

# ROWLAND WALKER

UNDER WOLFE'S FLAG;  
OR, THE FIGHT FOR THE  
CANADAS

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# Rowland Walker

## Under Wolfe's Flag or, The Fight for the Canadas

### CHAPTER I THE TROUT-STREAM

"Here's a beauty, Jack!"

"Hold him, Jamie, till I come!"

"Come quickly then, old fellow—he's slipping away from me! Quick! Hang it, the fellow's gone! I've missed him, and—"

"Splash!" The sentence was never finished, for Jamie, stepping too excitedly on a treacherous, moss-covered rock in mid-stream, slipped, and the next instant found himself sitting down, up to the armpits in the water which raced past him like a mill-stream.

"Never mind," said his companion, when the laughter which greeted this mishap had subsided. "There's a likely spot, up under the fall there, where I've landed many a big fish; let's go and try it."

This "likely spot," however, was a difficult one, and for any other soul in the tiny village of Burnside—these two young rascals excepted—an impossible one. There, right under the overhanging rocks, over which a cascade tumbled twenty feet, into a swirling pool which formed one of the deepest parts of the stream, was a narrow ledge, where the moss grew thick upon the wet, slippery rocks, but in the cracks and fissures beneath that ledge, many a lusty trout was hidden.

While the two chums are wending their way to this "likely spot," which lay at a bend in the stream, just at the bottom of Hawk Woods, leaping from boulder to boulder as they crossed the broken stream, I will briefly introduce the reader to a little of their previous history.

Jack Elliot and Jamie Stuart were aged respectively fifteen and fourteen years. Only a week ago these two sturdy lads had been soundly thrashed by Dr. Birch, for playing truant and indulging in the tempting but forbidden pastime of "tickling trout" in the laughing stream, which, descending from the blue moorlands above, sang its way down through the densely wooded slopes of Crow Hill.

Jack was the youngest son of Squire Elliot of Rushworth Hall, an old but somewhat dilapidated manor, standing on one of the ridges of the Pennine Chain. His eldest brother, who was now twenty-two, was an ensign in the celebrated "John Company," and at the present time was engaged in active service in India. His second brother was at Oxford. Jack was still a scholar (though a dull one) at the old Elizabethan Grammar School just above the village, where stern Dr. Birch drilled little else but Greek and Latin into unwilling pupils.

Jack's bosom chum and schoolfellow was Jamie Stuart. Now, Jamie was an orphan, at least so far as he knew, for his mother died on the day that he was born, and his father, a somewhat daring village character, who once transgressed the game laws, was considered by a bench of land-owning gentry as "too dangerous a character to remain in Burnside, lest he should lead other folk astray," and was ultimately transported to the new colonies in North America, and forbidden to set foot in England again "on peril of his life," for those were the days of the cruel game laws, when sheep-stealing was a hanging business, and to touch a pheasant meant transportation for life.

All this happened when Jamie was a little chap of but two years, and so he never remembered either his father or his mother. His father was said to be very fond of his little boy—for despite his transgression, he was a good father and a brave man, and very much the type of man that Merry England needed at that time, to fight her enemies—and his only request when he was sentenced was,

that before he left the country he might see again his little boy—a request which the selfish and hardened magistrates promptly refused.

Years passed away, and village rumours said that he had escaped from his captors directly he set foot on American soil, and had taken to the forest, amongst the Indians tribes that inhabited the backwoods of Pennsylvania, and that he had become a great chief amongst them; but this was perhaps only a rumour, for no one really knew whether he was dead or alive. So little Jamie grew up under the care of a maiden aunt, who kept a Dame School in the little village, and being a lady of some property, when the lad became ten years old, he was sent to the Old Grammar School.

The time of which I write was the middle of the eighteenth century, and England was just laying the foundations of her great future Empire, which was to be the wonder and envy of the world.

During the past twenty years, Anson and his brave sea-dogs, though always outnumbered in ships and men, had driven the French and Spaniards from the seas, and had made the name of England famous all over the world. On all the seven seas the old flag was supreme, and was proudly unfurled to every breeze that blew.

Across the burning plains of India, and under the very palace of the Old Mogul, was heard the boom of British guns, for against overwhelming odds Clive was winning brilliant victories, that would soon end in bringing the vast Indian Empire, with all its wealth and treasure, and its multitude of dark-skinned princes, to do homage at the feet of England's king. Nor was this all, for over the Atlantic, on the shores, the rivers, and the great lakes of the new world, the long campaign had already begun, which was to end in the capture of Quebec, and the wresting of the Canadas from our inveterate foes across the Channel.

So the Squire's son and the poacher's son became fast friends. All the Squire's efforts to separate them had failed. They were kindred spirits, and there was no mischief or devilry ever set afoot, either in the school or the village, in which they did not participate. All the rules and laws that were ever invented failed to keep them within bounds.

Their three great enemies were, Dr. Birch, Old Click, the keeper of Hawk Woods, and Beagle, the village constable. The first had thrashed them a score of times, the second had threatened to bring the penalties of the game laws upon them, if they did not desist from their depredations, whilst the third had once put them in the stocks, and threatened them with the lock-up for the next offence.

Thus it happened, on this glorious afternoon in the early summer of 1757, when the school bell was calling its unwilling pupils to their lessons, that these two boys were robbing the nest of a humble-bee, in a meadow below the school, extracting the wild honey from the combs, when the bell suddenly ceased ringing.

"There goes!—that confounded bell has stopped ringing, Jamie."

"So it has. Now we're in for it again."

"The second time this week, too," and Jack sat down and began to whistle, "There's nae luck about the house," while a look of grim despair settled on the countenance of his friend.

"And my back's still sore with that last thrashing. What shall we do, Jack?"

"Let's go trouting in Hawk Woods."

"And what about Old Click? He said that the next time he caught us, he'd take us before the magistrates."

"Oh, hang the magistrates and Old Click too! Why shouldn't we fish there if we like? Shall we go?"

"Agreed!"

And the next moment they were scampering across the meadows in the direction of the woods, taking care to keep under the shelter of the hedges and walls as much as possible, till they had entered the friendly cover of the trees.

Hawk Woods was a lovely bit of primeval forest, that covered both sides of a deep valley. In places, the descent was almost precipitous, right down to the bottom of the gully, where the burn

threaded its way amongst the rocks, boulders, and fallen tree-trunks. It was a bewitching spot. The shimmering of a thousand trees, on whose leaves flashed the sunlight, their brown, aged and distorted trunks, the huge scattered rocks, and above all, the music of the stream as it tumbled half a hundred little cascades, with the speckled trout leaping amid its whirls and eddies, made it a charming place. Who that has seen that spot can forget it?

This was the place that had wooed these two boys from their lessons, and here beside the big cascade we have found them again.

Jamie had tried twice to reach the ledge behind the falls, by climbing along the face of the rock, and clinging to the ivy roots, but there was no foothold.

"It's no use," said Jack, "there's only one way to get there, and that is by swimming. We can easily duck, when we come to the fall."

"Then we'll try it, for I'm already wet through, what with the spray from the falls, and sitting down in the stream."

