sign of his high station was a badge, pinned to his suspenders. The two policemen ended the discussion by going inside the house once more,—"to make up their lost sleep" suggested Mr. Daddles. They retired within and shut the window.

Then Eb and the rest of them started to march us back to the village. The news of our capture had spread and there must have been twenty or thirty men and boys waiting for us at the front gate. Some of them had lanterns, and two or three had shot−guns or rifles.

"We left Bailey's Harbor very modestly," Mr. Daddles remarked, "but our return is certainly impressive."

"You better keep your mouth shut, young feller," said one of the men, "committin' burglary aint no joke."

"That's right, that's right," said Gregory the Gauger, who was flitting about from one to the other of us, "an' whatever may be said against yer, may be used in yer favor, too,—better remember that."

The constable was still more indignant because the crowd nocked around us.

"Clear outer here! Clear outer here!" he shouted two or three times. But they only laughed at him. Then we set out over the dusty road. First came Eb, with two other men leading Mr. Daddles, then Jimmy and Ed Mason, each securely held, while I was at the end of the procession, gripped by the arm and collar by a tall man, who never uttered a word. At our heels and doing their best to step on MY heels whenever they could, came a mob of boys and men.

When we got back to the Harbor, it had quite changed its appearance. From being a dark and deserted place it was now rather lively. There were lights in most of the houses and people waiting in the street.

On our way out of the village, an hour or two before, we had noticed a tent at the edge of the inlet, just above Gregory's hut. The people in the tent had turned out now,—they were three young men, who seemed to have been camping there. They had hung a lighted Japanese lantern over the door of the tent, and one of the campers was playing on a banjo.

The constable halted the whole procession, and ordered one of his assistants to put the banjo−player under arrest.

"I won't have it!" he shouted, "he's disturbin' the peace!"

Everyone laughed at this,—there was so much noise in the street that the banjo could hardly be heard. But a man went across the road, took the player by the arm, and told him that he must come along. The banjo−player seemed to be perfectly dumb−founded; his friends gathered round, argued, threatened, and finally laughed, and tried to treat the whole thing as a joke. Eb was stubborn, and the man joined our parade, with his banjo under his arm.

The police−station and jail were both in a new building half way up the hill. Into this we were hurried, and the doors were shut.

"Keep 'em all out!" shouted the constable, "keep 'em all out, except members of the possy!"

The "possy" seemed to consist of Eb himself, the men who were guarding us,—five or six of them—and Gregory the Gauger. I never found out just what office he held, but he was clearly the most important man of the lot,—except Eb. The constable leaned his pitchfork against the wall, lighted one or two lamps, sat down behind a desk and put on a pair of spectacles. Then he jerked his head, as if to beckon, toward the banjo−player.

"Name?" said he, picking up a pen.

"My name is Warren Sprague," said the man.

"Occupation?"

"I suppose you would call me a student."

"Don't yer know that yer was disturbin' the peace—"

"Contrary to statoot," put in Gregory the Gauger.

"Shut up, Mose!" said the constable.

"I thought that the peace was pretty well disturbed already," said the banjo−player,−"there was so much noise in the street that it woke us all up. I couldn't sleep,—none of us could sleep, and I didn't see any harm in playing a tune. Whose peace could I disturb?"

"Looky here, young feller, it won't do yer any good to get flip!"

"I'm not going to get flip."

"Don't yer know that it's agin the law to play on a moosical instrument after eleven P. M.?"

"No, sir, I didn't know it. Are you going to have me executed for it? Because if you are, I hope that you'll let me consult a spiritual adviser, first."

"You're too fresh, young feller. I might have let yer off—"

"With a reppermand," put in Gregory.

"Mose, you shut your head!" said the constable.

Then he turned again to the prisoner.

"I mighta let yer off, but now I'm goin' to keep yer right here in the lockup, an' consider the case tomorrer mornin'. Take him below, Justin." Justin was the fat man, with the fan−like ears. He stepped forward.

"Number six?" he asked the constable.

"Yup. Put him in number six."

Justin took the prisoner by the arm, took the banjo in his other hand, and together they started down stairs. They passed in front of us to reach the stairs, and as they did so, the young man turned to Mr. Daddles with a smile:

"If you ever get out alive, remember me to my friends, out there. Tell 'em I passed away, thinking of them."

"Silence in the Court!" cried Gregory.

The constable was now in a fury.

"If he locks up a man for banjo−playing—" murmured Mr. Daddles,—

"He'll have us burned at the stake," suggested Jimmy Toppan.

I had been feeling very unhappy ever since we arrived in the police−station. It looked to me as if we were in a pretty bad fix. The constable was so savage toward everybody it didn't seem possible that he would believe that we had broken into the house by mistake. Also, I was so tired that I was ready to drop. We had been up since four o'clock that morning, and it was now after midnight. It seemed to be years since we had left the "Hoppergrass," and during the last few hours we had walked over a dozen miles.

"Now," said the constable, "we'll make short work of you. Names?"

He really seemed to be less indignant with us, than with the banjo−player. Burglary was a smaller offence in

his eyes than "disturbin' the peace,"—with a banjo.

He soon had the names of Edward Mason, James Rogers Toppan, and Samuel Edwards added to his list.

"Name?" he snapped to Mr. Daddles.

"Richard Hendricks."

"Why!" exclaimed Ed Mason, "I thought your name was Daddles!"

"Hear that? hear that?" put in Gregory the Gauger, "that's his Elias!"

"No, it's not an alias,—in the sense that you mean. It's a nickname. There is no use in going through this again. What I told you in the first place is all true,—and we'll prove it to you in the morning. I know, or used to know, a number of people here. I know Mr. Littlefield, my uncle's neighbor, but if he's gone away, that won't do any good. But I know an old lady down the street here, who lets rooms, and sells sweet−peas, and painted shells, and things. Isn't there such a woman?"

"What's her name? S'pose there is,—what of it?"

"I can't recall her name now. She could tell you who I am. But if you're determined to lock us up until the morning you might as well do it. We're all tired out, and we've got to sleep somewhere. I warn you that you're making a mistake and that we're not the burglars you are looking for. We came in here this afternoon in a boat, as I told you."

"I told you they come in a boat," said a man.

"What was the name of the boat?" asked the constable.

"The Hoppergrass."

"The—what's−that−you−say?"

"Hoppergrass."

"I never heard of no such boat."

Mr. Daddles was silent.

"Where's the boat, now?"

"I don't know,—she sailed away."

The constable laughed.

"You needn't think you can play it over me, with any such story as that, young feller."

Justin had now returned from down stairs, and the constable ordered him and another man to conduct us all below.

"Put 'em in number four an' five."

"Number four an' five it is!"

So we descended the stairs. Below, there was a brick−lined corridor, with three cells on each side. At the end a kerosene lamp hung in a bracket on the wall. This was the only light.

"Hullo!" said a cheerful voice, "how long did you get? Life− sentence?"

It was the man who called himself Sprague. His banjo stood against the wall just outside his cell, and under the lamp.

"No," said Mr. Daddles, "we're awaiting our trial in the morning, the same as you."

"What was your crime, anyway? Whistling?"

Justin shook his head at the man in the cell.

"You fellers better look out,—all on ye," said he. "Eb's pretty mad. An' he's got a bad temper when he gets riled, I tell you. An' folks are all stirred up about this burglin' business."

He looked at us doubtfully, and shook his head again. The other man—he was the tall, silent one, who had led me along the road− opened the last cell on the right and told Ed Mason and me to go in. Mr. Daddles and Jimmy were put in a cell across the corridor. The tall man vanished upstairs, leaving us all locked in. Justin was turning down the light.

"Look here, old sport," said the banjo−player, "just let me have that, will you?"

He pointed toward the banjo. Justin's jaw dropped, and he raised his hands in horror.

"Let yer have that? Holy Cats! Why, Eb would skin me alive—an' you too—if you was to play on that thing down here!"

"I don't want to play on it," replied the man, "but the strings will get damp, and break, out there. Just let me have it in here, —that's a good fellow. I can let the strings down a bit. No good spoiling 'em. I won't play a note

on it. Honest Injun!"

"Sure about it?" asked Justin.

"Sure. Honest, I won't."

"Well, all right, then. Mind what yer promised, now!"

He took a key down from a hook under the lamp, unlocked the cell door, and passed in the banjo. After locking the door with great care, and replacing the key on its hook, he bade us all good night, and went upstairs.

"Burglary? Is that what the Czar has run you in for?" This from the stranger with the banjo.

"That is the crime with which we are charged."

"Well, I must say you disappoint me. I had always hoped for something better in the way of burglars. I hope you won't be offended but really, you know, you don't look DESPERATE enough."

"It's our first offence," said Mr. Daddles.

"That's what I thought," said the stranger heartily, "but I didn't like to say so,—for fear of hurting your feelings. Cheer up,— you'll improve as time goes on."

"Have you been here long?" I asked.

"Came in yesterday,—or day before yesterday, rather. We were in that black sloop,—perhaps you noticed her? You were in the white cat−boat, weren't you? We saw you when you came in."

"Did you see her go out?"

We all asked this eagerly.

"No,—has she gone out? We were on board our boat all the afternoon,—down in the cabin, I guess. Wish I'd stayed there. But we had the tent,—one of the fellows likes to sleep on shore, and so we all stayed. Say, this is a little bit of Russia, isn't it? Eb could give the Czar points. This is a new police−station, and he thought it ought not get rusty."

"Find your quarters comfortable over there?" asked Mr. Daddles across the corridor.

"Great!" said Ed Mason. He had already taken off his coat, rolled it up for a pillow, and lain down on one of the wooden benches in our cell. I was preparing to do the same. Upstairs we heard the front door slam, as Justin, and the last of the "possy," left the police−station.

"S−s−s−t!"

This came from the banjo−player's cell.

"Watch this, boys!"

I looked out the barred door of our cell, and so did Mr. Daddles and Jimmy from theirs, on the other side of the corridor. The banjo−player, holding his instrument by the head, was poking the neck of it through his door. Very carefully he managed it, and I soon saw what he was after. The big key, hanging on the wall under the lamp, was just within his reach. With the utmost care he inserted one of the keys of the banjo in the ring of the cell key, and drew it off the hook. Then holding the banjo very delicately he pulled it slowly inside the cell, until he had the key in his hands. Then he grinned out at us.

"Talk about Baron Trenck and Monte Cristo!" he said.

In a second more he had put one hand through the bars of his cell, put the key into the lock and let himself out.

"What's the matter with this,—hey, what? Another chapter in Celebrated Escapes!"

Then he tip−toed back into his cell, and shut the door again.

"It won't do to go upstairs too soon. I'll give 'em time to get home. Then I'll get the keys to your cells,—never shall it be said of Despard D'Auvigny that he deserted his friends in misfortune! A regular jail−delivery,—what? The destruction of the Bastille was nothing to this! And we'll carry Eb's head on a pike."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Daddles, "I never thought of that! Do you suppose the keys to our cells are upstairs? I thought you were the only one to get anything by this,—I was resolving always to carry a banjo with me."

"Why, I guess they'll be upstairs,—I can't for the life of me see why this was left down here. But I don't care,—I've no fault to find with the arrangement. Now, we'll have to wait awhile."

We all sat down and waited for about ten minutes. Then the banjo− man, saying "the hour has came!" opened his door again, and stole softly upstairs. Half way up he turned and came back for a match. Mr. Daddles gave him one, and he vanished with it. He was gone a long while, and we began to be in despair, thinking that he couldn't find the keys, or perhaps that he had gone away without troubling himself any more about us.

At last however, we heard him once more on the stairs. He came down, on tip−toe, holding up two keys. He

was smiling gleefully.

"They were in Eb's desk and all tagged and numbered."

In a moment or two we were all out in the corridor. Our new friend locked all the cell doors, and hung up his key on its hook.

"It shall be an unsolved mystery to them all. They shall puzzle themselves bald−headed over it," he whispered.

Upstairs we stopped long enough to return the keys to Eb's desk. Our friend still had his precious banjo under his arm. We had to go cautiously in the dark, as we dared to light only one match, and that we kept covered as well as we could. There was a window at the rear of the building, and unlike the window in the corridor below, it was not barred.

Mr. Daddles and I looked out. There were no lights to be seen, and no people about. We raised the window very cautiously, an inch at a time.

"Country police have their disadvantages," whispered Mr. Daddles, "but they have this virtue: they go home at night, and let the jail take care of itself. In the city, we should have had to pick our way through the slumbering forms of innumerable cops."

We listened at the window. Bailey's Harbor, after its great excitement over the captured burglars, had gone home, and gone to sleep. Everything was quiet as a graveyard. We could hear the slapping of the water against the timbers of the wharf, and somewhere, a rooster, disturbed by the moonlight, crowed once. It was a dim and sleepy sound, and it was not repeated. The fog had nearly gone; the moon shone clear.

One by one, and as quiet as mice, we crawled through the window, and dropped to the earth below.

CHAPTER VII. BUT WE DECIDE TO GO

Mr. Daddles stood on a ledge of the building a moment, and quietly pulled down the window.

"It wasn't locked," he muttered, "so there'll be nothing to show how we got out."

We were in a little yard at the rear of the jail. There was a large empty building,—a barn, or a boat−builder's work−shop, on the next lot. It cast a deep shadow over one side of the yard, and we kept in this shadow, as we stole toward the fence. A short alley ran down the hill on the other side of this fence. In a moment or two we were tip−toeing through the alley. It seemed to me that I had been going on tip−toe for hours,—I wondered if I would forget how to walk in the usual way.

Everything was quiet; we met no one, and heard nothing. Turning up the street we kept on, silently, until we reached the open space near the water. There was the tent, white and still in the moonlight. We looked in at the flap of the tent,—two dim forms lay wrapped in blankets, breathing heavily, and both sound asleep.

"Look at 'em!" said the banjo−man, in a low tone, "sleeping like babes, while _I_ was languishing in jail."

"Wake up!" he said, in a slightly louder voice, prodding the nearest one with his banjo.

"Ub−ber−ubber−er−bubber−yah!" remarked the man, sitting bolt upright, and looking about him, as if he had been attacked by wild animals.

"That's all right," said Sprague, "it's only me. Don't get excited. Keep quiet,—don't bubber any more. We're hunted criminals, with a price upon our heads. Prices, I should say."

The other man stirred slightly, and rolled over.

"Hullo! That you? Rescued from a county jail?"

"Rescued nothing!" replied Sprague, "I might have died in jail of old age before you would have done anything. Got out by our own valor and ingenuity. Tunneled through fifteen feet of living rock. Now, get up, and be quiet about it,—the hounds of the law are on our trail, and we must leave these shores quick."

The second man arose swiftly, and began folding his blankets. The other one, however,—the one who had wakened uttering gibberish— crossed his hands over his knees, and said: "I don't know about this!"

"No," said Sprague, "of course you don't. We'll discuss it on the boat,—you shall argue it out to your heart's content. Come out of the tent, now'. We're going to get under way, and quit this place just as soon as we can,—and that's in about two shakes."

The second man had come out of the tent, bringing his blankets with him. Mr. Daddles and all the rest of us set to work pulling up the tent stakes. But the other man sat there, shaking his head.

"I think you're making a mistake," said he; "of course that constable was very arbitrary in his manner, but he IS the constable, just the same. I inquired and found that he is. The arrest was perfectly legal. You had much better stay in jail until morning, and submit to a fine which would probably be merely nominal. As it is, you are becoming a fugitive from justice—"

"That's right, and I'm going to fuge just as quick as I can. Come out from under the tent, Lord Chief Justice, or you'll get a blow on the cocoanut that will damage that legal mind of yours. These are my friends and fellow−criminals, the alleged burglars. ... All right there? Everything clear? ... I fear they are innocent, however, just as I am guilty,—of banjo−playing."

"No, but listen a minute—"

At this moment the other man snatched down the tent pole and the whole thing fell on the "Lord Chief Justice," leaving him floundering under waves of canvas, and tangles of rope. "Never mind him," said Sprague, "two of you hustle down and push off the boat,—it will take us three trips to get the tent and everything on board."

Jimmy Toppan and one of the other men (the second one to wake up, —they called him "Pete") hurried down to the water's edge. The "Lord Chief Justice" (whom they called "Chief," for short) crawled out from under the canvas, and we began to fold up the tent. It was a small one, and they had nothing in it except their blankets and some cushions and pillows from the yacht.

The Chief, still muttering and complaining, was sent out on the first trip, with Jimmy Toppan and Ed Mason. He and Jimmy were commanded to get up the sails, while Ed brought back the boat. This time he carried the tent,

and then came back for the pillows, blankets and cushions. All this took more or less time,—fifteen or twenty minutes, perhaps. Mr. Daddles and Sprague kept their eyes on the little street nearby, to make sure that we were not observed.

Just as Mr. Daddles and I were getting into the boat, someone spoke from the shadow of a building.

"Aha!" said a voice.

Then a man stepped out into the moonlight, and advanced a little toward us.

"Leavin' kinder sudden, aint yer?"

It was Gregory the Gauger. He walked still nearer. Then he recognized Mr. Daddles and me.

"What's this? What's this?" he snapped, "got out, didger? Thought yer was escapin', didger? Consider yerselves under arrest. I apprehend yer in the name of the Commonwealth. Stay right where yer be. I'll go an' get Eb."

"No, you won't, either," said Mr. Daddles.

He and Sprague darted forward at the same moment. They grabbed the little man, each by an arm, and commenced walking him rapidly toward the boat.

"Here, here! Whatcher doin'? Lemme be! Lemme be! This is assault! Lemme be, I tell yer!"