They quickly divested themselves of their clothing, plunged in, swam across the pool, ducked under the cascade, and reached the narrow ledge, which was the object of their immediate ambition, and within a quarter of an hour they had succeeded in capturing half-a-dozen fine trout, by the process known as "tickling," and as they caught them, they flung them far out on the bank.

Then they swam back, and after drying themselves in the warm rays of the sun, they dressed, and prepared to cook their afternoon meal.

An armful of twigs and broken branches, a bit of dry grass—these were quickly gathered. Then Jack struck a spark with his tinder-box, and there was a fire! Now the blue smoke was curling upwards, and hanging like a wreath over the tree-tops. Alas, that fatal smoke! This it was that betrayed them, and was the means of changing the whole course of their lives, for other eyes had seen it from afar, and were hastening to the spot.

In later days, amongst the backwoods of another continent, when their nearest neighbours were a scalping party of Algonquins or fierce Iroquois, they learnt to be more careful about that thin column of blue smoke which rose from their evening camp-fire.

But at present they were unconscious of any such danger. The feeling that they were most conscious of at this moment was one of hunger somewhere amidsthips, for their outdoor exercise, and above all, the cold dip, had given them healthy appetites. As soon, therefore, as the fire had burned sufficiently clear, they laid the spoils of the chase across a rude grid, made of a few wet sticks.

Then the savoury smell of roasted trout filled the wood, and when this delicate repast was ready, our two young heroes feasted sumptuously on the royal dish of red-spotted trout. When they had finished their repast, they washed it down with a copious draught of cold water from the stream.

"There goes the old magpie back to her nest. I wonder if the young ones are hatched yet. I'm going aloft to see," said Jamie, and he immediately began to climb the tall, straight fir-tree, which stood on the very edge of a steep slope, about twenty yards away.

When he had shinned some fifteen feet up the trunk he was able to clasp the lowest branch, and in another minute he had ascended to the very top of the tree, and was swaying dangerously amongst the slender twigs where the magpie had built her nest.

"How many young ones are there?" called Jack from the foot of the tree.

"Three and one egg left."

"Good! Bring the egg down. It's no good to the old bird now. It's sure to be addled. Bring it down—you know we promised to get one for Tiny Tim the lame boy, who can't climb."

"Why, what's the matter? Anything wrong?"

"Sh! Sh!"

Jamie was signalling desperately from the tree-top to his companion below, and pointing across the stream, beyond the camp-fire.

"Who is it?" asked Jack, in a hoarse whisper.

"Old Click, I do believe—and—Beagle!"

"Snakes alive! What now?"

"Better come up the tree. Quietly now."

Jack was just as expert at climbing as Jamie, and never sailor-boy shinned up the trunk to the mast-head more quickly or more neatly than he did up that tall fir-tree. In another moment they were both perched aloft, and hidden amongst the branches.

The two men had seen the smoke from the distance, as it ascended above the trees, and suspecting either trespassers or poachers, they had crept quietly down to the place, and had reached the neighbourhood of the fire, soon after the boys had left the spot.

Imagine the feelings of the latter, as from their lofty perch they looked down upon their two bitterest enemies, only a stone's throw away, and effectually cutting off their retreat. Only a fortnight before, they had been hauled before the magistrates for this very same offence, and it had required all the influence of Jack's father to protect the youngsters from the penalty of the law.

"The young vagabonds—" Old Click was saying, as he kicked aside the embers of the fire.

"Look! Here be the heads of six foine trout they have stolen," said Beagle.

"I don't know whether be the worst—Squire's son or the poacher's son; but this I know, they be both framing for Wakefield gaol, or else the gallows."

"How do ye know it be they, Mr. Click?" asked the constable. "There be noa evidence that I con see, as yet."

"How do I know? Why, there ain't another rascal in the village who dare come into the woods and touch either fish or game since Jem Mason was transported. Nobody dare do it, 'cept these two vagabonds, who are the plague o' my life."

"Aye, the place is wunn'erfully quiet sin' I copt Jem at his old tricks," said Beagle, straightening his shoulders, as he recalled that stirring incident, in which, however, he took a very small part.

"And I do think, constable, that you ain't done your duty lately, to let these two rascals play the pranks they ha' played."

"What's that you say, Mr. Click?" said Beagle, rather testily. "What have they done?"

"Why, 'twas only last Friday that Gaffer John had a dead cat dropped down his chimney, when he was just cooking his supper, too, and it was all spoiled. And who was it that fired Farmer Giles's hayrick, but these same 'gallows-birds'? The young varmint!"

"First catch your man, Mr. Click, and then you'll have evidence 'red-hot' that a bench of magistrates will look at."

"Do you hear that, Jamie?" whispered Jack. "They're on our scent for dropping that dead cat down 'Surly John's' chimney. He deserved it, too, the skulking old miser, for turning poor old Betty Lamb out of her cottage. I'd do it again. But fancy blaming us for firing that hayrick! Surely he can't mean it!"

"I'll tell you what, Jack. This place is getting too warm for us. Let's run away and go to sea, as we always said we should."

"Chance is a fine thing. Wait till we're out of this hole. Wish we'd the chance to run now, but if we stir they'll see us."

At this point a shrill whistle rang through the woods and startled them, and before they had recovered from their surprise, the deep bay of a hound was heard approaching from the distance.

"Phew—" The boys looked at each other, and for a moment their faces blanched, as in an undertone these words simultaneously escaped from their lips.

"Old Click's dog—"

"We're up a tree now, Jack, in more than one sense." And they were, for they both knew the reputation of this wonderful hound. He could track a poacher for miles, and having once got the scent, he rarely let it go till he had run his victim down. Nearer and nearer came that deep bay, and soon the trampling of the shrubs and undergrowth gave notice of its arrival.

"Here, Charlie. Good dog.—Seek 'em.—Seek 'em," cried its master.

Instantly the hound began sniffing round about the embers of the fire, till picking up the newly-placed scent, it suddenly gave vent to a peculiar howl, and then dashed directly towards the stream. Here it paused abruptly, and began sniffing the air, then it ran back to the fire, picked up the scent again, and stopped once more at the edge of the stream.

"They've crossed the water, that's certain," said the keeper.

The boys had watched this with great consternation. They had given up all hope of escape, but when they saw this fine dog twice baffled by the stream, hope returned in an overflowing measure.

"There is just a chance," whispered Jack.

The two men crossed the burn, and brought the dog to the other bank, to see if it could pick up the trail. Fortunately, the boys had paddled a little way up-stream, when they crossed, and this caused some further delay in recovering the scent. Still the keeper persevered, and in another quarter of an hour, the hound uttered a joyful little bark, and with tail erect and nose to the ground, it started away in the direction of the fir. Suddenly it stopped at the foot of the tree, where the culprits were perched, and began clawing and scratching at the bark.

## CHAPTER II

### HOLDING THE FORT

Aghast—horrified—the boys looked at each other in silence. Most boys would have blubbered and given up the game. Not so these two lads. Their faces turned a shade paler, but a stern heroic light shone from their eyes, as they calmly awaited events.

A moment later the constable and the keeper came struggling through the brushwood.

"Here they are, Beagle! Caught at last. It's the two of them. The same old birds," cried Old Click joyfully, as he caught sight of the prisoners. "Good dog! Good old Charlie! There's a dog for you, Beagle! Not another like him for twenty miles around. See how he's run the vagabonds to earth!"