They led him, still chattering and protesting, right to the boat.

"We don't want you with us,—not a little bit. But you'll have to come, if you don't keep quiet. Then you'll have a beautiful case against us."

"Help! Help!" he squealed.

Mr. Daddles clapped a hand over his mouth, and they lifted him off his feet into the boat. Pete jumped in beside him, and smothered his cries with a pillow. Ed and I pushed off, and climbed in over the bows. In a minute we were alongside the yacht. Mr. Daddles and Sprague jumped on board, and Pete handed Gregory the Gauger up to them. He had to drop the pillow to do this, and as soon as the little man's mouth was uncovered he began his protests right where he had left off.

"Help!" he squeaked, "help! Lemme be! Put me back on shore, I tell yer! I'll have every last one of yer in State's Prison for this. It's abducshun,—that's what it is,—d' yer hear? It's abducshun!"

"Yes, and you've already got assault and battery against us, and smothering−with−a−pillow, to say nothing of burglary, breaking and entering, and banjo−playing after 10 P. M. We won't any of us live long enough to serve out our sentences, not even if we get old enough to make Methuselah look like a spring−chicken."

"And if you go on with that yelping, my friend," added Sprague, "we'll add piracy on the high seas, keel−hauling, drowning in a sack, and hanging at the yard−arm to our list of accomplishments. I would have you know that we are desperate men. This person"— pointing to the Chief, "is the only law−abiding one amongst us. If you'll be good and quiet, and sit down and behave until we are well away, you will come to no harm."

"And we'll let you exchange legal chit−chat with the Chief Justice, here," added Pete.

But nothing could quiet the captive. He broke away from them, ran up to the bow, and began once more to call for help. At this, Pete and Sprague seized him and gently led him down into the cabin. They closed the cabin doors and left him there. Instantly he began to pound and thump on the deck.

"Let him thump," said Sprague, "it's time we departed."

"Yes," said Ed Mason, "any moment I expect to see Eb coming down to the shore."

"With his pitchfork," added Mr. Daddles.

We got the anchor up, and the boat began to move out of the inlet. The breeze was light, but two short tacks took us into the bay.

"Where do you want to go?" inquired the Chief, gravely. He was sailing the boat.

"'Somewheres east of Suez,'" said Sprague. "I don't care. I should like to go to sleep. And I should think you burglars would be about ready for a nap."

"We are!" we all groaned.

"The Chief and I will stand watch," said Pete, "I'm not sleepy. By George! It's a great night."

He yawned, stretched both arms in the air, and gazed up toward the moon. Suddenly he brought both arms down at his sides.

"Great Scott!" he cried, "we've forgotten Simon!"

The Chief gave a snort of disgust.

"If you're going—" he began.

"That's so! that's so!" shouted Sprague, "put about, Chief!"

The Chief groaned. "Positively," he said, "you make me sick!"

"Then you're in no state to sail the boat," replied Pete, "here, get away from the wheel!"

He pushed the indignant Chief away, and taking the wheel himself, began to put the boat about.

"Who's Simon?" asked Mr. Daddles.

Nobody paid any attention to his question.

"To think of forgetting him!" exclaimed Pete, "can you see anything of him, Warren?"

Sprague had run up forward, and was peering ahead as we entered the inlet.

"Here he comes!" he cried, "by Jingo, here he comes! Well, what do you think of that? Isn't he a brick, Pete?"

I tried to see what all this was about. The moon was bright on the water, and at last I could make out some white thing, like a sea gull, moving toward us. We were running before the wind and soon were near enough to get a good view. It was a bird of some kind. We were in no doubt about the kind when it raised itself upon the water, flapped its wings and uttered a loud "Quack! qu−a−a−a−ck!"

"It's a duck!" said Ed Mason.

"Of course it's a duck," replied Pete, "we got him at Duck Island, too. It's Simon. Can you reach him, Warren?"

"I think so," answered Sprague, "easy now!"

Pete brought the yacht carefully alongside the duck, Sprague twined one foot around the bob−stay, reached over and lifted the bird into the boat. As soon as it was set on deck the duck shook its feathers, gave one defiant waggle of the tail, and paddled aft, remarking: "Quack! quack! qua−a−a−ck!"

"Well! Simon, old man!" said the delighted Pete, "did you think we had left you behind? You didn't think that of us, did you? But you had started out to overtake us, hadn't you? That shows what a good old sport you are. The Chief might have left you in the lurch, but your Uncle Warren and I wouldn't."

Simon waddled about a little, and finally settled down in the center of a coil of rope. Once more we turned and started again on our flight from Bailey's Harbor.

It was a beautiful night. The moonlight sparkled on the water, and shone clear and soft on the sails of the boat. The breeze was cool and delicious. Gregory the Gauger had stopped thumping and everything was very pleasant and restful after the jail, and the other exciting events of the night. Except for the sound of the water at the bow, we sailed for five or ten minutes in perfect silence. My eyes half closed and my head fell forward as I sat in the cockpit.

"Well, I'd go below, and turn in," said Mr. Daddles, "but I don't know about facing that sabre−toothed tiger down there. We made a great mistake, boys, in not slitting his weasand the first time we saw him. Somehow, I think I'm going through life with him in close pursuit."

"Let's see what he's up to now," said Sprague.

"He's probably scuttling the ship," suggested Jimmy Toppan.

Sprague opened the cabin doors, and pushed back the hatchway. Gregory had lighted the lamp and was calmly engaged in examining the clock. To our surprise the wrath seemed to have gone out of the man.

"Where didger git that air clock?" he asked, peering up at Sprague.

"In Boston," Sprague answered him, "what do you think of it?"

"Pretty fair, pretty fair. What does a clock like that cost?"

They entered into a conversation about the clock, and some of the other furnishings of the cabin. Sprague asked him if he wanted to come on deck. He accepted the invitation and came up.

"You'd better look out for him," Mr. Daddles whispered to Pete, "this may be guile."

Then all of us, except Pete, the Chief, and our prisoner, went below, and prepared to turn in. Jimmy Toppan stretched himself out on a bunk and went to sleep in no time at all. Ed Mason and I picked out places for ourselves, while Mr. Daddles made himself comfortable with a couple of pillows under his head.

"Today," I heard him murmur, "I've lost my steamboat, been wrecked on a desert island, been rescued, fallen overboard, rescued again, lost my money hunting buried treasure, was deserted by the boat that rescued me, and left stranded in Bailey's Harbor, been scared pink by an old cow, committed burglary, scared again by a snoring policeman, got arrested by the High Sheriff and his posse, confined in dungeons, escaped from jail, committed

abduction, Gregory−snatching, and muffling−with−a−pillow. I wonder—"

Here his voice trailed off into a whisper.

I had expected to go to sleep as soon as I lay down, but I found the cabin rather close and stuffy. Sprague and Ed Mason didn't seem to mind it,—they lay still, and were evidently asleep. I hitched about for a while, and finally decided to go up on deck. It struck me that I could sleep better there.

So I took a pillow and went up. Gregory was sitting in the cock− pit, contentedly smoking a clay pipe and watching the sails with the air of an owner. Pete and the Chief were both sitting quietly in the stern. The Chief was again at the wheel. I found some canvas, part of a sail−cover, and stretched myself out on a seat, with the canvas over me to keep off the dampness. In a minute or two I was asleep,—the best and most refreshing sleep I ever remember. All through the rest of the night I was dimly aware of the sound of the water about the bows, and the cool breeze on my face.

When I woke it was broad daylight. The boat had come to a stop, the mainsail was down, and they were taking in the jib. I heard the anchor go over with a splash, and then Pete came running aft.

"Hullo! Awake? How are you?"

"All right. Where are we?"

"I don't know. Unknown island."

I sat up and looked over the starboard side of the boat. We were in a little bay, and there was land about a hundred yards distant, —a rocky island with pine trees, and two or three small cottages set amongst the trees. I heard someone talking on the other side of the boat, and I looked up forward to see Sprague, in a bathing suit, and Gregory the Gauger. Sprague was entertaining the Gauger with a poem which he had been reciting at intervals ever since we met him.

"'She'd git her little banjo an' she'd sing Kulla−lo−lo!'—but not in Bailey's Harbor,—hey, what? She wouldn't get her little banjo there, or you'd run her in, wouldn't you, Squire? You and the Constable!"

"Where did you get that poem?" asked Pete, who was furling the sail.

"I read it in a paper last week. Isn't it great? It's by a man with a funny name,—I wish I could remember it! 'An' the dawn comes up like thunder outer China 'crost the Bay!' That's the way the dawn does come up over there, isn't it? Ever been in China, Squire?"

"No, I haint," said Gregory. "Where be you fellers goin' to put me ashore? That's what I want to know."

"All in good time, Squire, all in good time. Watch this,—I bet you can't do it!"

And Sprague made a clean dive and scoot under the water, came up thirty feet away, and commenced to float, facing the boat, and waggling one big toe at Gregory the Gauger.

It did not take me two seconds to know what I wanted to do, nor two minutes to get overboard. The water was cold, but I swam around the yacht, before I climbed out again. One by one the others came up from below, and they all jumped over for a swim, except Gregory and the Chief. The latter went poking about, in his silent, methodical way, paying no attention to the orders which Sprague fired at him.

"Food! food!" called the banjo−player, climbing aboard; "my wasted frame cries aloud for food. Get out the frying−pan, Chief, and the coffee−pot! Move about more briskly,—remember that I have been many days on bread and water in a dungeon ... Oh, hang it!"

He floundered about in his shirt, which he had put on wrong side foremost in his hurry.

"Fish out those eggs, and see if there are any rolls left,—I'll match you for yours, Squire. You won't be hungry, you haven't been in swimming."

"Ketch me goin' into that water!" returned Gregory, "I'll make my abbalootions right here."

And he proceeded to wash his face and hands over the stern of the boat. We were all very much awake now, very hungry, and no longer tired. The swim had opened our eyes. The drowsy moonlight world had gone and given place to one of sunshine. A breeze rattled the halliards against the mast, and ruffled the blue water of the bay in little patches. We hurried into our clothes, while the Chief warned us to keep out of the cockpit, and not get everything wet. Sprague struggled with his shirt, and declaimed his favorite poem in a muffled tone.

"'And the flyin' fishes play,'—And speaking of flying−fishes, where is Simon? Has he had his morning swim? ... Oh, there he is, —paddling about like a good one! Swims like a duck, doesn't he, Squire?"

"There's nothing for breakfast except bacon and eggs," said the Chief.

"And coffee and rolls," added Pete, "what more do you want, you old lemon?"

"No, there are only three rolls. Some of us will have to eat crackers."

"I will eat marline−spikes," said Mr. Daddles, "if you've got any of them on board. I've never seen one,—though I've heard of them a great deal."

"I'll eat crackers," declared Jimmy Toppan.

"So will I," said Sprague, "and glad to get 'em. I might be gnawing a bone in jail, now, instead."

"And there's no milk," said the Chief, "we were going to get some, and some bread, this morning in Bailey's Harbor."

"If you had endured the sufferings that _I_ have in Bailey's Harbor—" began Sprague.

"There are three dozen eggs," said Pete, "and that's more than four apiece, and there is plenty of bacon,—stop talking and get busy."

In ten minutes we were eating breakfast. They had trouble to keep us all supplied with fried eggs, until two skillets were put into commission. Then there was silence for a time.

"There's an apple pie down there," remarked Sprague, as he helped himself to another cup of coffee.

Mr. Daddles hurried below, and soon came up with the pie.

"I hope some of you will," said he, "you do, in this region, don't you?"

"In obscure parts of the ulterior," said Pete, "I have heard that the habit lingers of eating pie for breakfast. It's merely a tradition in my family, I regret to say."

"The old, robust stock is dying out," said Sprague, mournfully, "but my father has told me that in his youth he often saw his father do it. We are over civilized, but if there should be any great national crisis,—a war, or anything like that,—I have no doubt that New England would rally once again, and—"

"I am so much disappointed," said Daddles, turning slowly about, with the pie in one hand, "my poor grandmother has often told me about it, and I did hope to see the weird, old custom practised on its native heath—won't you? Or you?"

He turned to one after the other of us.

"Yer can give me a mejum piece," observed Gregory the Gauger, looking up from his fifth fried egg.

Mr. Daddles cut a large slice in evident delight. Gregory ate it, slowly and thoughtfully.

"Have some more?"

The Gauger held out his plate.

"Jes' mejum," said he.

After breakfast, we of the "Hoppergrass" held a council.

"The Captain will come back to Bailey's Harbor," said Jimmy Toppan, "but we can't go there at all. We'll have to go somewhere else, and send a message to him."

"We might go to that place—what's its name? Squid Cove," Ed Mason suggested.

"And send a message to him by the car−driver," I added.

"We'll have to write it in cipher," said Mr. Daddles, "for it would never do to have it fall into the hands of Eb."

"How do you know that he will come back there?" I asked.

"I don't," said Jimmy, "but it's the most likely thing to happen, isn't it?"

"The most likely thing doesn't seem to happen on this trip," remarked Ed Mason, who was feeding Simon, the duck, with cracker crumbs.

Sprague broke in on our conversation.

"This charming little island," said he, pointing over his shoulder, toward the land, "is not an island, at all, it seems. It is a cape, or promontory, or perhaps more properly a peninsula. Its name, so the Squire tells us, is Briggs's Nose. Probably the man who gave it that name perished long ago,—slain, no doubt, by the residents. At any rate, it is so far from the nearest town on the mainland that we believe it will be safe to land the Squire there. He can take the steamer this afternoon and get home before dusk. All who wish to kiss the Squire good−bye should therefore get ready. The line forms on the left."

Gregory the Gauger was disposed to grumble at being set ashore.

"Fear not, Squire," said Sprague, "crowns for convoy shall be put into your purse. Many a ship's crew would have marooned you on a desert island, or set you adrift."

"With some ship's bread and a beaker of water," added Mr. Daddles.

"Quite so," said Sprague, "only we couldn't find a beaker on board,—and wouldn't have known one if we

HAD found it."

Pete and the silent Chief prepared to row Gregory ashore. Just before they left Sprague gave the prisoner some money for steamboat fare, and Mr. Daddles presented him with the remains of the apple pie, begging him to keep some of it for breakfast next day.

Twenty minutes later our friends were on board again, and we were getting up the anchor. Jimmy Toppan, the Chief, and Sprague went below to consult a chart, while the rest of us got the yacht under way. When they came back on deck the Chief took the wheel, announcing:

"Lanesport it is."

"Why Lanesport?" asked Pete.

"It's the nearest town on the mainland to Bailey's Harbor," said Jimmy Toppan.

"Then I should think you'd better steer clear of it."

"Oh, they won't have heard anything yet," answered Sprague, lying down on a seat, with his banjo. And he added: "Assisted by Simon, I will now give you a little song."

"Do you think we'll find the 'Hoppergrass' at Lanesport?" inquired Ed Mason.

"We can but try. We'll do a little sleuth−work there, anyhow."

"Who will you inquire from?"

"Oh, anybody. Do not interrupt me again, or I will sing 'Rocked in the Cradle of the Deep.' Honest, I will."

A little before noon, we sailed up the river to Lanesport. The old town lay very still in the baking sun. There were schooners in the stream, and one or two at the wharves. A few sloop−yachts and cat− boats were at anchor in the river, but none of them was the "Hoppergrass." Old and dilapidated wharves ran down to the river, some of them deserted, and covered with grass. There were tumble− down buildings at the water's edge, and they were mostly black with age. The town looked as if it had been sound asleep for a hundred years.

The Chief skilfully sailed our boat up to a wharf, where there was a landing−stage, and all of us, except our skipper, went ashore. Half way up the wharf we found a man, painting a row−boat. He knew nothing about the "Hoppergrass" and said he had never heard of it.

"We'll walk up into the town," remarked Pete, "we've got to get some grub, anyway."

We strolled up the wharf, and along a quaint and crooked street. The sidewalk was so narrow that we had to walk in single file, and the curb−stone, as Mr. Daddles put it, was made of wood. There were a few shops, but as most of them sold ships' supplies, we did not go in any of them. A pleasant smell of tar came from each door.

Presently we reached a square or market place. Here were more shops, a butcher's, a grocery, and one that announced "Ice Cream." A peanut−stand, sheltered by an umbrella, stood in the middle of the square, and toward this we made our way. An aged Italian sat behind it, reading a newspaper. He sold us peanuts, and exchanged facetious remarks with Mr. Daddles. As we left the peanut man, we heard a far−off shouting. Down the street came a tall, thin man, ringing a great dinner−bell. He was very lame and made slow progress. Now and then he would halt, and shout something at the top of his voice.

"What's the matter?" Sprague asked a man, who stood in the door of a cigar−shop, "is there a fire?"

The man grinned.

"That's the town−crier," said he.

"Town−crier!" exclaimed Mr. Daddles, "I didn't know there were any of 'em left."

"There aint," said the man, "except this one. He's the last one of 'em."

The crier limped slowly down the street toward us. We all halted to hear his next announcement. Stopping in the middle of the street he solemnly rang his bell two or three times. Then he threw back his head, and bellowed in a tremendous voice:

"Hear—what—I—have—to—say! Stolen! the cat−boat—Hannah—J.— Pettingell—from—Mulliken's Wharf—yesterday—afternoon! Reward —will—be—paid—for information!—Apply—to—the—owner—at—the Eagle—House!"

CHAPTER VIII. HUNTING THE HOPPERGRASS

"Did you ever hear the like of that?" said Mr. Daddles, in a kind of awed whisper; "don't move,—he's going to do it again!"