"He's a good dog, I admit, Mr. Click, but he hasn't quite run them to earth yet, seeing that they're a good forty feet above the ground; but we've got them tree'd and cornered this time, proper, eh?"

"Ho, there! Come down, ye young varmint. Come down this minute, or t'ull be worse for you," shouted the keeper.

"I shall come down when I please," said Jamie.

"All right, you son of a poacher. I'll sit down till you do as I tell you. I don't mind a rest and a smoke, but I won't move from this spot till you do come down."

"Won't you move, though? You old fox. You shan't stay there if you have tree'd us. Take that, and that," and as he spoke Jamie hurled with all his might a chunk of dead wood, which he had torn from a withered branch. "I'll teach you to call me names. My father was a better man than you, any day."

The missile hit the keeper on the knee, as he sat on the grass, and gave him a nasty shock. Up he jumped in a rage, and for a couple of minutes he fairly danced and limped around the tree, in spite of his determination a minute ago not to move. He clenched his fist and shook it at the youngsters.

"I'll have the law on ye—ye young jackanapes. What's that, Beagle, but 'battery and assault,' and what's the penalty for it?"

"Twenty strokes of the birch, Mr. Click, and ten years' imprisonment, or, more likely, transportation for life."

"Aye, that's it—transportation. Like your father got, you young gallows-bird."

This second taunt about his father made the blood rush to the lad's face, and he hurled another chunk of wood at the irate keeper, which narrowly missed his head, but hit the hound instead, which set up a frightful yell and bolted into the wood, and despite all the blandishments of its master refused to come anywhere near the zone of fire again.

The boys were as agile as monkeys aloft, and they quickly got several more pieces of dead timber ready for their captors. Things were turning out much better than they feared, and they were not having the worst of it, so far, at least. How it would all end it was impossible to say, but there was just this chance, that they might drive away the two men by their determined assault, until an opportunity occurred for them to slip down the tree; and once on the ground, with even a dozen yards start, they could easily leave their pursuers behind. As for the hound—well, another chunk of wood would about settle him.

Both the keeper and the constable were now very chary about showing themselves, after the narrow escape of the former, for the boys were so expert with the missiles, and so determined in their opposition that the two men kept behind the tree trunks, some twenty or thirty feet away. Both boys had their pea-shooters, with a plentiful supply of dry wicken-berries, and whenever their opponents showed so much as an inch of face they were mercilessly pelted.

"You young rascals. You shall pay dearly for this. Do ye know ye're insulting the law?" cried the constable, trying hard to dodge the pea-shooters as he spoke.

"Why don't you go home?" called out Jack. "If either of you come near the tree again, we'll break every bone in your body. We've plenty of wood here."

This game was continued for more than half-an-hour, at the end of which time the two men got behind a thick holly bush near by, and began to consult together.

The next moment the boys would have been free, for while the keepers were thus engaged, their prisoners were preparing to slide down the tree and make a dash for it, when, observing this, the men rushed towards the tree just in time to prevent them.

"Come back, Jamie! Come back—" cried his companion, hurling at the same instant another piece of wood at Beagle, who made a desperate spring, and tried to catch hold of Jamie's legs, as he hung dangling from a branch. The missile took effect, and the constable quickly retreated, roaring like the "Bull of Bashan."

The next moment Old Click emerged from the wood with an armful of bracken, with which he quickly kindled a fire. Soon a thick column of smoke arose, and drifted towards the tree. More and more bracken and brushwood were piled on, and the smoke became chokingly dense up there in the tree, for the fire had been lit with the express purpose of smoking them out.

The boys plied them valiantly with wood-chunks and wicken-berries, but their ammunition soon failed them. The smoke had become dreadful now. They were nearly choked with it, and were already half-blinded. What could they do? Still they held out. They mounted to the very top of the tree, and sat there with their faces buried in their hands to keep that suffocating smoke from their eyes and nostrils.

"Coming down now, sir?" asked the keeper, who had now begun to light another fire at the root of the tree, for he saw that there was no more ammunition aloft, but he had counted without his host.

"No, you villains! Take that!—and that!" shouted Jack, at the same time hurling down through the smoke first one boot and then another, as a last resort.

The second boot caught Old Click in the middle of the back as he was stooping down to tend the fire, and made him give vent to a yell which resounded through the woods. This incident evoked a bit of high-sounding English that I will not here repeat—suffice it to say that the yell brought Beagle, who had gone to fetch a woodman's axe, running to the spot to see what had happened.

The keeper sat down on the grass for a few moments, and the boys were afraid that they had killed him, but in a little while he sprang up again and cried out angrily—

"I'll give you two minutes to come down, gentlemen. At the end of that time I shall cut down the tree."

There was no answer, and at the end of the two minutes the keeper spoke again.

"Will you come down and go quietly to the lock-up?" Still no answer, and the next moment—

"Chip!—chip!" went the axe, and at every stroke the tall tree shook. The trunk was more than half-way through now, and the whole stem trembled with the blows, when a voice called from aloft, through the smoke—

"Stop! Mr. Click, if you please."

Quite willing to take a brief rest and to enjoy the discomfort of the youngsters, the keeper stayed his axe for a moment.

"We'll come down, Mr. Click, if you won't take us to the lock-up. We've only had six of your beastly trout, and they were not worth two-pence each, but we're willing to pay you for them, and to come down, if you won't take us before the magistrates. We've done nothing to deserve it," said Jack, as he prepared to descend.

"Do you hear that, Beagle? That's what I call trying to bribe an honest man. What do you call it?"

"That's it—bribery and corruption," replied the constable.

"The terms of surrender are unconditional, you young jackanapes." And with that Click went to work with the axe again. The tree quivered, and gave signs that it was about to fall.

"Stop! Stop! We're coming down." And then, realising that the game was up, the two chums quietly slid down the trunk into the arms of their captors, and were triumphantly marched off to the lock-up.

It was getting dark when they reached this ugly little building, but they were unceremoniously thrust inside, and when the key grated in the lock and the two men had left them, with only the rats for their companions, they were just a little bit "skeered."

"Jamie! Where are you?" asked Jack, when they had been left alone in the silence and the darkness for some minutes.

"Here! Here!" cried his companion, and they crept along the wall until they were able to touch each other. Then they cowered down in a corner, against the wall.

"We'll get out of this before morning, else my name's not Jack Elliot, and then we'll do that which we've often spoken about. We'll run away—we'll go to sea—we'll tramp to Liverpool, and we'll find a ship going abroad, and we'll get taken aboard somehow—and—and we'll stick together, and make our fortunes. What say you, Jamie?"

"Jack, you're a brick. Give me your hand. I'll go with you, and we'll stick together. I've no father and no mother, and no friends—except you. All the world's against us. Old Click and Beagle have been trying to catch us for months, and now they've done it. They'll brag about it, and the whole village will laugh at us."

"Yes, they've threatened to turn us out of school, and now they'll perhaps send us to prison, just for taking a few trout, as though God didn't make the trout, and the streams, and the woods for all of us. And to-morrow they'll bring us before the magistrates—"

"Will they, though? They won't have the chance. Just hold this, while I get a light, and then we'll examine the place," and Jamie pulled a piece of tar-band out of his pocket, unravelled the end, and handed it to his companion. Next, he took out his tinder-box, and quickly threw a shower of sparks on to the tow, which produced a little flame, about the size of a rushlight. Then they began to look around them.

It was a common type of village lock-up, built of rough, undressed stones from the neighbouring quarries. It had massive oaken doors, which had been securely locked, and there were no windows, for the only opening was a small aperture, eighteen inches square, and about seven feet from the ground, and it was caged by several rusty iron bars. The floor was flagged with stones and covered with rushes.

The place was used merely as a temporary lock-up for poachers and other law-breakers before their transference to the county gaol, and was situated just outside the village. In a few minutes they had examined the doors, the walls and the floor, but they sought in vain for any spot that offered a chance of escape.

"The grating, Jack! Let's try the grating. I reckon that's our only chance. Here, give me a leg! Let me climb on to your shoulders and try the bars." This was no sooner said than done.

"Here's luck! The middle bar is filed through at one end, and here on the ledge is a rusty file, thick with cobwebs. How jolly! Some one's been at this game before, and it's never been discovered. Half the work's been done for us, but it must have been many years ago. I believe if we can file through the other end of this bar we can squirm through."

"I wonder who did it?"

"Blessings on his head, whoever or wherever he is. May he never want a friend!"

It was indeed a long time ago since the file had been used. It had lain there for twelve years hidden by cobwebs and dust, and the poacher who had used it had been transported.

For the next half-hour the two boys took turns filing away at that thick iron bar, standing or kneeling on each other's shoulders. Suddenly at the end of that time voices were heard, and then footsteps approaching.

"Sh! Sh! Put out the light, Jamie, quick! Some one is coming." The light was extinguished, and the prisoners sat down quietly on the rush-strewn floor.

Who could it be? Had the magistrates sent some one already to remove them to the county gaol? If so, their chances of escape were already cut off. They determined to wait quietly and see, for this was all they could do.

Nearer and nearer came the sounds they had previously heard. The footsteps halted outside the heavy doors. The rays of light from a lanthorn flashed through the interstices and the openings. Some one was examining the lock. Who could it be? The boys' hearts quaked with fear lest their efforts at escape should be foiled. Then they heard the voices of their captors.

"They ain't broke gaol yet, Beagle! The lock's safe and sound. We've got them safe—this time," said Old Click.

"Have you, though?" whispered Jack, under his breath.

"Hullo, there, ye young varmints! Who's master now? You won't do any more poaching in Hawk Woods, I'll warrant," said the keeper, who seemed to have come purposely to poke fun at them. Then Jamie pretended to sob piteously.

"Oh, it's crying ye are, is it? Ah, well, it's too late for repentance now. Ye should ha' thought o' that before."

"Come away now, Mr. Click. They're safe till the morning, anyhow. Then we can bring them before the magistrates and have them whipped, and sent to prison, and perhaps transported. Come away," said Beagle.

"I'd like to see the man who would dare to whip me," cried out Jack, his voice ringing with anger and defiance.

"Tut, tut! my little man! When a boy begins training so early for the gallows, what can he expect? Howsoever, 'tis no use argefying, so I'll just bid ye good-night." After which they both went off chuckling and saying—

"'Twill be a lesson for them. T' squire and schoolmaster seemed mightily pleased over it."

To do the janitors justice, however, I must here say that it was not intended to punish the lads further than by letting them spend the night in the lock-up, in the hope that this might teach them a severe lesson. To this course Jack's father and the schoolmaster, who had been already informed, quite agreed.

The lads, however, took it more seriously, and felt convinced from precedents within their memory that the full severity of the law would be meted out to them, and they determined to prevent it by escaping and running away from Burnside and saving their families this terrible disgrace, for Jamie still looked upon his aunt as his guardian, and though Jack had no mother or sisters, he had a father and brothers. Besides, they were just at that age when romance begins; for all their heroes had commenced life by running away.

As soon, therefore, as their janitors were out of hearing, they set to work again with the rusty old file, which by this time had lost much of its rust and had begun to bite keenly. It was hard work, but their freedom and their future were at stake. They were hungry, too, for since dinner they had tasted nothing but those few trout which they had taken from the burn.

It was damp and chilly too, but they did not feel the cold, for they were aglow with the exercise and flushed with the promise of victory.

"Hurrah! It's through at last!" exclaimed Jamie, as the file slipped and the heavy bar fell upon the floor with a jangle and a jar.

"Bravo, old fellow! Well done."

Jamie put the file in his pocket, and swung himself up by the remaining bars. There was now an aperture about eleven inches square, and though it required a bit of a struggle to squeeze through that awkward gap, yet they had both done more difficult things than that in the past, and so within five minutes they were both standing in the road outside the lock-up.

## CHAPTER III

### A LONG TRAMP TO THE SEA

The village clock in the old church tower was striking eleven. It was dreadfully dark, but the lads were not afraid, and they started off at a sharp trot, as soon as they had regained their liberty. For some distance they followed the tree-lined road that led away from the village. They kept on in silence till they reached the outskirts of Bogden Woods, then they took one of the narrow, winding paths that led down through the thicket, crossed the stream at the bottom of the dell, and ascended the opposite hill-side.

Still they kept on—now through the more open country, over hill and dale, until at the end of two hours, despite the darkness, they had put six good miles between themselves and the lock-up.

At last, fatigued beyond measure, they halted for a rest below Lin-Crag, one of the highest peaks in the Pennine Chain. Here, on the lower reaches of the moor, they made for themselves a bed of dried heather, where they could lie down.

"Here, let us rest awhile, Jack, for I'm dead beat," said Jamie.

"Right!" said his companion, "No one will discover us here."

After a short breathing space, they began to take stock of their possessions. Alas! Jamie had but a few pennies and half-pence, a piece of tar-band and a tinder-box, while Jack could only find a penknife, a pocket compass and a sixpence. This, then, was their stock-in-trade, and it did not promise them much luxury on their way to the sea.

"Now," said Jack, "I have an uncle who is captain of a ship that trades between the River Plate and Liverpool—Captain Elliot is his name, and the ship is called the *Ilawara*. If, when we get to Liverpool, he should happen to be in port, I am sure that he would give us both a berth aboard, for once, when father took me to see him, he advised me to become a sailor, when I had grown up."

"Capital! But let's see, how far away is Liverpool?"

"It must be about sixty miles away, and almost due west, right over the moors there, for I've often measured it roughly on the map. I think that's the west, though I can't quite see the needle of the compass in the dark."

"Yes, Jack, that's the west, right over the moors and over Lin-Crag too, and there are about twelve miles of moorland, with plenty of peat-bog, and soft ground, so that it will not be safe to go much further till daybreak."

"You're sure that's the west, Jamie?"

"Yes, certain. Why, look, you don't need a compass! There's the North Star, and the Cassiopean Guards, and right opposite is the south, and over there must be the east, as you'll soon see when the day breaks."

"Bravo, Jamie! You're as good as a compass."

"Then we'll sleep here, and at sunrise we'll get some food and start for Liverpool, and there'll be no going back for either of us. The die is cast, old fellow. What say you?"

"The die is cast! We will not go back."