But Ed Mason, Jimmy Toppan, and I were not be to restrained.

"That's the 'Hoppergrass'!" we all burst out, at the same instant.

"What's the 'Hopper'—?" began Mr. Daddles, but his voice was drowned out by the crier. Beginning with his "Hear what I have to say!" he repeated the announcement word for word as he had given it the first time. Then he rang his bell with four, slow, deliberate motions, and started to hobble away.

We were after him in a second.

"Where is it?"

"When was it stolen?"

"Where's Captain Bannister?"

The crier looked down at us with some air of indignation, and shifted his quid of tobacco.

"Apply at the Eagle House," said he, pointing his thumb over his shoulder.

"Come on! come on!" we begged the other three, "let's go to the Eagle House!"

"Why? What for?"

"That's the 'Hoppergrass' he said was stolen. Captain Bannister is here,—at the Eagle House!"

"But he didn't say the 'Hoppergrass';—he said the Hannah Billingsgate."

"Pettingell. That's the other name of the 'Hoppergrass'."

"The other name? Does she travel under an Elias, as Gregory the Gauger calls it?"

"No, no! The captain doesn't like 'Hoppergrass' and he said he had thought of changing the name. Come on,—let's go to the Eagle House."

We made them understand at last, and then we started up the street in the direction that the crier had pointed. On the way, Jimmy Toppan was struck by doubts.

"I don't see how the Captain COULD change the name like this. You have to register a new name for a boat, I think."

"You said that he was thinking of calling her the Hannah J. what —is—it? Didn't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, then, it must be the same boat. There wouldn't be two knocking about, with a name like that."

We found the hotel presently. There were two elderly men sitting on the little piazza, and they hitched their chairs around and watched us through the window as soon as we entered the office. This room was empty, but after we had stamped and coughed a good deal, a small man in shirt−sleeves came from some room in the back.

"Is Captain Bannister here?"

"Bannister? Oh, no, Bannister aint here!"

This in a tone which was as much as to say: "I wouldn't have a man like that on the premises."

"Well, he WAS here, wasn't he?"

"Was here? Oh, yes, he WAS here,—last night."

(As if to say: "He was here until we got on to him.")

"Has he gone away?"

"Gone away? Oh, yes, he's gone away."

This seemed to strike the two men on the piazza—whose ears were almost stretching through the window—as a joke. They both laughed uproariously. The hotel man was evidently unwilling to give up any information until it was wrenched out of him, bit by bit. Mr. Daddles continued the cross−examination.

"Do you know where he's gone?"

"Oh, he went away before six o'clock."

"Well, do you know WHERE he went?"

"Where? Oh, he told me—Joe, where'd he say he was goin'?"

One of the men on the piazza answered:

"Big Duck."

"Big Duck Island?"

"Yup. He—"

The other man broke in. "He says to me that he was goin' to Rogerses'."

"Rogerses'? Where's that?"

"Rogerses' Island," said the hotel man, "'bout three miles t'other side of Bailey's Harbor."

One of the men now came in from the piazza, and after much questioning we found out all they knew. Captain Bannister had arrived in Lanesport sometime the latter part of the afternoon. He left the "Hoppergrass" at the wharf, and came up into the town. When he returned, an hour later, his boat had disappeared. One or two men had seen it sail down the river, but in the fog had not noticed who was on board. The Captain "flew round like a coot shot in the head," declared our informant. He went from one wharf to another, started to hire a yacht and go in pursuit, but gave up the plan. Then he went to the police−station.

"The police reckoned it was some of them burglars had took it. The fellers that have been breakin' into houses on Little Duck."

"They've ketched them fellers," said the hotel man.

"Ketched 'em?"

"Yes. Got 'em last night, breakin' into a house in Bailey's Harbor. Bert Janvrin was in here not more'n ten minutes ago, and he heard 'bout it from a feller that was off Bailey's this mornin', haulin' lobster−pots. They got the whole gang, and put 'em in jail, an' they all got out again, somehow, an' got away on a boat, an' there's a man missin',—Mose Silloway,—you know Mose, Joe—an' they think likely he's been murdered by 'em."

Mr. Daddles looked at me very gravely, and rubbed his upper lip, hard.

"Dear me!" he said, "why, that's terrible! I hope it will turn out all right. Well, we want to find Captain Bannister and his boat. How do you get to Rogers's Island?"

"Jes' go over to Bailey's Harbor, an' keep on to the far end of the island,—you can row across to Rogerses' from there."

"I don't think he has gone to Rogerses', young feller," said one of the men, "I heard him say he was goin' to try Big Duck, fust."

"I guess we'll have to try them both,—thank you, all."

We said good−bye, and left the hotel. As we walked down the street again Sprague said that we would do well to get away from Lanesport, soon.

"If any more of these Bill Janvrins, or whatever his name was, come here with news about the burglars, we may find the constable after us again."

"It seems to me," said Pete, "that you fellows are getting in deeper all the time. When you had lost your boat and your Captain it was bad enough. But now the Captain has lost the boat, and one is in one place, and the other in another."

"Some of us will have to go to Big Duck Island, and some of us to Rogers's," said Ed Mason.

"By way of Bailey's Harbor?" asked Pete, with a sarcastic smile.

"We won't have to go there," said Jimmy; "at least, I don't think so. I noticed Rogers's Island on the chart. I don't believe we'd have to land on Little Duck at all."

We talked it over on our way back to the boat. In one or two shops, where Sprague bought some food, we found out that the horse−cars would take us to Squid Cove. Beyond that ran the car on which we had travelled yesterday. Then there was a walk of less than two miles to a point on the shore from which a row−boat could take us to Rogers's Island. It was a long way to go, but it was necessary in order to avoid Bailey's Harbor. Moreover, since Sprague and Pete decided to take their boat to Big Duck Island, the trip to Rogers's must be made by land.

"It will be safer for just one of us to go to Rogers's Island," said Mr. Daddles, "and he can look around after the Captain and the 'Hoppergrass.' If he finds them, they can all sail over to Big Duck Island tonight or to−morrow morning and join us there. If he doesn't see anything of them, he can come back here to Lanesport, and spend the night in the Eagle House. Then the rest of us will join him tomorrow afternoon, with or without Captain Bannister, as the case may be. But we'll wait at Big Duck till noon."

When we got back to the yacht, there was the Chief, peacefully reading a last year's magazine. We routed him up, and cooked the dinner. While we were eating, the question arose: who was to go to Rogers's Island?

"We'll draw lots," said someone. We did so,—with slips of paper, and I was more than pleased when I saw that I had,—well, I was going to say: won. I thought I had won at the time, and I was tickled at the idea of going on this expedition by myself.

As we were separated from our boat, clothes, and all our belongings, Sprague fitted me out with some money, and I left Lanesport on the horse−car. At Squid Cove I looked anxiously to see if the car−driver would remember me, and I was glad to see a boy, about my own age, driving the old horse.

"Gran'father's gone over to Bailey's Harbor," said he, "to see if the burglars have come back. Gee! I'd like to see a burglar, wouldn't you? Gee! they say these had black masks, an' six− shooters, an' bottles of chloro−chlory—of that stuff they put folks to sleep with. An' brass knuckles. Say, did you ever see any brass knuckles? I did. I know a feller that has got a pair. He keeps 'em in the hay in the barn, so's his father won't get onto him. Gee! They put the burglars into the new jail, but they all got out, an' no one knows how they did it. Nate Bradley come back on his milk−cart from Bailey's and he says he went into the jail, an' the cells was all locked up, so they must have clumb out through the bars somehow. Gee! No one can find old Mose Silloway, an' they think the burglars drownded him, outer revenge. Giddap!"

He leaned over the front of the car and hit the horse a loud slap, with the ends of his reins.

"Gee! You bet Eb Flanders is madder than a settin' hen!"

"Who is he?" said I. Which was guile on my part.

"He's constable. He caught the burglars, y'know, right in the face 'n eyes of two policemen from Lanesport. An' when they got away, Eb pretty near bust his biler. He got his possy together again, an' he says he'll have 'em back if it takes a leg, an' when he gets 'em he'll set over 'em night an' day, with a shot−gun. Gee!"

He hit the horse another slap with the reins, and then turned to grin at me through a gap where four front teeth were missing. He was a jolly looking boy, with a round, red face like the rising moon.

"I wouldn't like to be them burglars, when Eb ketches hold of 'em again," he continued. "No, sir. Why, Eb arrested two fellers last summer for haulin' Levi Sanborn's lobster−pots,—he took an' tied 'em back to back an' carried 'em over to Lanesport in his boat, an' turned 'em over to the police. One feller got six months in the House of C'rrection. Gee! You're goin' to Bailey's, aint yer?"

"No, I'm going to Rogers's Island."

"You be? Why, the excursion aint till tomorrow!"

I said "What excursion?" before I thought.

"Why, the Comp'ny. Aint you heard 'bout the Comp'ny? Gran'father's goin'. Everbody's goin'. Don't you live in Lanesport?"

"No, I don't know anything about it. What is it,—a picnic? How many people live there,—on Rogers's Island?"

"Didn't no one live there—till 'bout a month ago. Then those two gen'lemen came,—the P'fessor an' Mr. Snider. The house had been empty for a year an' a half,—ever since old man Rogers died. He was the last of the fam'ly, an' his folks have owned the island an' lived in the house ever since the first one of 'em come over in the 'Mayflower' or with Christopher C'lumbus, or somebody. When Gran'father was a boy there was twenty−seven of 'em livin' there, an' nineteen of 'em was children. Gee! there must have been a mob,—all in one house! But they've been dyin' off, or movin' away or somethin', an' when old man Rogers died there wasn't no one for him to leave the prop'ty to but a hospittle or somethin'. An' the hospittle aint never come to live there, or nothin', an' it's stayed empty. I went over there once last summer, an' peeked into the winders. ... But Mr. Snider an' the P'fessor are there now,— they hired the whole island to 'stablish the Comp'ny on."

He stopped the car for some passengers,—two women and two little girls who had been picking flowers beside the road. One of the women commenced to ask questions and I did not get much chance to talk with him again until we came to the end of the line, at the causeway leading to Bailey's Harbor.

I decided not to linger at this point, but merely stopped to ask the boy if I would be able to get a boat to row to Rogers's Island.

"You won't want one," said he, "there's a bridge. You'll find it all dry walkin'."

I learned what this meant, when, after about half an hour's walk, I came to a turn in the road, and a post with a metal sign: "Rogers's I.—1/2m." Here was another causeway across a marsh, not as well kept, nor as much used, as that from Bailey's Harbor, but quite passable. The island was in plain sight at the end of the road,—a rocky

hummock of land, with two patches of trees. At the edge of one of these groups of trees I could see a chimney and one corner of a house. A big, pink poster, stuck up on the sign−post, had caught my eye. It was like several others which I remembered having seen on trees and fences as I came along the road. Now, for the first time, I stopped to read one of them. This is what it said:

GOLD
FROM THE VASTY DEEP
OLD OCEAN
GIVES UP HIS WEALTH
AT LAST
SUCCUMBS TO THE MODERN WIZARD
EASE AND COMFORT PLACED WITHIN
THE REACH OF ALL BY THE
METROPOLITAN MARINE GOLD
COMPANY
COME TO THE GRAND DEMONSTRATIONS
AT THE COMPANY'S PLANT,
ROGERS'S ISLAND
TWO EXCURSIONS—MORNING AFTERNOON
JULY 30

I read that poster, and wondered what it was all about. July 30th,—that was to−morrow. Then I remembered what the boy on the horse−car had said about "the Company" and the excursion. This was the thing he had meant. Well, it was nothing to me,—I had only to find out if Captain Bannister and the "Hoppergrass" were there, and if not, to go back to Lanesport. "Gold from the vasty deep,"— I wondered what that was. The buried treasure on Fishback Island, —had it anything to do with that?

Half way across the causeway was a wooden bridge, painted white. It spanned a narrow stream, not much more than a creek, running through the marsh. This was the only water which divided Rogers's Island from the mainland.

On the railing of the bridge was tacked another pink poster. This one said:

RICHES
FROM NEPTUNE'S HOARD
TREASURE
FROM THE BOUNDLESS MAIN
WHY TOIL AND SLAVE ALL YOUR LIVES
WITH THE MEANS FOR LUXURY AT YOUR
DOORS?
GRAND EXCURSIONS TO ROGERS'S
ISLAND, JULY 30. STEAMER "MAY
QUEEN" LEAVES LANESPORT AT
8.30 A. M., AND 2 P. M.
THE METROPOLITAN
MARINE GOLD COMPANY
IS ENDORSED BY THE LEADING FINANCIERS
AND SCIENTISTS OF THE WORLD
AND BY
HON. J. HARVEY BOWDITCH DEACON ENOCH CHICK
LANESPORT

There were some hand−bills blowing around on the bridge, and I picked up one or two of them. They were like the posters,—about the Metropolitan Marine Gold Company, and the excursions to Rogers's Island. At the end of the causeway, where the road went up a little grade, there was a big sign, painted on white cloth, and fixed to some boards:

THE METROPOLITAN MARINE GOLD COMPANY (Limited)

The road wound up the slope, and I followed it and turned the corner. There was a great house, three stories high and as square as a child's block. If it had ever been painted, the paint had worn off, and the wood was almost black. For a hundred years or more the wind and rain and snow had beaten against it,—storms from the ocean, storms from the land, winds from all quarters, for except at one corner it was unprotected by trees. It stood on high ground, and faced the open water of the bay. Grass had grown rank all around, and there was no sign of anybody either indoors or out. There was an enormous barn behind the house, as well as woodsheds, and hen−houses.

I stood still for a few moments, and then walked up the weed−grown path, and hammered on the front door with the brass knocker. The knocking echoed all over the house, and the door swung slowly open. It was my knocks which had opened it, however,—there was no one inside, so far as I could see. I looked into an empty hall, dusty and neglected. A broad staircase led upstairs, but the only thing in the hall was a pile of pink hand−bills lying on the floor. I thumped again with my knuckles on one of the panels of the door, and called out: "Anybody here?" There was no answer, and after hesitating a moment I decided to try the rear of the house.

The driveway at the side was in the same neglected condition as the front path. The only thing about the place which looked at all new was a sort of wooden stand, built out of boards and packing boxes. This was decorated with flags and colored bunting, as if for a band−concert. It stood at one side of the driveway in what had once been a little garden. The barn and other buildings at the rear were shabby and ill−kept.

I pounded at a side−door, and at a door in the back, but there was no answer at either. Then I began to wonder what to do. Evidently Captain Bannister was not here, but why had he said he was coming to such a place? What had made him think he would find the "Hoppergrass" here? Where were the men about whom the boy on the horse−car had told me?

I strolled to the front of the house again, crossed the road, and looked down the hill toward the bay. There was a little wharf at the foot of the hill, and at the end of it was another of the white cloth signs. It faced out over the water, so I could not read what it said. Some planks, boards, and shavings lay about, as if someone had been working there recently. I thought I would go down and investigate.

As I still had on rubber−soled shoes, I suppose I walked noiselessly. I had not stepped upon the woodwork before I noticed a trap−door near the end of the wharf. I walked over to it and looked down.

It was rather dark below, but I could make out a platform about a foot above the water. Kneeling on this were two men, with a lantern beside them. They were both in their shirt−sleeves, and they seemed to be working over a little, square box. Four or five other boxes like it were lying on the platform in front of them.

I did not know exactly how to begin, but at last I gave a kind of cough, and said: "Can you tell me—"

But I got no farther than that. Both men looked up as if their heads had been pulled back on wires. One of them sprang to the ladder and came up it like a flash.

"Hullo!" he said, as soon as he reached the top; "who are you, and what do you want?"

He was a small man, with a clean−shaven face,—a very pale face it was, too. His hat was off, and I noticed that his hair was rather short. As for his age, I could not have told about that,—it might have been twenty−five or fifty, or any age between. He was quick in his movements, but his manner of speaking was pleasant enough.

"I'm looking for a boat," I said; "someone told me that it was here,—this is Rogers's Island, isn't it?"

"This is Rogers's Island, all right," he answered,—"what kind of a boat is it you are looking for?"

"She's a white cat−boat,—the 'Hoppergrass',—or the 'Hannah J. Pettingell',—it's more likely that's her name."

He looked at me inquiringly with his quick little eyes. The other man came up through the trap−door. He had put on his coat,—a long, black, "swallow−tail" coat. He was tall and thin, and dressed all in black, with a white neck−tie. His hair was sandy, and he had reddish side−whiskers,—the kind called "side−boards." I never saw a man with such a solemn face,—nor one with so long a nose. But he smiled as he walked over to me, a kind of painful smile as if he had the face−ache. He leaned over, took one of my hands, and held it in his damp grasp, while he patted me on the shoulder with his other hand.

"Well, my little man," he said, "what is your name, and what can I do for you?"

I did not like being called "my little man," and I tried to drop his clammy hand. But he held mine still, and smiled his tooth−achy smile.

"What is it we can do for you?" he repeated. He had a smooth voice that somehow made me feel as if I was having warm butter poured over me.

"I'm looking for a boat," I said, trying again to snatch away my hand.

"A boat?" he queried, in mild surprise, "and what is your name,— my little man?"

I started to tell him, and then it struck me, that we had given our real names to the constable at Bailey's Harbor, and that I might get into trouble if I told mine again, here. I tried to think of another name to give, but as I hadn't made up one in advance, it seemed to stick. Of course, I had often read of various kinds of criminals and desperadoes who went under false names, and also of people who were no more criminals than we, who had to give names other than their own. There were spies in war− time, for instance. These people in books all seemed to do it easily enough, and so I could have done, if I had had one ready. As it was I stammered over it.