They both laid themselves down on a couch of heather, there to spend the rest of the night, but they were too excited to sleep—the events of the past twenty-four hours chased each other through their brains. Jamie was nearly dozing off, however, when Jack suddenly leapt to his feet, and exclaimed—

"Here's a piece of luck, Jamie!"

"Why, what's the matter? How you did startle me!" cried the other.

"Just look here!" said Jack, ripping open the lining of his jacket, and taking out something that gleamed bright, even in the starlight.

"Why—it's a guinea! Where did you get it?"

"I'd forgotten all about it myself. About a month ago, Aunt Emma drove over from Honley, to see father, and when she went away, she said something about my being a poor motherless bairn, and she slipped this into my hand as she left. She asked me to buy myself a present with it."

"But you didn't?"

"No! I had a presentiment that when we ran away, we should want it, so I just sewed it into the lining of my coat, and till this moment, I'd entirely forgotten it."

"We're rich men, Jack. We are indeed in luck."

They were doubly excited now and quite unable to sleep, so they talked on about the future that lay before them, full of golden promise, when once they reached Liverpool. Then two hours before the dawn they fell fast asleep, and they slept so soundly that when at length they awoke the sun was nearly half-way to the meridian. Even then they were wakened by a rough but kindly voice that sounded in their ears—

"Here's a pretty sight, Jane! Come and see it. Here are two young gen'elmen, sleeping out o' doors." Then giving them both a hearty shake, he exclaimed, "What's the meaning o' this, young gen'elmen? Have you run away from school?"

Both boys sat up quickly, and rubbed their eyes. Then they looked around them, bewildered and astonished. Where were they? How came they here? Who was this big, burly-looking farmer before them?

It was a full half minute before they became fully conscious of all that had happened. At length they looked at each other, and then burst out laughing, for they were both relieved to find that the intruder was neither Old Click nor Beagle. Jane the milkmaid came over to the spot, leaving the cow that she had been milking, some twenty yards away.

The boys looked around them again to take their bearings before they replied to the farmer. A dozen cattle stood round about, chewing their cud lazily, and flicking off, with their long tails, the flies that had already begun to bother them, while beside the farmer stood his faithful sheep-dog, which had really first attracted his master's attention to the spot. The place where they had been sleeping was a sheltered little hollow, where the meadow joined the moor, while about two hundred yards away was a long, low farmhouse.

"I see you're running away from school, gen'elmen," repeated the farmer, good-humouredly, for there was a twinkle in his eye.

"Yes, sir," replied Jack, thinking it best to let it stop at that.

"An' where are you goin' to?"

"Liverpool—to the sea—"

A burst of laughter, like a minor explosion, came from the farmer. "Ah, I see. But ye'll be glad to get home before to-morrow night. I once tried it myself, I did. Walked all the way to Liverpool, and when I got there—ha! ha! ha!—the sea was rough, and I was 'skeered' an' I didn't like the look of it, and I turned back home, an' I tell ye, that for four days and for four nights I had nothing to eat, 'cept a few raw turnips. My poor feet were that sore an' blistered that I sometimes lay down and cried, and when at last, after six days, I limped back into the farm-yard yonder, my faither said—

"'What! Home again so soon, Jock? I didn't expect ye for anither week, lad!'

"'Could I ha' a basin o' porridge, faither?' I said meekly.

"'Jock,' he said, 'afore ye touch ony porridge, ye mun' earn it. Do ye see that heap o' stones there? Well, ye mun' wheel 'em across the yard there afore ye touch ony porridge here.'

"It was the same heap of stones that I had refused to wheel, and which had been the cause o' my setting off to Liverpool. I were that tired and faint an' hungry that I were ready to drop, but I simply said—

"'All right, faither,' and I began the task; but when I had wheeled a dozen barrow-loads or so, the old man saw me stagger once or twice.

"That'll do! Porridge is ready, Jock, lad.' An' to my dying day I shall never taste anither meal half so foine as yon basin o' porridge, an' if ye lads 'll take my advice, ye'll just turn back, and go home again, for it'll come to that later, only then ye'll be footsore and tired and hungry. But please yersel's, I don't suppose ye'll listen to an old man," he added, as he saw a clouded and uneasy look come over their faces.

"We're not going back," said Jamie boldly. "Are we, Jack?"

"No! We'll die first."

"I thought so. Maybe you're hungry, and could do with a little breakfast, lads."

"Indeed, we could, sir, and we're willing to pay for it."

"Tut! tut! Come into the house, then." And the kindly old man led them to the farmhouse, where his wife simply said, "Puir lads," and soon provided for them a substantial meal.

A large steaming basin of oatmeal porridge was soon laid before each of them, made from rich milk, instead of water. They soon made short work of this. Then Jane brought in a plate of home-made cakes, well-buttered, but still their hunger did not abate one jot. The farmer was used to big appetites, and neither his wife nor Jane expressed any surprise. Then their host took out his huge clasp knife and cut several rashers from a flich of bacon that hung suspended from the ceiling. These were fried along with a few eggs, and when they had cleared this third dish, the keen edge was taken from their appetites, and they declared that they were satisfied.

They thanked the farmer for his great kindness, and asked him how much they were indebted to him, but when they offered to pay, he held up both hands, and exclaimed—

"Not a penny! Keep your money. You'll want it all before long. It does me good to see lads with pluck like yours. Maybe you'll get further than I did. I think you're made of different stuff, and I ha' quite ta'en a fancy to you. While we've lads like you, we shall never want men to fight the Frenchers."

"I have a brother fighting under Clive now, in India!" exclaimed Jack, with a touch of family pride.

"Oh, maybe you're Squire Elliot's son, then!"

At this Jack's face fell, for he saw that he had well-nigh given away his identity.

"Ah well, never mind! Perhaps ye did not get on very well with the old squire. He was a harder man after your poor mother died."

The mention of his mother gave Jack a twinge of pain, and caused a lump to rise in his throat. His mother's early death had removed his guardian angel. Perhaps he would have been a better lad if she had lived; more tame and docile, like other boys.

"Puir lad!" exclaimed the farmer's wife; "and has he no mother then? He ma' weel run away."

Jack's tears were very near the surface, but he forced them back with an effort, for he considered it a great weakness to give way to his feelings.

As they left the old farmhouse, yet another kindness was shown to them, for Jane, secretly bidden by the farmer's wife, had made up a bundle of substantial oat-cakes, with a large piece of cheese, and as they passed out of the door she handed it to them.

This last act of kindness to these two poor motherless lads touched their hearts as perhaps nothing else could have done. They had not been used to such kindness, and they expressed their gratitude, not by words, for they couldn't speak, but by the great, big tears that welled up in their eyes, despite their every effort to keep them back now. Ah! nothing penetrates a boy's heart like kindness.

The old farmer pointed out the way, across the moors, and over Lin-Crag—the way he had trodden fifty years ago, and soon they were climbing the steep hill-side, knee-deep in heather, and following the winding sheep tracks. Again and again they turned round to wave their handkerchiefs at the trio standing by the farm-yard gate now far beneath them, until at last, as they stood on the summit of the crag, the house looked like a little speck in the distance and soon disappeared.