"Sam−er−er−Jim−er−James B−B−Brown," I said at last.

"Sam Jim James Brown!" he said, in his buttery tones, "well, Sam Jim James Brown, what is it you want here?"

I told him again about the boat, and how they told us at Lanesport that Captain Bannister was coming to Rogers's Island to look for her.

"What kind of a boat is it?" said the other man. I had succeeded at last in getting the tall man to let go of my hand, and I backed a little away from him. I described the "Hoppergrass" as well as I could, and told about the Captain's notion for changing the name.

"A white cat−boat, hey?" said the little man, "and Captain Bannister,—oh, yes! of Lanesport? Captain Bannister of Lanesport?"

"No, he comes—"

"No? Are you sure? He's been in Lanesport lately, hasn't he?"

"Oh, yes. That's where he lost the 'Hoppergrass.'"

"That's the man!" said he, "that's the man. Now, I tell you what. He isn't here now, but I expect he will be here tomorrow. You've heard about the excursion, of course?"

"Yes,—I read the hand−bills."

"Well, I understand he is coming here tomorrow. Now, have you got to go back to Lanesport tonight?"

"Just a second,—excuse me just a second, Professor," put in the tall man, "I'd like a word with you just for a second. You'll excuse me, young man, if I confer with the Professor for a second. An important matter of business, you know."

He drew the Professor, as he called him, some little distance up the wharf, where they whispered together for three or four minutes. The tall man kept his hand on the Professor's shoulder and seemed very earnest in what he was saying.

Then they came back to me.

"Were you going back to Lanesport tonight?" asked the Professor.

"Yes," I replied, "if I didn't find Captain Bannister."

"I don't believe you can now," said he, looking at his watch. "It's half past four, and the last car leaves the Cove at four. Besides, your surest way to find this Captain Bannister is to stay right here. He'll be here tomorrow, sure. Then you can go back on the steamboat at noon, if you want to. We'll fix you up for tonight, and make you comfortable. What do you say?"

There didn't seem to be any way out of it. If it had been the tall man alone I would have walked all the way back to Lanesport rather than stay. I never saw anyone whom I disliked so much, from the very first instant. But the Professor seemed perfectly straightforward. The cars had stopped, and I was left here on Rogers's Island, and might as well make the best of it. Besides if Captain Bannister were coming in the morning it was foolish to lose this chance of finding him.

I decided to stay, and told them that I would do so.

CHAPTER IX. THE GOLD COMPANY

Two minutes later I had begun to regret my decision, and to wonder if it was a mistake to stay on the island. I reflected that I was alone, with two strangers. Yet they were posting advertisements, and asking everybody in Lanesport to come to the island tomorrow. They would hardly do that if there was anything shady about them. From the very first, I had no fault to find with the Professor. The trouble with the other man was that he seemed to be so very, very GOOD.

"Now, James," said he, "we'll leave the Professor to finish some work here, while you and I go up to the house. ... Wonderful man, the Professor!" he continued, after the latter had vanished down the trap−door, and we had started up the hill,—"wonderful man! How future generations will bless his name! That is it,—that is all that induced me to become connected with this great enterprise,—the blessedness of it! I would never have anything to do with any work unless it was for the good of my fellowman. I asked the Professor if his work was going to be for the benefit of ALL mankind. He told me that it was. Then I consented to come in with him. He has a marvellous brain."

"What is he professor of?"

"Transcendental chemistry ... He has studied in all the leading universities of Europe. ALL of them. The name of Von Bieberstein will be blessed by generations yet unborn. And how devoutly happy am I that the name of Snider will come in for some of those blessings! It will be associated with his in this great work,— this GOOD work!"

"Is that his name?"

"Professor Von Bieberstein. Yes. And mine is Snider. ... James, I hope you are a good boy."

I said nothing, but if to be a good boy would turn me into anything like Mr. Snider when I grew up, I hoped I was the worst kind of boy.

"You don't use tobacco, I hope, James?"

"No."

"Don't ever do it. It leads to lying. And drinking. I have known the greatest criminals and blacklegs in the city of New York, murderers, and thieves, and men like that,—and they all became what they were through using tobacco. All of them."

We had arrived at the house, and Mr. Snider led the way around to the side−door.

"Here is the platform, you see, James," said he, pointing to the band−stand, "all ready for the gathering tomorrow. Yes. It will be a great occasion. Historic. Nothing that this ancient house has ever seen could match it. And yet I suppose that many of the world's great discoveries were made in places humble and obscure like this. ... Suppose we split a little wood, James, and bring some water from the well. Then we can have supper ready, when the Professor comes back from his work. He is very absent−minded. Very. His mind is engaged on these problems all day. He would not remember to eat unless I reminded him of it. I have to take care of him,—his life is very precious to the world, James!"

We went to a shed where there was a little kindling wood in one corner. Mr. Snider handed me a hatchet, and I split some wood, while he stood near and talked to me about the importance of being good and virtuous.

"It's the way to be happy, James, and successful, and RICH. Did you ever hear of Abraham P. Fillmore, James?"

"Oh, yes. Lots of times." "Worth ninety million dollars, James! Think of it! Ninety million dollars!" Mr. Snider licked his lips. "The richest man in the world, today. Some say that John Sanderson is richer,—but it isn't true. No; it isn't true. The last time I saw A. P. Fillmore, I said to him: 'Brother Fillmore,' I said, 'how do you account for it? How did you do it? How did you GET it?' And he said: 'Caleb,' he said, 'I'll tell you. It was by following the Golden Rule.' That's all there is to it, James,— just by being GOOD. Isn't that simple, James? Oh! why can't we all do that!"

I looked at Mr. Snider in astonishment. Here was a man who knew the famous millionaire, A. P. Fillmore, well enough to call him "Brother Fillmore," and to be called "Caleb" in return by him. I had seen pictures of Fillmore in the newspapers ever since I could remember,—people were always talking about him. "You must

think I am as rich as A. P. Fillmore!"—how many times I had heard people say that! And Mr. Snider, who was on such friendly terms with him, was standing here in a woodshed, talking with me! I wondered why I had never heard of Mr. Snider before.

Presently we went in the house, after we had the wood and a pail of water. The house was almost empty of furniture, and it was pretty dismal. The kitchen was the only room they used downstairs,—it contained a cook−stove, two tables, a couple of broken−down chairs, and some boxes set on end, for seats. An old− fashioned kitchen clock, its hands broken off, stood on a shelf, silent. But a handsome little glass and gold clock was ticking away in front of it.

The Professor joined us while we were kindling a fire in the stove. He did not seem at all neglectful of his food, he inquired how soon supper would be ready, and suggested that we have some sausages in addition to what Mr. Snider was preparing to cook. They sent me out to the shed for some more wood, and again to the well for another pail of water, so that we could wash our hands and faces at the sink.

We ate our supper in the kitchen, and as soon as the Professor finished eating he lighted a long cigar. Mr. Snider did not seem to notice this, though it made me wonder why he did not tell his friend how many scoundrels he had known who had come to their downfall through using tobacco. When the cigar was nearly gone, the Professor said he would wash the dishes, if I would help him wipe them. I agreed, and we began the work. Mr. Snider presently started to talk to me once more about being good. He did not get very far, however, before the Professor turned to him and said:

"Oh, shut up!"

Mr. Snider raised his eyebrows, smiled his hideous smile, and relapsed into silence. After a minute or two he went outside, and walked slowly up and down the driveway, with his hands behind his back. When the dishes were finished, the Professor lighted another cigar, sat down at a table, and began to write and figure on a piece of paper.

This wasn't very amusing to me, so I looked about to see if I could find something to do. In a passage leading from the kitchen to another room, I found a shelf which held some empty medicine bottles, and four or five dusty books. I took the books down, one after the other. There was "The Life of Rev. Thomas Miltimore,"—I put that back on the shelf. There was "Leading Men of Rockingham County,"—I put that back. Then there was a book of hymns, and Foxe's "Book of Martyrs." I was about to take the latter to the kitchen with me, and curdle my blood again with its ghastly pictures, when I found another book under an old, yellow newspaper. It was "The Rifle Rangers; or Adventures in Southern Mexico by Captain Mayne Reid." The frontispiece, which was protected by a torn and stained leaf of tissue paper, showed a soldier in a tropical forest, being startled by a skeleton which had apparently risen out of the ground. On the title−page someone had written in pencil "A mity Good Book." Underneath, in another handwriting, were the words, "you Bett!" This seemed well recommended,—even if the name of the author hadn't been a strong recommendation in itself. A faded legend on a fly−leaf showed that the book had been "Presented to Edward Rogers, on his Fourteenth Birthday, Jan'y 21st, 1852, By his Uncle Daniel."

I took that book back to the kitchen. The Professor had a lamp burning on the table beside him, and I sat down in its light. In a few seconds I was following the adventures of the hero,—a hero whose foot, it seemed "had pressed the summits of the Andes, and climbed the Cordilleras of the Sierra Madre." He had "steamed it down the Mississippi, and sculled it up the Orinoco."

The Orinoco! That magic river with the musical name! I knew it too, and could see it in my mind's eye as I read. The branches of the trees met across the stream,—parrots screamed, monkeys chattered, and scampered from one tree to another. The kitchen, the Professor, vanished from my sight. I was unconscious of the hard, uncomfortable chair in which I sat, and of the dim, sputtering light of the badly trimmed lamp.

What else had he done? He told you about his past adventures, before he began upon the new one. "I had hunted buffaloes with the Pawnees of the Platte, and ostriches upon the Pampas of the Plata; I had eaten raw meat with the trappers of the Rocky Mountains, and roast monkey among the Mosquito Indians." Now, it seemed, he was off for the war in Mexico,—and I could come along with him, if I liked.

I did like, and it was two hours later when I suddenly heard an oily voice saying: "Why, it's half past nine,—James, you're not going to read all night, are you?" Then I came back to Rogers's Island with a bump, and saw the obnoxious face of Mr. Snider looking down at me. The Professor had left the room, though I had not noticed when he went.

"What is that book, James? Something improving, I trust?"

"It's a fine book," said I.

He took it and looked it over, making a clicking sound of disapproval with his tongue.

"How much better it would be," he observed, "to read some book of useful information, or something with a MORAL! Such a book as this TEACHES you nothing. Couldn't you find anything better?"

I was sorry that the Professor wasn't there, to tell him to shut up. I had no patience to stay and hear a book of brave adventure decried by this sanctimonious looking hum−bug,—whose mouth watered when he talked about old Fillmore and his ninety million dollars. Fillmore, so everybody said, was so stingy that he cut his own hair, and went around looking like a fright, rather than pay a barber. Worse than that, he was hated like fury by all the people who worked for him because he screwed their wages down to the lowest possible figure. But Mr. Snider thought him a great man, and boasted to me of knowing him within ten minutes of the time we met.

I told Mr. Snider that I was ready to go to bed, if he would show me where I was to sleep. He led me upstairs, past two or three rooms, to one in the rear. The floors were all bare, but the rooms had some furniture,—four−post beds, wash−stands, and one or two hair−cloth chairs. The bed in my room had a mattress and blankets, but no other bed−clothes. Mr. Snider bade me good−night, tried to shake hands with me—an attempt in which I foiled him—and softly departed down stairs.

After I was in bed I could hear the murmur of his voice below, as he talked with the Professor. Just as I was dropping off to sleep the voices grew suddenly louder for a moment or two, as if a door had opened somewhere.

"Maybe," I heard the Professor say, "but they'd never send a kid like that."

Mr. Snider answered something,—I could not distinguish the words.

"Oh, rats!" said the Professor, "what could he have seen?"

Again Mr. Snider murmured.

"Oh, sure, sure," the Professor's voice came again, "I was for keeping him, from the first. But just to be perfectly safe. We want to keep him till the first crowd has gone, anyway,—and till the second one has gone, if you say so. I don't care."

Another mutter from Snider; the Professor laughed and spoke again:

"It won't make a bit of difference. Bowditch has got all those hayseeds hypnotised. That's where you come in,—with your pink whiskers. ... Say, that door's open!"

There was a sound of footsteps, and the soft closing of a door. Presently another door closed, outside, and I heard the two men come upstairs. I jumped out of bed, and locked the door of my room. It was fairly plain to me that I was in the house with a couple of swindlers, of some kind or other, and though I didn't believe they would harm me, there was no need to take unnecessary chances.

They went into one of the front rooms. I heard four thumps, one after the other, as they took off their shoes, and threw them on the floor, so I judged they were going to bed. As I lay there, listening for them to begin to snore, I fell asleep myself.

I waked, a little at a time, in a room which was in broad daylight, with the sun shining through one window. For a moment I could not remember where I was,—at home, on the "Hoppergrass," in the jail at Bailey's Harbor, or on the other yacht. Then I recalled Rogers's Island, Mr. Snider and the Professor. I got up and listened for them, and looked out of the window, but I neither heard nor saw anybody. I dressed, unlocked the door, and tried to open it. But I could not do so,—a bolt had been shot, or a button turned, and the door was locked outside. While I was rattling and shaking at it I heard Mr. Snider in the passage.

"Dear me!" he said, "what's the matter? Is that you, James? Just wait a moment."

I heard a fumbling, and my door came open.

"Dear me!" said he again, "this bolt had slipped over, and locked the door. It does that sometimes. An old house, you know, all out of repair. You must have thought we were trying to keep you inside. It DID look that way."

What a clumsy liar he was! I said nothing at all to him, but hurried down stairs as fast as I could without running. I felt much safer with the Professor,—perhaps he was as big a rascal as the other,—but he wasn't as slimy in his manner.

It was half past seven, and they had eaten their breakfast. They had saved some for me, and I ate it, keeping an eye out for Snider. He did not reappear, however, and after I had finished eating, I got "The Rifle Rangers" and

went outside with it to read, and wait for the people who were coming on the steamboat. I felt more comfortable outdoors than in. With Mr. Snider creeping from one room to another I never knew what might happen, nor how he might try to cage me up. Outside, he wouldn't be able to touch me, if I had any kind of a start.

I had thought it over while I was eating breakfast. There was some sort of hocus−pocus going on, connected with this excursion and the gold company. Anybody could see that. Whether they really expected Captain Bannister to come on the steamboat, or whether that was all a lie to make me stay, I could not tell. Captain Bannister had said, according to the men at the Eagle House, that he was coming to Rogers's Island, so it might be that the Professor's story was true. On the other hand, it might have been made up out of whole cloth in order to keep me there over night. But why should they want to do that? They thought I had seen something,—the Professor had asked: "What could he have seen?" I hadn't seen anything,—except that they were working over some boxes on the platform beneath the wharf. They had both acted like boys caught in the jam closet.

I sat on the front porch, and thought it over, and read, and then thought it over again, until the smoke of the steamboat was in sight. This must have been about half past nine. The Professor and Mr. Snider had been out in the barn most of the time, or bringing chairs and putting them up on the platform in the side yard. When the smoke of the steamboat appeared they both came around to the front of the house. The Professor shook hands with me, and said goodbye. He had to go to Lanesport, he said, on important business, and he must start now. He was going by the road.

"Of course," said he, "I wish I could stay for the excursion, but Mr. Snider will have to receive them, and explain the works."

"And James," added Snider, "will come around to the side and help me with the chairs,—won't you, James? It will only take a moment."

The Professor vanished around the corner of the house, as we turned into the drive.

"I hope you understand, James," said Mr. Snider, "that any—er— precautions we have taken since you came amongst us, were only such as were perfectly necessary under the circumstances. We are guarding here, of course, a valuable scientific discovery,—a VERY valuable discovery. There are people who would give thousands of dollars, and go to ANY lengths to get our secret away from us. Any lengths. We are determined that these men—these wicked men, I regret to say—shall not steal from the Professor the fruit of his brain. The workings of this—er—this precious secret will be displayed today, when the good folk arrive from Lanesport. We have the recommendation, as you must have seen, of two of the most respectable men in the town,—their names alone are proof of the high moral plane on which our Company is conducted. I say this to you because you do not know me, nor the Professor, and you are young, and thoughtless, and might jump to wrong conclusions. That would pain me very much, James. Very much. You will see, after the good folk arrive, and after you have heard Mr. Bowditch and Deacon Chick, that everything is as open as the day."

In spite of Mr. Snider's manner, in spite of his oily voice, I was nearer believing in him then, than at any time while I was on the island. After all, I had heard of inventions which must be kept secret. Moreover, there may have seemed something suspicious about the way in which I had come. I had bungled in giving that false name, and made them think that I was simply prying into their affairs. All that I wished now was to see if Captain Bannister were on the steamboat, or if I could get news of him or the "Hoppergrass," and I told this to Mr. Snider.

"Very well, then," said he, "it will be all right, now we have a clear understanding. And I would like you to keep near me while the people are here. You may be able to help, and thereby you can work off some of your debt to us for the two meals you have had at our expense. Though we would not charge you much for them,—about fifty cents for the supper, and thirty−five—or forty—for the breakfast, I think. Now, we will go down to the wharf."

The steamboat was less than quarter of a mile distant. It gave three long, shrill toots of its whistle, and came straight for us. It was a small boat, covered with flags and streamers. A brass band, in red coats, sat in the bow playing "Sweet Marie." As the boat came nearer I was surprised to see how few people, aside from the band, were on it. I had expected to see a big crowd,—a picnic gathering. Instead, there were only about two dozen people. Most of them were men, but a few had brought their wives—nice looking old ladies—with them.

Mr. Snider stood up on a high place, took off his black felt hat, with a great flourish, and put on his ghastly smile. "Welcome!" he shouted, "welcome to Rogers's Island!"

There was a big man with a frock coat and top hat standing near the band. He must have weighed two hundred

and fifty pounds, and all his movements were slow and majestic. He took off his hat, faced toward the people who were sitting about the deck on camp− stools, and shouted in a deep but tremendous voice:

"Three cheers for Brother Snider!"

Then, counting "One, two, three!" and waving his tall hat in slow circles, he gave the three cheers all by himself. No one else opened his mouth.

The steamboat came alongside the wharf, was made fast, and a gang− plank run out. The big man came ashore, together with another who had a gray beard,—Deacon Chick, as I found out later. They shook hands with Mr. Snider very warmly, and introduced him to some of the other people as they stepped off the gang−plank.

"The Professor not here!" I heard the big man say; "that's a great disappointment!"

Then they all started up the wharf toward the house. The men of the band had scrambled ashore, and they headed the procession,— still playing "Sweet Marie" with loud blasts. Then came Mr. Snider, accompanied by the big man (he was the Hon. J. Harvey Bowditch) and by Deacon Chick. Behind him were the people from Lanesport, two by two, some of them carrying baskets, and most of them in their Sunday clothes. At the end were some men from the steamboat with armfuls of camp−stools.

Captain Bannister was not there. I had watched all the men as they came ashore, and I asked one of the crew of the "May Queen" about him. He had never heard of such a man, he said. So I decided to go up to the house, hear what was going to happen, and then go back to Lanesport on the steamboat. It would leave, so the man told me, at twelve o'clock sharp, and get to Lanesport about one. I would be in time to meet Ed and Jimmy, Mr. Daddles and the rest, and find out if they had had better luck at Big Duck Island.

Mr. Snider had a great amount of trouble in getting the people placed as he wished them. The band was in one corner of the garden playing "Razzle Dazzle" in very lively fashion. This helped make the occasion gay, but it also made it hard for anyone to hear what was being said. Mr. Snider's smooth remarks, as he teetered about, the Hon. J. Harvey Bowditch's stentorian bellowings, and Deacon Chick's confidential whispers were all drowned out by the music. Some of the men wanted to inspect the barn, and the premises generally, and one or two of the women had shown a desire to look into the kitchen. They had to be headed off by Mr. Snider, who gave them all a smile, a clammy hand−shake, and a patting on the shoulder, as he rounded them up on the camp−stools near the platform. Then he and Mr. Bowditch and the Deacon mounted the stand. There was a table with a pitcher of water and a glass, and Mr. Snider took his place behind it.

But when he smiled, and opened his mouth to speak, the band seized upon that moment to burst into music again. Their choice this tune was "Daisy Bell,"—

"Daisy! Daisy!
Give me my answer true!"

they blared forth, with their full strength. Mr. Snider turned toward them and tried to maintain his smile, while the Hon. Mr. Bowditch, and Deacon Chick waved their hands furiously at the leader.

The leader, however, was quite unconscious of their efforts, as his back was turned toward them. He was a short, very stout man, stuffed into a scarlet coat. He stood up to lead, and instead of waving a wand, played a cornet. This he moved about in the air, swaying his head and the upper part of his body in time with the music. His face was deep red, and it seemed as if he might burst if it were not for blowing into the cornet. The tune went on, defiantly, in spite of all the hand−wavings from Bowditch and Chick.

Finally, a trombone player caught sight of their gestures, and he attracted the leader's attention to the fact that something was wrong by giving him a prod in the stomach with the slide of his trombone. The leader hesitated, stopped, and then faced about to the speakers' stand. Some of the band paused, while others kept right on with "Daisy Bell."

Mr. Snider smiled, bowed, and I suppose, with a desire to make himself agreeable, thrust out his hands and applauded. At any rate, the band−master mistook the meaning of it, for he silenced those who were still playing, leaned forward to say something to them all, waved his cornet, and started them once more on "Razzle Dazzle." He had thought that Mr. Snider preferred that to "Daisy Bell," and wanted it repeated. Then they had to begin the hand− wavings and gesticulations all over again. Nothing could stop them this time until Deacon Chick descended from the stand, went over to the band−master, tapped him on the shoulder, and whispered excitedly in his ear. At last they got them all quieted down, except one tremendous man who sat on two stools, playing an enormous bass−horn. For quite two minutes after the others had ceased he went on with his: "Um−pah! Um−pah! Um−pah!"

"The boys don't get a chance like this more'n once a year," said a man who was standing beside me, "and you bet they are going to give J. Harvey his money's worth!"

He was a sharp−faced man, a farmer evidently, not more than thirty−five years old. He had bright black eyes, which he kept fixed constantly on Mr. Bowditch and Mr. Snider.

Finally, Mr. Snider got his chance to speak. He said he would call them all "Friends" as that suited them better than "Ladies and Gentlemen." He told how sorry he was because the Professor had been called away by the illness of a relative. Then he told what a great inventor the Professor was, and how he was even more remarkable for doing good. For this invention was one which would do good to so many people.

This led Mr. Snider up to his favorite subject, and he began to speak on doing good and being good. The black−eyed man beside me began to utter little groans.

"I knew I was in for J. Harvey Bowditch," he said under his breath, "and I thought that was enough punishment for one day."

At last Mr. Snider got back to the gold company. "From the earliest times, my friends, scientists have known of the existence of gold in sea−water. Together with other metals,—silver, platinum, and so on, there is a great amount of gold in sea−water. It is in tiny particles, not so big as the point of a needle. There it is,—but how shall it be got together? How shall it be extracted from the water? Aristotle tried to discover a method. He failed. Diogenes Laertius tried. He failed. Sir Isaac Newton, Benjamin Franklin,—they tried. And THEY failed. Professor Von Bieberstein has succeeded. And YOU are to see this method demonstrated today, and YOU, my friends, are to benefit by this discovery."

Then he talked at some length about the big "plant" which they expected to build, and how they would "treat" seventy millions (or billions, I forget which) of gallons of water daily. In one year from that date, he predicted, IF the plan received support, the gold taken every month from Broad Bay would be worth three hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Snider licked his lips. "Think of that, friends,—three hundred thousand dollars a month!" Shares in this Company were on sale for five dollars each. They would be placed on sale after the demonstration. He now had the pleasure and the honor to introduce to them one who needed no introduction to an audience from Lanesport,—the Hon. J. Harvey Bowditch.

Mr. Bowditch came forward with majestic tread. He thrust his right hand into the lapel of his coat, and commenced, in the deep booming tones of a bass−drum.

"My friends," he said, "I shall detain you here for just one moment."

"The poet Byron," he continued, "has written in words which must be forever immortal, of the deep and dark blue ocean. He said,—"

Mr. Bowditch talked for three quarters of an hour. That was his idea of "just one moment." Several people went sound asleep, one man pitched forward out of his chair while asleep, and some of those in the back began to get up and tip−toe away. At last Mr. Snider got him to stop—by pulling at his coat−tails—and they began to hand around the gold specimens.

That woke them up! Deacon Chick came down from the stand with a neat little box, and walked around among the people, showing off the gold. There were six nice, fat little nuggets—smooth, and yellow,—and delightful to handle. Each was about as big as a postage−stamp, and about half an inch thick. This was the gold which the Professor and Mr. Snider had extracted from the water, right there at Rogers's Island, by their secret, chemical process. It had been in tiny particles then, like dust, but they had sent it somewhere, and had it made into these nuggets,—plump and pleasing! They had a letter from someone in the Treasury to prove that it was solid and pure, and of the very best quality. No one needed the letter. The nuggets spoke for themselves,—they were so heavy! I held two of them, one in each hand, and weighed them. We all held one or two of them, and felt of them, and got a great deal of pleasure out of them.

The people from Lanesport gathered around Deacon Chick, the men looked at the gold nuggets, weighed them, and smiled at each other.

"Looks like the real stuff,—hey?"

"Looks like it to ME, all right!"

Everybody was interested, brightened up, happy and good−natured. They smiled and joked over the gold. Only one man seemed at all troubled in his mind.

"There's jus' one thing," I heard him say to two other men, "there's jus' one thing that kinder worries me. If we

go ahead and perdoose gold at this rate, we're goin' to flood the market! Yessir! Gold will get so common that the price of everything will go sky−high, an' that'll raise old Ned!"

The other two looked pretty serious at this, and they started to discuss it. One of them thought they had better hold back most of the gold, "and only spring it on people a little at a tune."

Suddenly Mr. Snider shouted: "Now, friends, if you please, we will go down to the wharf for the demonstration!"

CHAPTER X. MR. SNIDER

It was hard to get them started—they were clustered so thick around the Deacon and his little box, all talking and laughing and discussing. Everyone was awake now, and animated,—if those six little yellow lumps of gold had appeared sooner, even the Hon. J. Harvey Bowditch couldn't have put the people to sleep.

By sending the Deacon and the gold nuggets ahead, the procession was formed again for the wharf. The band stayed in the yard, playing tune after tune, and enjoying themselves immensely.

The "May Queen" was lying at one side of the wharf, so Mr. Snider, the Deacon, and Mr. Bowditch went to the end, while the people gathered around them in a semi−circle. Mr. Snider had a small tin box, which might once have held a pound of crackers. It was punched full of tiny holes. Two wires were soldered on one side of the box, and he connected these by long coils of fine wire with the jars of an electric battery. A little tin tube had been fastened to the bottom of the box so that it stood upright. Into this Mr. Snider poured some powder which he took from two little vials,—first he put in some white powder, and then some of a dark blue color. He sealed up the top of the tube with beeswax and then let everyone look into the box and see that, except for the little sealed tube, it was absolutely empty.

Then he put on the cover, wound a cord completely around it, got the wires clear, and with the greatest care lowered the box over the end of the wharf. He kept on lowering until the box must have been eight or nine feet below the surface. Then he stood waiting, with the most solemn expression upon his face. Mr. Bowditch stood beside him, holding a watch, and counting the minutes. Every now and then he would say, like the tolling of a great bell: "One minute gone! ... Two minutes gone! ... Three minutes gone! ..."

The people had watched the preparations with the utmost attention. Not a movement made by Mr. Snider escaped them. Now they all stood in profound silence. Some of the men had taken out their watches and were keeping count of the time. After "Eight minutes gone!" had tolled forth from the big man, he began counting the seconds: "And ten seconds! ... Fifteen! Twenty! ... Thirty! ... Thirty− five! ... Six! Seven! Eight!"

At eight minutes and thirty−eight seconds Mr. Snider began to pull up the box. The excitement was intense. Men from the "May Queen" had joined the group,—everyone was leaning forward to watch, with faces set and eager. You could hear the people breathe,—a sort of miracle was being performed, gold was being made right before their eyes!

The box came to the top and Mr. Snider had it at last in his hands. He disconnected the wires of the battery, unwound the cord which tied the box, and lifted the cover. One woman drew in her breath so quickly that she almost sobbed, and then choked, and had to be slapped on the back. Everybody crowded around, even closer than before, as Mr. Snider exhibited the box. There was a little mud and gravel inside and this they rinsed away very carefully with a cup and basin of water. Sticking to the tin tube were two or three dozen glittering golden grains! The box was passed about, and everyone looked at the gold in silence.

"Well, I snum! Yer've done it! I didn't believe yer could, but yer've done it!"

This remark, from a man in front, made most of the people laugh. One very serious old man kept the box in his hands. He had neither laughed nor smiled when the man in front spoke, but he looked earnestly at Mr. Snider.

"Just let me test them little bits of dust, will yer, Mister?"

"Test them? Oh, yes,—certainly, certainly. By all means."

"That's right," said two or three, "let Melvin test 'em."

After giving the box to someone else to hold, Melvin fished out of his pocket a little china dish and a bottle of some liquid. They scraped off some of the gilt particles with a pocket knife, and put them in the dish. Melvin had his bottle poised above them.

"If it aint genyewine," said he, solemnly, "it'll fizzle when I pour this acid onto it, but if it is genyewine, it won't fizzle."

Then he poured the acid into the dish. There was a pause.

"It don't fizzle," said he.

"Three cheers for Brother Snider!" bellowed the Hon. J. Harvey Bowditch.

The old man who had made the test advanced toward Mr. Snider. He had a roll of money in his hand, and I

saw a hundred dollar bill on top.

"I'll take a hundred of them shares, Mister," said he.

"I come first here," said another man, "I've had this fixed up with Harvey Bowditch ever since we come. Gimme fifty shares."

"I'll take fifty of 'em," said another man.

"Here's twenty−five dollars," said another, "that's good for five shares, aint it?"

"Just one moment, friends," said Mr. Snider, "just one moment."

They got a stool from the "May Queen," and a little table. Mr. Snider sat down at the table, with Mr. Bowditch and Deacon Chick hovering near. They produced a bundle of certificates, all printed in bright purple ink, with a picture of Washington, and a big eagle, and a flag at the top. At the bottom was a great gold seal, with two red ribbons fluttering from it. Mr. Snider filled in the names with a fountain pen, and the number of shares that each man purchased.

He sat there and simply raked in money. I counted three thousand dollars before I got tired counting. But they got more than that, for the black−eyed man—the man who groaned during the speech− making—told me that old Melvin Eaton, who had tested the gold, walked away for a while and thought it over, and then came back and bought four hundred more shares, giving Mr. Snider five hundred dollars in cash and a check for fifteen hundred. This had such an effect on the others—for Melvin had a reputation for being "closer'n the bark of a tree"—that several of them doubled their previous purchases. One man had already bought a hundred shares, and now he counted ten more fifty dollar bills into Mr. Snider's hand. The money went into a black bag, and Mr. Snider raised the number of shares on his certificate to two hundred.

"No need to waste another certificate," said he.

The black−eyed man pulled me by the sleeve, and led me up the wharf, away from the crowd.

"You didn't come on the boat with us," he said, "perhaps you're part of the Company?"

"I am not!" I said, "I came here last night to look for a boat I had been cruising in. They made me stay here over night,—Mr. Snider and the Professor did, but I'm going back on the steamer with you."

"How do they work this fake anyhow?"

I stared at him.

"Oh, come! You know it's a fake as well as I do. I knew it was one before I came,—anything that Bowditch is in is always a fake. I'm sort of sorry, you know, to see these old roosters getting skinned so badly. It'll do some of them good, for believing in Bowditch,—he never had to do with anything straight yet."

"Why do they believe in him now?"

"Oh, it's Chick. Chick is an innocent old Betty, he's as much fooled as the others. He told me that he had put a thousand into this a week ago, and I don't doubt he has. Bowditch would have got a few of them,—there are always some who believe in a wind−bag, no matter how many bunco games he has been in, but Chick got most of them. Who knows anything about Snider? Now I've seen him, I wouldn't let him hold my coat while I ran across the street and back,—not if there was two cents in the coat that I ever wanted to see again. But they swallow him because Chick does, I guess. And Chick does because Bowditch does. And there you are... Where's this Professor? Everything Chick and Bowditch told us while they were rounding us up for this trip was about the Professor. It was Professor this and Professor that,—and now we get here, and he isn't to be seen. What's happened to him?"

"He went to Lanesport just before the steamer came."

"Did you see him go?"

"Why, yes...I..."

"Did you really see him set out on the road and depart?"

"Well, no...I don't know that I did. He went around one corner of the house, as I went around the other with Snider... Why? What do you mean?"

"He aint down under the wharf salting these gold−boxes or doing some other kind of monkey business with 'em? Hey?"

"Why, no," I persisted, weakly, "he's gone to Lanesport, I tell you."

But the idea struck me for the first time,—"down under the wharf,"—that was where I had seen them both yesterday.

"Gone to Lanesport?" he continued, "but you say yourself that you have only his word for it. Why should he go there today? That looked fishy to me, right on the start. Now the easiest way to account for that trick Snider did out there on the wharf is that there's someone down there hitching on another box or stuffing in that gold. It was a pretty good trick, and you saw how it took with them."

"But they say that was real gold, and that those nuggets are real."

"Of course they're real. What of it? They could buy that amount of gold ten times over—twenty times over—with what they've taken in this morning. And they expect another boat−load of suckers this afternoon. And this is only the beginning,—Snider's been rustling around amongst a lot of women and old people over in Lanesport, and they're about ready to make over their bank− accounts to him. They LIKE him, you know,—a lot of folks DO like just that kind of slippery snake. It's funny,—you'd think anyone with ordinary common−sense would grab hold of his watch and his small change, and hang on to it—hard, as soon as Br'er Snider hove in sight. But no,—they try to crowd their money onto him... Real gold! Of course it was real,—that's what fetched 'em. They don't stop to think that there's no connection proved between the gold and the sea−water. What got 'em interested at first was old man Chick's reputation for honesty. He is honest,—no doubt about that, honest as the day is long. Only he's been fooled like the rest of 'em,—he was over here two weeks ago, and they did their trick for him then, with the tin box and the battery, and the blue and white powders, and all the rest of it. They gave him some of the gold they made then, and he carried it up to the city and had it analyzed. But they could make gold in J. Harvey Bowditch's tall hat just as well as in that old tin box."

I had been thinking all the time he was speaking.

"Look here," I said, "I saw them down under the wharf, yesterday afternoon."

"You did? Where?"

I told him all about it,—how I had seen them both on the platform above the water, what they were doing, and how guilty they had acted.

"There's a trap−door, then? Do you suppose you can point it out to me? Let's stroll down there now. Pretend to be talking about something else, and just cough when we are on the trap."