Then they footed it gaily across the lonely blue moorlands. Sometimes they started a covey of young grouse, hidden amongst the heather; then the peewits wheeled around them, uttering plaintive

cries, as though bidding them good-bye. The scenes of their childhood, and the landscape on which their infant eyes had first gazed, were now left behind. The little lambs frisked about playfully, or cropped the short, green patches of tough grass near the water-courses, while overhead the larks sang joyously, continuously, and the sun shone brilliantly down from that wide expanse of azure dome.

The lads sang, too, blithely, lustily, for nothing could repress that feeling that was bubbling up within them; they trod the earth lightly, for they were in the "Land of Havilah," which is the "Golden Land of Youth," where the sun is always shining, where all the visions and ideals are golden, the enthusiasm and the energy boundless. So life with all its charm was opening out to them, but what was that life to be?

"Let us halt beside this spring, Jamie, for we have come twelve miles since morning," said Jack, about an hour after mid-day.

So they rested awhile, and ate some of the oat-cakes, and drank at the spring, where commenced a little stream of clear water, which sang its way down to the sea. Soon they left the wild moorlands behind them, and descending the western slopes of the Pennines, they entered the county of Lancaster, and passed through several hamlets and villages, where the rude country people spoke a dialect which they could scarcely understand.

Towards evening their footsteps began to lag. They had long ago ceased to sing, or even to whistle. They were tired and footsore, and for the last hour they had trudged on in silence, for they were both very brave, and neither would confess fatigue.

That night they slept under a hayrick in the corner of a field. They slept soundly, too, but next morning they were up early, and after performing their ablutions, and cooling their blistered feet in a neighbouring pond, they finished the oat-cakes and cheese, and started again.

The first day they had covered nearly half the distance between their home and that rising little sea-port town of Liverpool, whose docks and wharves were now crowded with ships from every part of the globe. The second day, however, they were too footsore to travel half that distance, and they had to break into that golden guinea to buy food, but they still persisted and never spake one word about turning back, and in the afternoon of the fourth day their hearts beat with joy, as they reached the top of a little eminence, that is now part and parcel of the great city of Liverpool, but was then merely a country lane, and their eyes were gladdened by a first glimpse of the forest of masts and spars, that lay in the river beneath them, while out there—beyond the bar, where the breakers were rolling in by the lighthouse—was the sea.

"The sea! the sea!" they both exclaimed.

And in the transport of joy which followed, tired limbs and blistered feet were forgotten, for this was their first glimpse of the sea.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE WATCH IN THE FORE-TOP

Soon they were down by the Mersey's bank, at a spot where the famous landing-stage has since been erected. Then they passed along the wharves and docks, but recently constructed, where the big ships, with their towering masts and spars, came in to unload their valuable cargoes, for here were ships from the Levant and the Eastern Archipelagoes, from Spain and the West Indies, from the Canadas and the new colonies of America.

Never before had they seen such noble vessels, nor had they dreamt it possible that such leviathans could be built. Never before had they gazed upon such a vast concourse of people, rushing hither and thither, shouting, pushing, loading and unloading, as though every ship must catch the next tide that flowed.

Their hearts swelled with pride as they stood and watched a stately barque, fresh from the River Plate, being warped in to the bank and made fast. Some of her swarthy crew were aloft clewing up the sails, others were below, stowing away, making fast, or squaring the yards, singing snatches of songs, but all of them eager and longing to get ashore and to set foot in Old England again.

Oh, how they envied these men, who had sailed those far-away seas and seen those lands with strangely-sounding names, and islands that gleamed like gems set in the tropical seas. East, west, north and south met here with all their charm and romance, for then Liverpool was rapidly becoming an emporium for the sea-borne commerce of the world.

And so the lads forgot the toil and weariness of the past four days, for they were bewildered by the strange and wonderful scenes which were being enacted before them. They were both romantic and imaginative, and nothing of it was lost upon them, for it all was so new.

They forgot that they were hungry and tired, homeless and friendless, and almost at the end of their tether. It was as though the very ships were speaking to them of the places whence they came. They told them of far eastern seas, of dusky kings and princes, whose palaces, crowned with minarets and towers, lined the golden shores of those far-off lands. They spoke of coral islands which shone like gems in an emerald sea, of shining strands that were edged with fronded palms, of rich and spicy groves that were filled with new and luscious fruits, of the jungle, the prairie and the forest. All these things and more were out there—in the west, beyond the lighthouse and the sunset.

The big ship from the River Plate was alongside now. The merchants were going aboard to see the lading, but the sailors, with merry hearts and other thoughts, were coming ashore, dancing and singing like huge schoolboys set at liberty. One had a parrot that he carried in a cage, another had brought home a monkey, while some had strange curios worked by the natives, but each man seemed to have brought some present or keepsake for those at home. They all seemed so jolly, too, that the boys made up their minds, there and then, that they would take the first ship that offered, whether eastward or westward bound.

'Twas getting toward evening, and in another two hours it would be dark, but they still wandered spellbound about the ships. Several times they had spoken to sailors and officers, and each time Jack had asked after his uncle, Captain Elliot of the *Ilawara*, but no one seemed to know him. They had now begun to wonder where they would have to spend the night, if no one would take them aboard. They were beginning to feel a little bit uneasy.

In their wanderings they had several times passed and repassed a fine ship that was almost ready for sailing, and they now found themselves close by her again. The men were aboard, and several officers were on the afterdeck, and they had wished very much to hail them, but so far they had not had the temerity to do so.

"I wonder where she's going to, Jack?" said his chum, as they sat down upon a coil of rope just alongside.

"Out west, somewhere. To the Americas, I believe."

"She's going out on this tide. I heard one of the men aboard say so. I wish they'd take us."

"Clear that gangway, lads! Here comes the captain, and the pilot, too!" cried one of the officers.

The lads looked around and saw a smart-looking officer in uniform coming along the quay, accompanied by an older man—a veritable sea-dog, with his arm full of oilskins and a sou'wester on his head.

"How soon do you hope to reach America, Captain Forbes?" the pilot was asking.

"In five weeks, if this wind holds."

"Have you got a full crew aboard?"

"We're three hands short of a full complement, but I don't intend to wait, with this wind blowing."

"Did you hear that, Jack? Three hands short, and sailing to-night," whispered Jamie.

"Now is the time! Let's try our luck."

"Agreed!"

They boldly approached the captain, and Jack, acting as spokesman, began somewhat nervously thus—

"If you please, sir, we want to go to sea."

"What's that?" snapped the captain. "Who are you? What do you want?"

"I heard you say, sir, just now, that you were three hands short aboard your ship. If you will take us we will try hard to serve you in any capacity."

"But, my little man," said the captain, stooping down, for he was very tall, "I don't take babies aboard my ship. You see, we haven't got any nurses to look after them when they cry."

The lads drew themselves up to their full height, and told the captain that they were fifteen, and that they had walked sixty miles to reach Liverpool, and that they meant to go to sea, if not aboard his ship, then aboard some other vessel.

"Take an old sea-captain's advice, lads. Don't go to sea till you're twenty, and then you'll never go at all. The sea's not exactly the place for young gentlemen like you. Go home to your mothers."

"We've got no mothers, or perhaps we shouldn't have come here!" said Jack, flushing up a little at the captain's words.