It was not very easy to do. There were about thirty people standing on that little wharf, and they had left baskets, coats and shawls here and there, so that the standing room was pretty well covered. Besides, when I came to look for the trap−door I found I could hardly pick it out, it had been so skilfully made. At last I thought we were on it, so I coughed, and the black−eyed man halted. He had been telling me some story all the time, and now he turned toward me and held out both his hands as if he were measuring the size of a fish or something. Then he pointed out into the bay, threw back his head and laughed. Finally he glanced down at the trap−door, looked up again quickly, and went on with his story. Then he moved off the door, looked down at it again, pinched my arm, and whispered: "Say, I think I'll come back here this afternoon, and have another look at this."

My back had been turned toward Mr. Snider all the time. He was still at the little table, folding up his certificates. Now I turned and glanced toward him, and found that he was watching us very intently. I turned again, and walked toward the end of the wharf. As I did so, the whistle of the steam−boat blew a loud toot, and the people began to crowd on board. I walked on with the rest, getting separated, for the moment, from my friend the black− eyed man. I saw him talking with two other men, and a little later saw Mr. Snider and Mr. Bowditch whispering together and glancing in my direction.

Well, I thought I was departing from Rogers's Island, and from Snider, for good and all. You would hardly believe how I got left behind. I heard someone say, "Oh, here's the boy who is going to find my shawl for me!" and I looked around and saw a nice, smiling old lady.

"Mr. Bowditch says he won't let the steamer go, if you'll run up to the house and see if you can find my grey shawl,—I must have dropped it in the grass there, where we set down."

I wouldn't have done it for Snider,—I would have suspected some kind of a trick. But I think the lady was sincere, and moreover you don't suspect an old person in a black silk dress, with gold spectacles, of laying plots and playing tricks. Her request was genuine enough,—Snider simply took advantage of it to let the steam−boat go without me.

I was less than five minutes in running up to the house, hunting in the grass until I felt sure the shawl was not there, and starting back to the wharf again. But while I had been out of sight of the "May Queen" they had cast off the lines and steamed away. There she was, going merrily, her stern pointed toward the island, a trail of thick

smoke floating back, the band playing "After the Ball," and no one paying the slightest attention to me!

Yes, there was though,—just one! The old lady in the black silk dress was standing near the stern waving her hands. I held up mine,—empty—to show that I had not found the shawl, and ran down the wharf shouting: "Wait! Stop! Come back!"

It was a silly performance. No one heard me, and I do not suppose it would have made the slightest difference if they had. They would not turn the boat around and come back for someone who had no business on board anyway.

Mr. Snider was not in sight. Had he gone on the steam−boat? Or crawled through his trap−door underneath the wharf? I did not know, but I was angry with him. I felt sure that he had purposely let the boat go without me,—it was part of their scheme to keep me there, until the people had gone in the afternoon.

Now I should have to go that roundabout way by the road, and get to Lanesport two or three hours late. There was nothing else to be done, however, so I went up the wharf once more, and started along the road. At the turn, just beyond the house, I found Mr. Snider, walking up and down with his hands behind his back. His face was rather red, and he did not attempt to smile.

"Why, James," he said, "so you lost the boat! Well, you can take the one this afternoon."

"I'm going now," said I, "I'm going to walk."

And I tried to pass him. He stepped in front of me.

"Just one moment!" said he, "I would rather you stayed until this afternoon, and then—"

"Let me go," I answered, "you promised me I could go on the steam− boat, and then you let it sail without me."

"James, I am sorry to hear you accuse me—"

I tried again to dodge by him, but he reached out one of his long arms and grabbed me by the coat−sleeve. I jerked it out of his grasp however, and jumped to the side of the road and tried to pass him in the gutter. He headed me off with two strides,—he couldn't dodge as quick as I, but his long legs gave him an advantage. Then I lost my head and threatened him.

"You'd better let me pass," I said, "I know all about your game here,—and your trap−door in the wharf!"

His face became pale again in an instant, not white,—lead color.

"You little brat!" he squeaked, "I'll wring your neck for you!"

And he made another grab at me. I dodged again, and a third time, and as I did so caught one foot in the grass, stumbled and fell. He had me by the coat collar hi a second, and in another second I was out of the coat and running back toward the house. I did not wish to go there, but I didn't have time to choose. The thing to do then was to get away from Mr. Snider. He dropped the coat and came after me on the run.

He was a good runner, was Mr. Snider, but I knew I could beat him if I had any sort of a start. His stride was longer, but he couldn't move as quick. Besides, he was out of practice. When I dashed in at the front door he was just coming up the path. I slammed the door and tried to lock it. But the bolt was rusty and it stuck. I gave that up and ran upstairs, two steps at a time. When I reached the landing I ran along the passage toward the rear in order to get to the stairs to the third storey. Just as I started up them I heard Mr. Snider burst in at the front door. On the third storey I had to hunt about a little for the stairs to the attic. I found them in a moment or two, and ran up into the attic, and hid behind a trunk in a dark corner.

That had been my idea,—to hide in the attic. And a very foolish idea it was,—I can see that now. It is quite easy—sitting here and writing about it—to think of three or four better plans. I ought to have kept outdoors, and then I could have run around the house, dodged Mr. Snider, and got a clear start again for the road across the marsh. He could not have caught me then. The hero of "The Rifle Rangers," for instance, would have planned all that out while he was running up the road with Mr. Snider ten feet behind. But I hadn't planned it. My one idea was to get away from Mr. Snider. He looked as if he would murder me,—or, at any rate, half−murder me, and I did not wish to be murdered, nor even half− murdered. I had rushed into the house without thinking what I was doing, and now here I was, caught like a rat in a trap, in this hot, dark, and dusty attic.

For I very soon saw that if Mr. Snider came up into the attic there was no place to retreat. I could hear him now, hunting through all the rooms and closets down below. As soon as he found I was in none of them, up the attic stair he would come. And then he would simply poke about among the boxes and trunks until he found me. I had run up one flight after another until I had reached the top, and now I could go no higher.

No higher? How about the roof? There must be a ladder and a scuttle in the roof. If I could get up there and close the scuttle again perhaps I would be safe. Mr. Snider might stop at the attic. I jumped up from behind the trunk and hunted about in the semi− darkness. There were other trunks and boxes, old shoes and old umbrellas on the floor, and I stumbled and bumped against all of them. Two or three coats or suits of clothes were swinging from hooks, dangling unpleasantly, like hanging men. But I found the ladder at last. There was a faint rim of light above, at the edge of the scuttle. It was high time I found it, for I could hear Mr. Snider in the room below now, and I felt sure he would come upstairs in a minute.

The ladder was rickety, but it held, and I got to the top, and began to fumble for the hasp or lock of the scuttle. It was thick with cob−webs and dust, and for a while it refused to move. While I was working at it I heard Mr. Snider open the door at the foot of the attic stairs.

I stood perfectly still on the ladder. In books they tell how, when you are frightened, your heart comes into your mouth. It isn't at all what happens. Your heart stays right where it always is, but it thumps so loud that you feel as if it could be heard in the next room. And your throat becomes horribly dry, all of a sudden, and seems to be closing up. It gets so narrow that you can scarcely breathe.

Mr. Snider paused for a moment and seemed to listen. Then he closed the door again and tip−toed away. I went to work at the hasp again, and finally I had it open. I raised the scuttle, as quietly as I could, and stepped out on the roof.

The glare of the sun almost blinded me at first. Then I saw that I was on a flat part of the roof,—the highest point in the house. The roof sloped on either side toward an enormous chimney. The shingles were old and rotten.

Looking off, I could see a great distance in almost every direction. Across the bay, so far that I could hardly see the steam−boat herself, was a trail of black smoke from the "May Queen." The water on the other side of the house was hidden by the trees.

I turned again to make sure that I had replaced the scuttle. As I did so I heard Mr. Snider's footsteps in the attic beneath. My first thought was to sit on the scuttle hoping to keep it closed. But I knew that I was not heavy enough to hold it down. Would he think of the roof? If he did, and if he came up the ladder, of course he would find the scuttle unlocked, and he would know that I was on the roof. The thing to do was to wait there until he raised the scuttle and then bat him over the head. But unfortunately, I had nothing to bat him with.

Sure enough, here he came up the ladder! I retreated down the slope of the roof,—it was a ticklish job, but again my rubber− soled shoes stood me in good stead—and crawled around to the other side of the broad chimney, and hid behind it.

I had not been there more than a second before he raised the scuttle. I could hear him puffing. Once more my heart began to thump and my throat to contract. He stepped out upon the roof and I suppose he decided immediately that I was behind one of the chimneys. At any rate he started down the roof in my direction. The instant that he did so he slipped and came down on the roof with a crash. Several shingles must have come out, and he clawed and scraped at a great rate. I thought—and hoped—that he was going to slide right off the roof, but he managed to save himself. His slide was checked somehow, and he commenced to crawl back toward the scuttle. As he did so he uttered a string of curses that would have horrified his friends in Lanesport very much.

I heard him descend the ladder. It struck me that he was going down to the side of the house, to look up to the roof and see if I were really behind the chimney. I hurried out from my hiding−place and crawled on my hands and knees up the slope of the roof. But when I reached the scuttle I found it closed and locked. I could not raise it. He had caught me now,—I might stay on that roof forever, for all that I could do.

Unless—and I already had my jack−knife out—unless I could cut through the scuttle and get at the hasp. The wood was old, frail, and half rotten,—in three minutes I had the point of the blade through. In five, I had cut a hole large enough to admit two fingers. I knew that I was safe from being seen,—anyone on that part of the roof would not be visible from the ground near the house. After cutting for a little while longer I put enough of my hand through the hole to unfasten the hasp. Then I raised the scuttle, with the pleasant sensation that this was quite in line with our escape from the jail at Bailey's Harbor. Even better than that,—I was alone here, and cutting my way out,—or rather down, with a jack−knife. It gave me a thrill like some of the adventures in "The Rifle Rangers," and various other story−books.

No more of the roof, no more of the attic for me! I was tired of being chased about like an animal in a cage,—I was going to get down stairs and outdoors if I possibly could. I preferred to take a chance with Mr.

Snider in the open.

So I went down the ladder very cautiously and listened in the attic. Then came the attic stairs, at the foot of which there was a door to open. I got it open, and stepped into the passage−way. I could hear nothing. Mr. Snider thought I was safely locked up there on the roof. Little by little and pausing for two or three minutes on each landing, I crept quietly down stairs.

When I reached the lower hall I was in doubt whether to go out the front or the back door. But the back door was open, and so I chose that. I walked quietly out, crossed the back yard, and nearly ran into Mr. Snider's arms, as he came out of the woodshed with an ugly looking club in his hand!

He was more surprised than I, and that gave me the start I needed. He was after me in a second, but I ran around the corner of the house and headed for the front yard. Coming through the driveway was the Professor! I suppose that he had just come up from his hiding−place beneath the wharf, for his arms were full of his boxes. As soon as I saw him I turned sharply to the right, ran through the side−yard by the speakers' stand, and climbed a rail fence on the far side of the garden.

Then I ran down a little slope toward a clump of trees. As I did so, I looked back and saw Mr. Snider crawling through the fence.

The trees stood on a little hummock,—there were about a dozen of them, with some undergrowth. I ran through this, and came out on a rough ledge of rocks, which ended in a little beach. I had come to the shore on the other side of the island. Here was a small bay, not more than a hundred yards in width.

Sailing slowly out of this bay was a cat−boat, with a skull and cross−bones pirate−flag at the mast−head. It was the "Hoppergrass"!

CHAPTER XI. PIRATES IN TROUBLE

"Hi! Captain Bannister!" I shouted, "hi!"

Someone—not the Captain, but a boy in a blue shirt—looked up from the wheel. Then I heard Mr. Snider come crashing and floundering through the underbrush, so I waded into the water until I was waist−deep and then struck out to swim. Before I had made a dozen strokes Mr. Snider emerged, and ran down to the water's edge.

But I had no idea he would follow me now. He didn't look like a person who could swim,—nor even like one who enjoyed cold water much. I glanced back at him over my shoulder,—he was simply standing there, gazing after me, and rubbing his hands together excitedly, clasping and unclasping them.

"Captain Bannister!" I called out again, "the Hoppergrass! Wait!"

The boy who was steering put the helm over a trifle, altering the course of the boat a little more in my direction. Another boy came up from below, and stood there staring at me. In three minutes I was alongside, and reaching out for the tender.

"Let me come aboard!" I gasped,—"that man—"

But I was too much winded to say anything more. With some difficulty—for I had been swimming harder than was necessary—I crawled into the tender, and sat down to get my breath. As I sat there, one of the boys said:

"Why, that's Mr. Snider!"

Then he pulled the tender alongside, and I stepped on board the "Hoppergrass."

"Now, I know why you were running," said he,—"anyone would run to get away from Snider. Has he been advising you to be good?"

"He's been trying to—I don't know what. Kill me, I guess. Do you know him?"

"Don't we!" they both exclaimed together.

And then the one at the wheel said: "Has he g−got his g−gold machine here?"

"Yes," I said, "he and another man. They're a couple of crooks, and they're cheating people out of stacks of money. How did you know him?"

"Oh, he's b−been at the house. But after the first t−time we always s−skun out, over the back f−fence when we heard he was coming. Mr. Chick brought him,—to talk b−business with F− Father."

The "Hoppergrass," still sailing slowly, had drawn near the point of land at the entrance of the little bay. Mr. Snider, who had walked a few steps along the shore, stood near this point,— watching us. We passed so near him that I could easily have hit him with a base−ball, if I had had one, and felt so inclined. It was curious to be so near a man who, five minutes earlier, had been chasing me with a club. He was still clasping and unclasping his hands nervously, but he said nothing, and neither did we. After about half a minute he turned, and hurried through the trees in the direction of the house.

"I think I'll get some dry clothes," said I, starting toward the cabin. Then I stopped,—it occurred to me that there were some questions to be asked. Up to this moment I had been so glad to get away from Mr. Snider, and to find the boat again, that I had thought of nothing else.

"Say—look here—you know,—how do you happen to be on this boat, anyhow? Where's Captain Bannister?"

Both the boys turned red, and looked silly. They were twins evidently,—exactly the same size, and almost precisely alike in the face. Each of them had bright red hair, a great many freckles, and a snub nose.

"Are you one of the fellows that was on this boat?" asked one of them.

"Yes," said I. And I told them my name. "That's my shirt you've got on, by the way."

"T−t−tell him about it, S−S−Spike," said the one at the wheel.

"Tell him yourself!" growled the other.

"W−Well," said the steersman, giving the wheel a twist, "you s− see... you s−see... oh! I can't t−tell him,—it makes me s− stutter so d−darned much!"

"Go ahead!" returned Spike.

"Well," he began again, "you s−see, we were all going to B−Big D− Duck for a month, an' F−Father said—oh! our name is K−K−Kidd, you know,—the K−Kidd kids,—th−there! everybody has to spring that old chestnut about us, because they think it's f−funny. It's so old it's m−m−mouldy, but we might as well s−say it and

g−g−get it over with! W−Well, we were all going to Big D−D−Duck, s−s−same's we do every s−summer. B−But F−Father got awful cranky 'cause we f− fell behind at s−school last year, and he m−mapped out a p−p− programme of entertainments f−for us this s−summer that didn't strike us as—as—as exactly oh! as exactly b−b−bully, you know... In f−fact, it was b−b−bum! S−Studying about all s−summer... S−Say, w−won't you f−freeze?"

I thought I might do so, myself, so I took off my wet clothes, and spread them out in the sun. Then I went below, found my bag, brought it up on deck, and began to dress again. He went on, in the meantime, with his story.

"Well, F−Father didn't c−c−confess his f−foul p−plot till the very d−day we were going to Big D−Duck. That was—it was—oh, when was it, S−S−Spike?"

"It was—er—I'm all mixed up about time," said Spike.

"S−Same here," replied the other.

"It was day before yesterday,—Tuesday," Spike finally remarked.

"T−Tuesday. That's right. W−Well, F−Father g−gave us this awful j−j−jolt at l−l−luncheon. Th−That was F−Father's idea of m−making m− m−merry. It didn't t−t−tickle us m−most to d−death, s−s−somehow. We t−talked it over that afternoon, out in the b−barn, and we decided to k−k−k−k−quit. We'd t−take the b−boat ourselves, and—"

"We were all going to sail over to Big Duck in a cat−boat, you know. Father hires a boat every summer."

"S−Say, S−S−Spike, g−go ahead, if you want to."

"I don't. You go on,—you're getting there all right. You'll come to the point in an hour or two."

"W−Well, I aint c−c−crazy about it, you know... W−Well, we were all going, the whole f−family, in a new cat−boat that belongs to C−Captain B−Bill P−P−P−Prendergast. We hadn't seen her, 'cause he's had her over at P−Porpoise Island all s−summer, taking out s−sailing p−parties. F−Father said she was d−down at W−W−Woodwell's Wharf—C−C−Captain B−Bill had brought her over in the morning, and then he'd gone back to P−Porpoise Island. He was engaged to c−c− cook c−c−clam chowders at the American House. W−We were going to sail her over to Big D−Duck—S−S−Spike and I—w−w−while F−Father m−messed around and th−thought he was running the whole s−s−show. That was his p−p−p−plan. B−B−But we decided to nip his g−g−game in the b−b−b−bud, b−b−b−b−(oh! hang it!) b−b−by sneakin' down ahead of the f−family, and just sailing away on that b−boat, and embarking on a c−c−career of pup−pup−pup−piracy!"

"You see," said Spike, "we got so sick of all this Kidd talk that we thought we might as well get something out of it."

"B−Besides," said the other, "w−we were d−d−d−desperate. W−We g− got this f−f−flag—s−skull and cross−bones, you know that we had on our b−boat, the 'J−J−Jolly Roger,' last summer, and we l−l−lit out for W−W−Woodwell's Wharf to f−f−f−f−fool F−Father. It was p− pretty f−f−foggy when we got to the wharf, and we s−saw it wouldn't be s−safe for F−Father and M−M−Mother and B−Betty and Alice and the b−b−baby to go sailing, anyhow. But there wasn't any b−boat at W−Woodwells,—she was over at M−M−Mulliken's Wharf. So w−we s−skun around, and g−got aboard, hoisted the s−sail, and s−started down the river. W−We were nearly out into the b−bay before it struck us that we weren't on the right b−boat."

"I went down into the cabin," said Spike, "and it was all full of bags and things. Our stuff had gone over—some of it—to Big Duck that morning, by the steamer. And the rest, Father was going to bring down to the wharf in the carriage. But these bags were marked a lot of strange names,—Toppan, and Edwards, and so on."

"T−Tell him about the n−name, S−S−Spike."

"Oh, yes. There was a strip of canvas hitched over the stern,—it had something painted on it in black letters. I hung over the stern, but I couldn't make it out,—because it looked upside down, of course. So I got out in the tender and read it, and it was 'Hannah J. Pettingell.' Then there was another name under that,—in gilt letters, in the regular way. That seemed kind of funny, and when I got back on the boat we unhitched the cords and pulled up the canvas sign. I tried again, hanging over the stern, and spelled out the gilt letters, one at a time. The name was 'Hoppergrass.' We thought there must be some funny business,—a boat with two names, like that."

"That's why the Captain had the crier call it the Hannah Pettingell," I reflected.

"Well, we knew we were on the wrong boat," said Spike, "because Captain Bill Prendergast's is the 'Clara'."

"B−B−But what could we d−d−d−do? We didn't d−dare to go b−back. If F−Father didn't l−l−l−lambaste the

l−l−l−life out of us, the o−owner of this b−boat would. We had s−started out to be pup−pup− pirates, and we had m−made a b−b−bully g−g−good beginning, b−by g−g−gum!"

"Say, you don't own this boat, do you?" asked Spike, suddenly.

"No."

"Oh, th−that's too bad! J−Just think. If you d−did, n−now we've s−s−s−saved you from S−Snider you'd be in a f−friendly f−f−frame of mind, and we could t−turn the b−boat over to you, everything f−forgiven, and no k−k−k−questions asked."

"It belongs to Captain Bannister, and I wish you'd tell me where he is," I answered.

"D−D−Do you think you can s−s−square us with B−B−B−Baluster?"

"Ye−es,—I guess so."

I did not want to be dismal about it, but my own opinion was that the Captain would be furious. His boat had been missing now for two days.

"W−Well, if he thinks we've been having a p−p−p−picnic, that's where he's off. We s−sailed over to S−S−Squid C−Cove that night, and went ashore in the t−t−tender. It was d−d−dark as a p−p− pocket, and this ch−ch−chump here, S−Spike, didn't make the t−tender f−fast to the s−slip, and she f−floated off. The f−fog was so thick that we couldn't s−see the yacht, and we didn't dare t−try to s−swim for her, b−because if we got wet and c−couldn't f−find her, and had to l−l−loaf around all night on s−shore, s−s− soppin' wet, why, that would be r−r−rotten, you see. S−Spike s−s− stripped and s−swum out into the f−fog, but he couldn't f−f−find her, and we thought the b−b−blooming yacht had g−gone adrift, t−too! And so we s−stayed on sh−shore, and slept in a p−p−potato− patch, and all we had to eat was some r−r−radishes. I ate f−f− fiiteen of 'em, and they g−g−gave me the p−p−p−p−pip... And when we woke up in the m−morning, there was the t−tender, on sh−shore, about t−twenty yards away,−she had f−floated b−back again, you see."

We were getting out into the Bay, and I asked them where they were going.

"G−G−G−G−Give it up; there's no p−place that's s−safe for us, now. Everyone's hand is against us."

I asked them to head for Lanesport, and told them that I expected to meet the rest of the "Hoppergrass's" crew there.

"L−L−L−L−L−Lanesport!" exclaimed the boy at the wheel, "it w−would be sailing into the j−j−jaws of d−d−d−death! W−Why, d−don't you s−see when we s−stole this b−boat w−we c−committed pup−pup−piracy on the high s−s−seas! They'd s−s−s−string us right up at the y−y− yard−arm!"

"Oh, no, they wouldn't. I'll fix it up with Captain Bannister."

"That's all right," said Spike, "but piracy isn't the only thing they've got against us."

"Isn't it?"

"Not by a long shot."

"Why, what else have you done?"

"B−B−Burglary, b−b−by g−g−gum! S−S−Say, what were you f−fellows doing? This b−boat is said to be owned by n−notorious b−b−b−b− burglars and thieves!"

I put my head down on the cabin, and laughed until I thought I should choke.

"You can laugh, but it didn't look like a joke to us."

"You b−bet it didn't."

"Where did you go from Squid Cove?"

"We stayed right there most of the morning,—eating breakfast, and getting some sleep, and—"

"R−R−Recoverin' from the p−p−p−p−potato−patch."

"Then we sailed around the Bay, and just fooled about until the last part of the afternoon. All the time we were wondering who this boat belonged to, and what they were doing about it. Once we started to abandon her at Squid Cove, and write a 'nonymous letter to the owner at Lanesport. Then Spook here, the big galoot, thought it would be a good idea to sail over to Bailey's Harbor and find out what had happened, and if there was any news of Father and—"

"Th−That's where I w−was f−f−f−foxy!"

"Yes! So foxy that you nearly got us jugged. You would have, if we had gone up the inlet. 'Twas just luck that we didn't. We anchored quite a way down, and thought we'd have supper first and then go ashore after dark. Say, those mince turnovers were great! There was a dory came along with a couple of little boys, about nine or ten

years old. We noticed that they stopped and looked at the boat, but we didn't think anything of that until half an hour later. We were eating supper, down in the cabin, and Spook looked out one of the cabin windows and saw another boat, with two men in it. One of them was armed—"

"W−With a pup−pup−pitchfork!"

"They squinted round for a few minutes, and then THEY went up the inlet again. 'Bout twenty minutes later, just as we were hauling up the anchor and going to sail up to the village, Spook sung out that there were three dories coming down, all full of men with pitchforks—"

"And g−g−g−g−guns!"

"He said, 'They're onto us,—they've heard about our stealing this boat!' I put her about quick, and it was mighty lucky there was a breeze. Ten minutes before, it was almost a dead calm. As soon as we swung around they began to yell—"

"L−L−Like b−b−blue b−b−blazes! Th−There was one g−great b−b−big d−d−d−d−d−duffer, about t−t−ten f−feet t−t−tall! He w−was the one I s−saw in the b−boat w−while we were eating s−supper, w−with the pup−pup−pitchfork..."

"That was Eb," I remarked,—"it's lucky he didn't catch you!"

"E−E−Eb?"

"Yes. He's the constable. Savagest man I ever saw. He arrests people for almost anything,—for playing banjos."

"W−Well, we d−didn't p−p−play any b−b−b−banjos then, b−by g−g− gum! I thought it w−was all up with us, and that we'd b−be d−d−d− dangling on the g−g−g−gallows b−b−before l−l−long! You s−see, they g−g−gained on us, at f−first. They r−rowed l−l−like fuf−fuf− fiends! B−But we b−began to d−draw ahead, and then the d−d−d−d− duffer with the pup−pitchfork—he was in the b−bow of the f−first b−boat—b−began to yell and b−b−bellow. He s−said that if we d−didn't s−stop he'd f−fill us f−full of b−b−b−b−b−bullets! S−Someone p−passed him up a g−g−gun, and when we saw that, I t−tell you, we d−dropped d−down in the b−bottom of the b−boat. S−Spike c−c−clung on to the wheel, and held her on her c−course, and we c−crouched down there, waiting for the old b−brute to b−b−blaze away. But he c−couldn't s−see us, and so there wasn't anyone for him to f−fire at. M−M−Maybe it was all b−b−bluff, b−but we didn't intend to s−stand up and t−try it, I t−tell you' After about t−ten minutes we p−p−peeked over the rail, and they were w−way b−back. They had g−given it up, and s−s−stopped r−rowing. P−Pretty s−soon, they t−turned around and went b−back. B−But we thought B−B−Bailey's Harbor was a p−pretty healthy p−place to k−k−k−keep away from!"

"And we didn't find out until this morning," said Spike, "why they were after us. It wasn't for taking this boat at all. We sailed around on the Bay all night,—we didn't dare land. We stood watch− and−watch,—I'd sleep while Spook took the wheel, and then I sailed her while he had a nap. This morning we were off this island about seven o'clock and we met a lobsterman in his boat. We bought some lobsters of him and he gave us this paper."

Spike pulled it out from under a seat and handed it to me. I still have that paper. It was the "Lanesport Herald" of the evening before,—Wednesday evening. There was an article on the front page headed "Capture Marauders!" Underneath, it went on: "Good Detective Work—Flanders Holds Crooks—Daring Escape." Then I read the article aloud:

"A clever piece of detective work on the part of Constable Eben Flanders of Bailey's Harbor resulted in landing in jail the gang of miscreants who have been making a series of breaks on Little Duck Island and vicinity and terrorizing the neighborhood Tuesday night. The miscreants who are believed to be well−known crooks and are the same who perpetrated the breaks at the residence of Mrs. Sarah B. Ellis last Saturday night and at the residence of Dr. Horace Bigelow the well−known physician Monday night were apprehended in the act of pillaging the summer residence of T. Parker Littlefield, the prominent attorney of Boston.

"Constable Flanders was notified by Moses Silloway of Bailey's Harbor that he had observed some parties acting suspiciously in the vicinity of his residence and that these parties were walking stealthily in the direction of the Littlefield residence. With his usual promptness Constable Flanders gathered a posse and seized the miscreants in the act. In a very short time the miscreants were all lodged in the new jail at Bailey's Harbor to await the action of the Court in the morning when they would have an opportunity of explaining their actions to His Honor Judge Treddick but when Deputy Constable Justin Coker opened the jail this morning he found that the parties had all vanished and that they could not be found. Considerable mystery surrounds the escape of the

miscreants and it is believed that they received assistance from outside and that some dastard or dastards gaining access to the jail liberated the parties.

"An important clue is held by Constable Flanders as it is known that the parties came to Bailey's Harbor in a yacht named Hoppergrass and a search is being made for that yacht, Constable Flanders promising the yacht a warm reception if he finds her in the vicinity of Bailey's Harbor with the miscreants on board."

"W−Well, he k−k−k−kept that p−p−p−promise, all r−right!" remarked Spook.

"Only you see," said Spike, "the miscreants weren't on board."

"That wouldn't have made any difference to Eb," I told him, "he'd have run you in just as quick."

"Now you s−see why we're a l−l−little sh−shy of going anywhere! W− With F−Father at B−Big D−Duck, p−p−p−probably, n−n−n−gnashing his t−t−teeth, w−we have only g−got the ch−choice b−between being s−s−strung up for pup−pup−pirates at L−L−Lanesport or j−j−jugged f−for b−b−b−burglars at B−B−Bailey's Harbor."

"But you haven't told us yet what you had done," Spike remarked, "did YOU break into Littlefield's house?"

So I gave them the whole story, beginning with Tuesday afternoon, when we left Captain Bannister on the "Hoppergrass" at Bailey's Harbor. I told them how we came back there and found our boat gone, how we blundered into Littlefield's house in the fog, how we were caught, how we escaped from jail, and all the rest of it. Then I told about my trip to Rogers's Island, how I saw the Professor and Mr. Snider under the wharf, and how they suspected me of spying on them, and tried to keep me on the Island.

"It was about the first lucky thing that has happened," I said, "when I found you. Snider could run pretty well, and the Professor was there, too, to head me off,—and I couldn't keep running around that island forever."

"S−Say," said Spook, "l−l−let's have some g−g−grub. T−Take the wheel, will you, S−Spike?"

He and I went below, and brought up some things to eat. We were well out in the Bay now,—Rogers's Island was only a dim blue spot astern. We ate luncheon, and discussed where we should go. I was trying to make them see that it would be safe enough to sail over to Lanesport, when Spook paused, with a banana raised toward his mouth.

"W−W−What's that b−boat?" he asked.

He was looking straight ahead. Both Spike and I looked under the boom and saw the sail of a yacht about a mile away. She was headed directly for us.

"Oh, some boat,—or other," said Spike, nibbling at a jam−covered cracker, which Spook had fixed for him.

"L−L−Let's ch−change our c−course a b−bit,—she m−may be f−full of p−p−persons with pup−pup−pitchforks."

"Rats!" remarked Spike.

But he shifted the course, just the same. We drew away from the strange yacht for about three minutes, and then,—

"Sh−She's c−coming about!" shouted Spook.

She certainly was coming about. In a few seconds she was headed for us once again.

"I d−don't know about you f−fellows, b−but I'll never b−be t−taken alive. It's those d−d−d−duffers from B−Bailey's Harbor again,— they've p−probably got c−c−cannon on b−board this t−time!"

Spike sat in silence, looking back at the stranger now and then. After about five minutes he said:

"They're not gaining on us much."

It was hard to tell whether they gained or not. As far as I could see there had not been any change in the distance between us since the other boat came about. There was a good breeze and both boats were now running before it.

"L−Let's c−clear away this g−g−grub,—we want r−room to r−repel b−b−boarders."

"We won't have to repel them," said I, "they can't catch us."

"If they do," replied Spike, "they'll only get aboard this boat through a perfectly murderous fire of raspberry jam."

"R−Raspberry j−j−jam d−doesn't r−repel b−b−boarders," said Spook, hustling the dishes below, "h−h−half as m−m−much as s−s−stewed p−p−prunes." He stopped, with his head out of the cabin door.

"S−S−Say!" he exclaimed, pointing, "isn't th−that another b−boat?"

There was another boat, certainly,—a sail had appeared some distance behind the yacht we had first sighted.

"They're not chasing us," remarked Spike; "somebody's chasing them!"

"What makes you think anybody is chasing anybody?" I asked. "They may be just out for a sail. Anyone would think there was a war going on here in Broad Bay."

"Th−There's b−b−battle, m−murder, and s−s−sudden d−death g−g− going on for us,—at B−Bailey's Harbor. And l−l−look! B−By J−J−J− Jiminy Kuk−Kuk−Crickets! There's another b−boat!"

"Oh, they're all probably pleasure boats, like this one."

"D−D−Do you c−c−call this a p−p−pleasure b−boat? S−Seems to m−me the 'H−Hoppergrass' is b−becoming a b−b−burden, like the one in the B−Bible."

"Just the same," said Spike, looking back uneasily, "this last one has come from Rogers's Island, I should think. Do you suppose it is Snider and the other man? Did they have a boat?"

"I didn't see any," I replied.

"They'd be sure to have one, though."

Spook went down into the cabin again, to get Captain Bannister's spy−glass. While he was down there, hunting for it, his brother and I watched the yacht and the two smaller sailboats behind us. The yacht and the boat which came from the direction of Rogers's Island were so situated that a line drawn between them would have formed the base of a triangle at the apex of which was the "Hoppergrass." The other small boat was half a mile or more behind the yacht. As we watched the three of them, the wind dropped a little, and there came a hot puff from the land.

"Hullo!" said Spike, "there won't be any chasing if the wind goes down much more."

Spook came on deck with the spy−glass and spent some time in trying to make out who was on the three boats. Beyond thinking that he saw pitchforks on all of them, however, he did not give us much information. The wind continued to fail, and it got hotter and hotter. In ten minutes we were sailing at a very slow rate,— hardly more than moving. The yacht was becalmed, its sail flapping. The little boat from Rogers's Island, however, still had a breeze; it was about half a mile distant and drawing up on us.

The behavior of the wind was explained by a mass of white clouds, dark underneath, which had been piling up in the west. For an hour they had been gathering, and now we saw that they were thunder− heads. They promised all the wind we needed, before long.

Presently the small boat ran into the calm streak, and her sail, too, hung loose. She was near enough now for us to see that she was merely a large sailing dory. There were two men on board her, but whether they were Mr. Snider and the Professor I could not tell. I reached for the spy−glass, when Spike said:

"They're going to row."

One of the men had lowered the sail, and the other was getting out a long pair of oars.

"W−Well, what's the matter with our d−d−doing that, too?"

"We can't row this boat, you chump!"

"N−No, b−but one of us c−c−can t−take a line in the t−t−tender, and t−tow her."

"They'll go three feet to our one."

"That's all right," I said, "it's worth trying. We can keep away from them for a while. There's a breeze coming out of those clouds in a few minutes, and then we can sail around them in circles."

I was anxious to get away. I had had a glimpse through the spy− glass, and thought I recognized Mr. Snider. We hauled the tender alongside, and Spook got in it to begin the towing. Just as he did so, and as I was standing outside the cock−pit, there came a sound above my head as if the air had been split open.

"Wh−wh−whi−i−i−ing—whip!"

The sail of the "Hoppergrass" shivered and the halliards rattled. Almost at the same instant there was a sharp "Crack!" from the dory behind us.

"The blooming sons−of−guns!" exclaimed Spike; "they're firing at us!"

"Firing?"

"Yes; a rifle. Look there!"

There was a puff of smoke floating away from the dory.

"And see that little hole in the sail. That's where the bullet went through."