"Oh, come now, my little bantams. If that's so it alters the case. For the boy who hasn't got a mother the sea's not a bad place. Just tell me who you are, and where you come from?"

So they told him all, for there was a glint of kindness in that stern face, and a twinkle in those clear, grey-blue eyes that gained their confidence. They even told the story of Old Click and Beagle, and the lock-up. When they described the manner in which they had held the keepers at bay with the wood-chunks, till they were burnt out, both the captain and the old pilot laughed heartily, and when they had described their long, wearisome tramp to find Captain Elliot's ship, the skipper clapped them on the shoulder and said—

"Bravo! You've got grit and pluck enough to become admirals. Captain Elliot, did you say?"

"Yes, sir, Captain Elliot."

"Of what ship?"

"The *Ilawara*. He is my uncle, and he promised I should go to sea with him when I was fifteen. Do you know him, sir?"

"Why, yes! We were boys together aboard the frigate *Monmouth*. We had many a fight with the French in those days, and many a close shave too. Fancy you being his nephew." Then turning to the old pilot, the captain said, "What say you, William? Shall I take the young gamecocks? I like them, but the sea's a rough place for young lads."

The pilot brought a pair of kindly eyes to bear upon the youngsters, as though he envied their youth and outlook upon life, and longed to be young again, and then said—

"Take 'em, Captain Forbes. A voyage will do them no harm. 'Tisn't as though they were taken crying from their mothers. It'll larn 'em a useful lesson. 'Tis just the way I went to sea meself. Take 'em."

"Get aboard, youngsters, and report yourself to Mr. Rogers, the first mate."

The youngsters did get aboard. Their hearts were thumping with pride and glee, for they had gained their hearts' desire, and before long they had cleared the Mersey bar and were standing out to sea, sailing out into the sunset. When the pilot went overboard, he nodded to them, and hoped that they'd come home some day "Admirals of the Blue."

As soon as his duties permitted, Captain Forbes himself took them in hand and assigned them their work. He supplied them each with a middy's outfit, enrolled their names on the ship's books, and gave them a small cabin near his own. Although the captain had taken a special fancy to them, they were not to find it all honey, however. They were to help the men to take in sail, to share in the watches, to personally attend upon the captain, and to do much monotonous and arduous work, but they never shied at it and never disobeyed a superior officer. Each day, however, several hours were set aside for study, and the captain provided the books and set the lessons, which were in mathematics, navigation and seamanship.

Captain Forbes took a kind and fatherly interest in the lads, though he never relaxed for one moment that stern discipline which is so necessary for a headstrong youth. He taught them that the only way to learn how to command others was by first learning how to command themselves. Nevertheless, to set matters right at home he had sent a letter by the pilot, addressed to Jack's father, telling him where the lads were, and asking him not to be uneasy on their account, as one voyage would soon settle whether their future was to be upon the sea or not. Under these favourable conditions our heroes soon got their "sea-legs," and made rapid progress in their new studies, though they never forget the dreadful fright they received the first time they were sent aloft in bad weather.

One dark night, in a fierce gale off the Irish coast, they were ordered to assist the men in furling the main-top-gallant and main-royal sails. The vessel was creaking and straining beneath them; rolling uneasily in the trough of the sea. Long before they reached the crosstrees their hearts were thumping wildly and their teeth were chattering with fright, and for a moment Jack wished that he were safe ashore, even if in the old village lock-up again; but the worst was yet to come.

Far down beneath them the slippery decks seemed black as night, except when a huge green wave swept it from stem to stern. The captain was shouting orders to the men aloft, as though the lives of all aboard depended upon a ready compliance, and for a while the men in the rigging seemed helpless. The hoarse voice of the first mate was heard calling to the men who were struggling at the wheel, and all seemed confusion.

Still, the lads felt that the eyes of the captain were upon them, and they did not come down till their work was done, although when they reached the yards they thought their last moment had come, as the canvas filled like a huge bladder, and nearly hurled them off into the boiling surf and the destruction that threatened them below. They remained at their posts, assisting the men, hanging on sometimes by their teeth, until the sails were dragged in and furled, and the gaskets made fast and true.

After that experience they soon acquired more confidence and were easily at home, whether aloft or below, in fact, if anything, they preferred to be aloft. 'Tis possible, even, that they might have adopted the sea as a profession, and that their names might have come down to us with some of the illustrious admirals of that period, but for an incident which happened when they had been about four weeks at sea, and which changed the course of their lives once more.

They were within two hundred leagues of Cape Cod on the New England coast, and they were congratulating themselves on having escaped the vigilance of the enemy's cruisers, for they had a valuable cargo aboard, destined for Boston, when the following incident happened. Seven bells had

just sounded in the middle watch, and both Jamie and Jack were on duty, perched on the crosstrees in the foretop. It was very cold up there, and they were both longing for the end of the watch that they might descend and warm themselves at the galley fire and appease their ravenous hunger before turning in for a sleep. Day was just breaking away to the east, but ahead it was still dark and a little cloudy. Suddenly, through a rift in the clouds, over there in the north-west, towards the coast of the French Canadas, Jamie saw a tiny speck, low down on the horizon. He was about to hail the deck, but first pointed it out to Jack.

"What can it be?"

"Take the glass, Jamie. My hands are so numbed and cold I cannot keep it still."

Jamie took the telescope, and steadying himself for an instant, he leaned against the mast and held the glass to his eye. As he brought it to bear on that speck, the cry involuntarily burst from his lips—

"A sail! A sail!"

"Where away?" called the first mate from the deck.

"On the starboard bow, sir, north-west by west."

"What do you make of her?"

"Can't raise her hull yet, sir, but she must be a big ship, for she carries a good head of canvas."

Almost instantly the mate was up in the fore-top, carefully examining the stranger. As he did so a grave look crossed his face.

"Anything wrong, sir?" queried Jamie.

"I don't like the look of her. I fear she's no friend. We may have to run." Again he examined her. Then, shutting up the glass with a bang, he said—

"Go down, Elliot, and call the captain."

"Aye, aye, sir."

While the captain was being called, eight bells sounded the end of the watch, and though Jack had been eagerly longing for that blessed sound before, he would now willingly have remained aloft to watch that distant speck, which seemed fraught with such danger.

As he reached the deck he met the captain coming up the companion ladder. The latter immediately called out to the first mate, who had remained aloft—

"Is she showing any colours, Mr. Rogers?"

"Not yet, sir!"

"What do you think she is?"

"She's a cruiser, sir. Of that I'm pretty certain, but whether English or French I can't yet say."

At this alarming news, the captain himself went aloft and keenly examined the movements of the stranger for a few minutes, and then said—

"She's a French cruiser, Mr. Rogers, and a fast one too. We must either fight her or show her a clean pair of heels."

In a few minutes the *Duncan's* course was altered. Every stitch of canvas that she could carry was flung out. Royals and stuns'ls were set, and with the foam surging under her bows she fairly bounded through the water, leaving a wake astern that was a mile long.

## CHAPTER V

### THE FIGHT WITH THE FRIGATE

There was no little excitement aboard when it became known that the distant sail, "hull down" upon the horizon, was probably a French frigate.