Spike and I dropped into the cock−pit, and crouched below the seats. Spike hurriedly told his brother to do the same.

"N−N−No, I g−g−guess I'm better off right here. He'll have to d−d− drill through b−both s−sides of the

'G−G−Grasshopper',—I m−mean the 'H−Hoppergrass' before he can hit m−me. I'm afraid B−B−Brother S−S−Snider is f−f−forgetting to be g−g−good!"

And then we could hear him quoting Mr. Snider.

"'It's the w−way to b−b−be h−happy, F−F−Frederick, and s−s− successful, and R−RICH. D−D−Did you ever hear of Abraham P. F−F− F−Fillmore, F−F−Frederick?'"

There was an interval—not a very pleasant one—while we waited for Mr. Snider to try another shot at us.

"Here's the wind!" said Spike, suddenly; "climb aboard!"

Spook crawled into the "Hoppergrass" just as we felt the first cool gust against our faces. A cloud blew across the sun for an instant. The boom swung out with a rattle and a bump, the sail filled, and the "Hoppergrass" heeled over to the breeze. It was only a light puff, and it did not last long, but it was enough to get us under way once more. Spike and I took a peek toward Mr. Snider's boat. They were getting up their sail, so Spike jumped up on the seat again. He was in danger there, if they should fire again, but as he said, he could not sail the boat while he was crouched on deck.

The dory's sail went up in a jiffy, and again the wind seemed to favor them, for they pulled up on us rapidly. We were sailing, but by no means as well as at first. The Professor was steering their boat, I thought, but it was impossible to be sure. Both men kept almost entirely out of sight.

Then we caught the breeze again. It was puffy and uncertain,—the forerunner of a squall.

"We'll say good−bye to 'em now," exclaimed Spike, gleefully.

"B−But we won't sh−shake that yacht s−s−so easy,—l−look at 'em! H−Hoisting a j−j−jib, d−d−d−dod r−rabbit 'em!"

We had forgotten the other boats, in our excitement over the dory. Spike looked back over his shoulder.

"This seems like persecution to me," he remarked. "One trouble after another. No chance to put any more sail on this boat," he added.

"And no sail to put," said I.

"Look! They're setting a spinnaker, too! Now they'll come!"

We saw the long boom run out, waver, and settle into place. Then there bulged out upon it a great mass of canvas that made the jib look like a handkerchief. The yacht simply tore through the water. Any hope of keeping ahead of her for ten minutes was absurd. She was really trying to catch us now, and she was doing it. She grew in size every second, an overwhelming cloud of canvas,—a fine sight on the darkening water.

"T−T−Tack!" exclaimed Spook, "she c−can't s−sail into the wind with that s−spinnaker!"

"What's the good?" growled Spike, "she can sail all round this boat, just with her mainsail and jib."

Now the yacht bore down on us with a rush, cutting through the water and sending spray flying on either side of the bow. The dory was forgotten as we watched this new enemy. There was no one to be seen on board,—the spread of her canvas hid everything.

Just as her bow−sprit pushed by the stern of the "Hoppergrass" something white stirred near the mast. Then two wings flapped, and there was a sound of "Quack! Quack! Quaa−a−a−a−ck!"

CHAPTER XII. THE VOYAGE BEGINS AGAIN

At the same moment Captain Bannister poked his head under the sail and looked at us. His face was grim—as it might have been that time he was chased by pirates in the China Sea—and he had a double−barreled shot−gun in his hand.

When he saw me his mouth opened, and he stared helplessly. I caught sight of Mr. Daddles standing near the Captain, Sprague at the wheel, and Jimmy Toppan and some others busy with the sails. Then I fully realized what had first dawned on me when I heard the quacking of Simon the duck. This was Sprague's boat, of course. It was not strange that I hadn't recognized her. Coming up as she did, bow on, there was very little to distinguish her from any other yacht. And I was never familiar with her appearance.

(By the way, I have forgotten to tell the name of the yacht. It was the "White Rabbit,"—named, said Sprague, after his favorite character in a book. And as the boat was painted black, it pleased him especially to call her this, in order to annoy the matter−of− fact Chief.)

Spook crawled under a seat as soon as he saw Captain Bannister.

"G−G−Guns again!" said he; "I t−told you s−so!"

"Come out!" I said, "come out quick! It's all right,—these are my friends. That is Captain Bannister."

"The one wh−who owns this b−boat?"

"Yes."

"D−Do you c−call th−that all r−right?"

"Yes; we can explain, and fix it up. Come out of there,—we have got to tell them about Snider, and get them to help us drive him off."

The "White Rabbit" passed us as if we were standing still. One by one all those on board turned and waved their hands at me,—all except Jimmy Toppan, who was having too good a time with the sails to care for any person on earth. Presently they took in the spinnaker and came about.

I persuaded Spike to believe that these people were neither police nor crooks, nor anything else dangerous. I got him to come about, while I dropped the peak of the sail. We made no more attempt to escape, and in a few minutes the "White Rabbit" was alongside.

Then there had to be explanations. Everybody asked questions at once.

"What are you doing here, Sam?"

"Where'd you find the 'Hoppergrass'?"

"Why aren't you at Rogers's Island?"

"Why didn't you come back to Lanesport?"

"Why did you try to run away from us?"

"Who are those fellows in the dory?"

The last question struck me as the one to be answered. But we had to keep an eye on the weather,—the worst of the squall was passing off to the north−east, and going out to sea, but it was still breezy, and rather ticklish work for two boats so close together. We dropped our sail, while the "White Rabbit" took in everything but the jib.

When we were near enough to talk comfortably, I pointed to the dory, which was only a stone's throw distant.

"Those are the men—the Gold Company people—from Rogers's Island. They've been shooting at us with a rifle!"

"Shooting? What for?"

"Is there a feller named Caleb Snider there?" asked the Captain, reaching again for his shot−gun.

"Yes, he—"

But Mr. Snider arose in the dory to speak for himself. He had on his black "swallow−tail" still, and his "Bless you!" manner. His rifle did not appear.

"James!" he called to me, "James! You have treated us badly. Theft, James, theft—"

But Captain Bannister cut in with a scream.

"Theft! you old sarpent, you! THEFT! I like to hear YOU talk about it! You don't know me, but I know you!

Where's that three hundred dollars I put into your Monte Cristo mine in '78? You old buzzard! I heard tell there was a feller of your name runnin' some gold− brick scheme at Rogerses', an' I cal'lated I'd come over an' see you. Why,—"

The Professor evidently thought that they would do well to leave these troubled waters. He jammed the tiller down, and tried to sheer away. It was the most unfortunate moment possible.

"Look out!" shouted Sprague; "look out! You're going—"

A gust of wind caught their sail, the boom jibed, nearly knocking Mr. Snider overboard, the little mast snapped like a match, and the sail went into the water, leaving their boat helpless.

The same gust so nearly brought our boat into collision with the "White Rabbit" that we were getting out oars, to try to fend off, while those on board the yacht hastily took in their last sail. A few drops of rain fell at the same moment, but we hardly noticed them. In the midst of the confusion another voice arose on the other side of the yacht.

"Yer're all under arrest,—all on ye!"

It was Eb and his merry men, who had come up in the second small boat. He still had the pitchfork, which had made such an impression on Spook.

But his voice merely aroused Captain Bannister the more. He was as full of rage as a turkey−cock,—his face purple, and his short figure shaking with anger. He stood on a seat in the yacht, and dominated the whole fleet. He turned on the constable of Bailey's Harbor as if he had expected his arrival.

"You go plumb to blazes, Eb Flanders! Go on! Git outer here! You a kunsterble! You aint fit to ketch muck−worms! Arrestin' boys for burglary, when the worst land−shark in the country is runnin' a bunco−game right under yer face an' eyes! Go over an' arrest them fellers,—arrest that there Snider!"

The voice of Snider was now heard, imploring aid.

"Is that Constable Flanders? Mr. Flanders, come to our assistance! Our mast is broken. Professor Von Bieberstein and I are here."

"Jus' the same," said Eb, "I've got to arrest that feller!" He pointed at Daddles. "I ketched him burglarisin' Littlefield's house. You'll lay yourself open to a charge of resistin' a officer, if yer interfere, Lem!"

"You'll lay YOURSELF open to a charge of buckshot!" roared the Captain, "if you try to come on this boat! That's my boat over there—the 'Hoppergrass'—an' I come into Bailey's with her last Toosday afternoon, an' this feller was with me, an' the three boys you arrested. An' what they told you was true,—they thought they was in his uncle's house,—an' anybody would have knowed it, but a puddin'−headed son of a sea−cook, like you!"

"Mr. Flanders! Mr. Flanders!" called Snider, again, "you must come and help us. There is water in this boat,—we are in danger of sinking!"

"Yes, go an' help him," shouted the Captain, "an' take that crowd of numbskulls with you."

Eb's boat—the only one of the four under sail—had drawn well ahead of us. His "crowd of numbskulls" consisted of three men, among whom was Justin of the fan−like ears. They crossed our bows, and came back to the assistance of Mr. Snider. The two gold makers were transferred to the constable's boat, where they seemed to be treated with great awe and respect. A light rain was falling now, and the wind had moderated. Sprague ran up his jib, and maneuvered his boat alongside the "Hoppergrass" again,—this time with a view to letting the Captain, Ed, and Jimmy come aboard. Out of regard for the paint, however, they finally came in the tender. About the same time we saw Eb's boat, towing the disabled dory, set out in the direction of Rogers's Island.

"There goes the crooks," remarked Captain Bannister, "safe in the protection of the kunsterble."

"Yes," said I, "they'll have to hurry back, and get the Professor down under the wharf before the 'May Queen' arrives. She's due about three o'clock, with a lot more money on board for 'em."

I was anxious to get the Captain in the right frame of mind toward the twins. There was no need to worry, however. His anger vanished when Snider and Eb departed. Besides, it appeared that he knew how they happened to be on board the "Hoppergrass." As soon as he had looked his boat over, he turned to Spook.

"Your father said we'd find you when we found this boat! But I wasn't so sure. I heard about these here burglars, so I thought it couldn't do any harm to have a gun ready."

"F−Father! How'd he know?"

"Well, he could put two and two together when he heard I'd lost her from Mulliken's Wharf. Besides he's seen a feller that saw you off Squid Cove yesterday."

"C−Captain B−B−Baluster, I wouldn't s−steal your b−boat again f− for a th−th−th−m−million dollars. It's been a t−time of a−a− absolute m−m−misery!"

Then we said good−bye to Sprague, Pete, the Chief, and Simon the duck. The "White Rabbit" was going to Porpoise Island, and we set out again to Lanesport.

"Mr. Daddles—" I began,—but he interrupted me.

"I've demonstrated to the satisfaction of everyone on board the 'White Rabbit' that that nickname is grossly unjust. It was given me by someone who thought I walked like a duck. Simon and I went through our paces—side by side, and it was voted that there was not the slightest resemblance. My name is Hendricks,—Richard Hendricks when I'm up before Eb. Though—"

He hesitated an instant and stammered.

"You need not be excessively formal. My first name IS Richard, but my middle name is William, and, as the poet says, the fellers call me Bill."

Spike—who was looking after the "White Rabbit"—turned his head with a snap.

"BILLY Hendricks?"

"Yes."

"The sprinter?"

"Even so!" And Mr. Daddles laughed.

There was a pause, and then Spook said:

"B−But it said in the p−papers that you were c−coming East in the fall t−t−to take a p−p−post−g−graduate c−course at—"

"That's so. But I wanted to earn a little money too, so I promised Mr. Kidd to come to Big Duck Island and tutor his sons for a month, in Latin and English. And when I saw him yesterday, he told me I must catch the sons. This is the first time I have ever tooted."

Spook fell back on the cabin and kicked.

"And w−we've b−been t−trying to g−give you the s−slip!" he moaned.

It took us nearly all the afternoon to reach Lanesport. When the rain stopped, the wind fell, and we were almost becalmed. We knocked about on the Bay till a little before five o'clock.

Ed and Jimmy told me how they had found the Captain at Big Duck Island, and how he had spent the night with them all on the "White Rabbit." In the morning the whereabouts of the "Hoppergrass" was still a mystery, although the Captain had been told that the Kidds had probably taken her. Everyone was too impatient, however, to stay at Big Duck until noon, so they set out for Lanesport. Of course they did not find me at the Eagle House, so they decided to make for Rogers's Island. They were on their way when they sighted us. It was our action, in altering our course, that made them think there might be something in the theory that the "Hoppergrass" had been stolen by the burglars.

Then I told them about my adventures with the gold makers, and Spook—to the Captain's great delight—related the troubles of the Kidd brothers on board the "Hoppergrass." Toward five o'clock we got a breeze, and half an hour later sailed up the river again, to Lanesport.

"We won't land at Mulliken's Wharf," said Captain Bannister, "I'm kinder superstitious 'bout that."

"Why did you come over here that afternoon?" I asked him.

"To see if I could get some letters to put on the stern of this boat. I'd rigged up a sign on canvas 'fore I left the Harbor, 'but it didn't look quite fust class. I'd no manner of notion but what I'd get back 'fore you boys did from Fishback."

At the wharf next the one where we landed the "May Queen" was lying, still covered with flags and bunting. She was empty, however, except for a man washing down the deck. The band had gone and her glory had departed. There was a boy in a small boat rowing around the steamer, and staring at her. I seemed to remember his round, red face and when he put down an oar, and waved his hand, grinning and showing where his front teeth ought to have been, I recollected him instantly. He was the boy who had driven the horse−car from Squid Cove yesterday afternoon. Now, he let his boat float down alongside the "Hoppergrass."

"Have you heard about the Comp'ny?" said he.

"No,—what about it?"

"Gee! Bust up! Yes,—the excursion went over again this afternoon, on the 'May Queen' here, an'—an'

Gran'father went too, an' while Mr. Snider was doin' the 'speriment Orlando Noyes an' two other fellers pried up a place on the wharf with a crow−bar, an' they found the P'fessor down there,—he was up to some monkey business, an' they say the whole thing is a fake! Gee! An' that aint all, neither. They've arrested Mr. Snider an' the P'fessor,—they're the burglars that have been burglin' houses over on Little Duck. One of the fellers with Orlando was a special perlice an' they went through the house an' found a whole lot of spoons an' things that they stole outer Mis' Ellis' house. They say the P'fessor aint a p'fessor at all,—he just got outer State's Prison 'bout a month ago!"

No one on the "Hoppergrass" was as much interested in this as the Captain and I. So while we talked with the boy, Ed Mason and Jimmy Toppan walked up town to get some supplies, while Mr. Daddles—or Billy Hendricks, rather—and the two Kidds went to see Mr. Kidd at his office. We had invited all three of them to come with us and finish the week on the "Hoppergrass." We felt that they belonged on the boat now, and that the voyage was really just beginning.

In an hour they were all back once more. The Kidds had been to their house for some clothes. They were allowed to go with us on condition that we sail over to Big Duck Island as soon as we could, to prove to the others of their family that they were still alive and above water.

"And that'll be all right," said the Captain, "for we were bound for Big Duck in the fust place... Cast off the line, Ed, and Jimmy, I guess you can take her now. It's half−past six and I'm going below, and see if I've forgotten how to cook flap−jacks."

Fifteen minutes later we were out of the river and crossing the Bay once more,—this time toward Big Duck Island. A pleasing smell of flap−jacks began to come up from below.

"There has been more doing in these three days," said Ed Mason, "than usually happens in a month,"

"But the voyage has been tame and uneventful," said Mr. Daddles, "compared with one my uncle made in these very parts, three years ago."

"What happened to him?"

"Why, he was one of the sixty−seven sole survivors of the famous wreck of the 'Hot Cross Bun'."

"Where was she wrecked?" asked Jimmy.

"On Pelican Point."

"How many were drowned?"

"No one was drowned. That was the trouble."

"Trouble?"

"Yes. They all got to hating each other so, and the food worried 'em so much, that they used to wade out in batches every morning and TRY to drown themselves. It was the food mostly. You see the 'Hot Cross Bun' was an excursion steamer,—like that one we just saw at the wharf. She wasn't on an excursion this time, however,— she was making a regular trip between one of the islands in this Bay and the mainland. That's the charm of Broad Bay,—there are so many islands and towns that almost anything can happen.

"Well, this steamboat had on board a miscellaneous lot of passengers, including a bird−study club, a fife and drum corps, and two scissors−grinders. It wasn't until the boat was wrecked in a thick fog, and they tried to exist on Pelican Point for four days,—foggy all the time—that they found out what it was going to be like. The Point is cut off from the mainland in bad weather, you know. Well, they examined the food supply of the 'Hot Cross Bun' and they found that it consisted of thirty−seven dozen sticks of pineapple chewing gum, four quarts of peanuts, (these went the very first day), eight pounds of half−petrified Turkish Delight, six boxes of all−day−suckers, and about thirty thousand chocolate mice.

"Now, all these things are very delightful when you're on dry land, and can have them now and then, so to speak. But Pelican Point wasn't dry, and the food got awfully tiresome! Why, my uncle,—he's a bishop, and very regular in his habits—told me he got so that he almost thought he wouldn't mind if he never saw a chocolate mouse again as long as he lived!

"On the third day came the mutiny. The bird−study club had been complaining—"

Mr. Daddles paused.

"Are you waiting for us, Captain?"

"The flap−jacks are ready," said Captain Bannister, from below.

"Why did they mutiny?" asked Spike.

"After supper," said Mr. Daddles, gravely, "I will conclude my account of the wreck of the 'Hot Cross Bun'."