"Look at her white canvas, and her large, square yards!" exclaimed Jamie. "She must be a man-of-war, and even if she's only a frigate she'll carry thirty guns against our ten, and treble the number of men."

"If she is a Frenchman she'll sink us, that's certain, though I hope Captain Forbes will make a fight of it," replied Jack, who could not entirely suppress a feeling akin to dread, as he watched the approaching ship.

"There's just a chance that she may be a friend, after all, for even the English cruisers do not always show their colours to the quarry until all chance of escape is cut off."

"It's just possible, of course, for there should be plenty of them hereabouts. Mr. Rogers tells me that last year they brought no less than three hundred French ships and their crews into English ports."

Breakfast was served as soon as the excitement aboard the *Duncan* had abated somewhat, and afterwards the captain assembled the crew and addressed them as follows—

"Lads, we're now within two hundred leagues of the New England coast, and we're carrying a valuable cargo. 'Tis our duty to save it if we can, but yonder is a fast and powerful frigate in our wake, who won't show any colours, though mine have been flying at the mast-head this half-hour."

"Hurrah! hurrah!" burst from the men, as they saw the ensign they loved so well unfurled to the breeze.

"That's right, lads! I'm glad to see that you're not ashamed to fight for the old flag," exclaimed the captain.

"We'll die for it, captain, if need be!" shouted several of the men, and no wonder, for 'tis remarkable the courage that even a flag inspires in the presence of an enemy, especially when that enemy dares to insult it.

"The fact that he has not yet shown his colours," went on the captain, "means that we've an enemy in our wake. Still, if this breeze holds we may outsail him, but if we can't do that we've got to fight him."

"Aye! aye! sir! Let's fight him."

"No Frenchman shall ever take my ship while I live. I'll blow her up first. Mark my words, lads. I will!" This was spoken in such a fierce, but deliberate manner that the men all saw that Captain Forbes meant it, and they responded with a ringing cheer, which rent the air like a broadside, and filled each heart with courage and determination.

"So now, lads, let's clear the decks, and prepare for the worst."

"Aye! aye! sir!"

And the men went to work as only British tars can work. They cleared the decks of everything that was useless in an action. They cleaned and loaded the guns, but they did not as yet open the port-lids to run them out, lest the lower decks should be swamped, and the ship delayed. They ran out the boarding-nets, and brought up the powder, wads and shot. They got ready their cutlasses and boarding-pikes, and in every way possible prepared to meet a daring foe.

"Tell the men aloft to keep a sharp lookout. We may sight an English frigate at any moment, and then we shall see some fun, Mr. Rogers."

"Aye! aye! captain. That we shall," replied the mate.

Slowly the distant frigate gained upon the *Duncan*, and before noon it could be easily seen from the deck, though still some five leagues distant. Nearer and nearer she came, and every man aboard

the *Duncan* had now made up his mind that a fight was the only possible ending, and the sooner it came, the better.

The second mate, Mr. Hudson, and Jamie were in the fore-top now, and just before dinner the captain hailed them, and said—

"Ho, there! Can you make out her armament yet?"

"Pretty well, sir."

"How many guns does she carry?"

"Twenty-six, I fancy, sir, for I can make out thirteen portholes on her starboard side."

The captain trod the deck impatiently, looking anxiously first at the approaching frigate, and then into the weather quarter, as though he anticipated a change.

"I fear the wind's dropping, Mr. Rogers," he said to the first mate, who paced the deck beside him. "We shall have a calm shortly," and within another half-hour the wind moderated, and shortly after that it blew spasmodically, and the frigate, now only two leagues away, was "laying on and off," trying to catch every breath of wind. The sails then flapped idly against the masts, and there followed a dead calm, when both ships lay helpless upon a mirrored sheet of glass.

A puff of blue smoke broke away from one of the starboard guns of the enemy, as she now lay broadside on towards the English ship, and then—

"Boom!" came a report, rumbling over the water.

At the same instant the French flag was broken at the mast-head.

"I thought as much, lads! Now we know who she is, and what she wants. That shot is a demand for surrender. What are those other flags he's hanging out, Mr. Hudson?"

"He's signalling, sir. Wants to know if we've struck. What shall I tell him, sir?"

"Tell him we haven't struck yet, but we'll do so as soon as he comes a little nearer, in the same way that Englishmen always strike."

At these words, which were heard all over the ship, a rousing cheer, which the Frenchman must have heard and wondered at, rang across the water, for it summed up the feelings of every man aboard. Shortly after this, the event which every one was expecting, from the captain down to the youngest cabin boy, happened.

"They're preparing to lower away the boats, sir. They mean to cut us out," came from the fore-top.

"Stand ready, my lads. Load every gun with grape-shot, lads, but don't fire till I give the order."

"Aye, aye, sir!"

One, two, three boats had been lowered, and filled with armed men. Each pulled ten oars, and there were at least thirty men in each boat, now pulling towards the *Duncan*.

Guns were run out; matches lit; cutlasses and pikes kept handy; but for the next half-hour a deep silence pervaded the ship's company. The men spoke not, for every order had been given, except that one for which they were all waiting; but the glow which was upon every cheek, and the sparkle which was in every eye, showed the tense feeling which animated the men. It was as though every man heard the words—

"In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength."

Jamie and Jack were both stationed at the same gun, one of the twelve-pounders on the port-side, amidships. This was their first action, and they had a strange feeling at this moment. It was not fear, for who could fear with the eye of that brave commander upon them from the quarter-deck. It was rather a feeling of mingled awe and suspense. Oh, how slowly the moments crawled! Five—ten—twenty minutes passed.

They could now hear the swish of the enemy's oars as they fell in measured strokes upon the water. Nearer and nearer they came. The first boat was now scarcely a cable's length away, when—

"Fire!" came in a voice of thunder from the poop.

Every gun that had been brought to bear belched forth its contents of flame and iron. The deadly missiles sped on their way, carrying death and destruction.

As soon as the smoke had cleared away, the awful effect of this concentrated fire could be seen. The first boat was literally blown to pieces; nothing was left of it but broken fragments, and the sea seemed full of struggling creatures, whose cries were pitiful. The second and third boats, however, were untouched, and while one went to the assistance of the first, the other dashed alongside, and with a wild cry of vengeance, the men clambered up the side and attempted to board.

"Repel boarders! Give it 'em, lads!" cried the captain, and seizing their pikes and cutlasses the men left the guns and attacked the enemy, who came on cheering, led by their brave officers. The third boat had stopped but to pick up a few stragglers, and then joined their comrades. There were now sixty or seventy men attempting to board the merchantman, but very few of them reached the deck, for the nets impeded their progress, and the stalwart defenders hurled them back into the sea.

The carnage was frightful. No quarter was asked, and none was given. The guns were silent now. It was hand-to-hand. Once the enemy succeeded in cutting away the nets, and an intrepid officer, followed by a few men, gained the deck, but in a trice Captain Forbes was amongst them, hewing his way with his long cutlass. A dozen men sprang to his assistance, and in less time than it takes to tell it, the intruders were stretched dead or wounded upon the deck.

At another time the alarm was given that the Frenchmen had gained the poop. Alas, it was only too true; some of them had clambered up and in at the stern windows, and had thus gained the upper deck. There was not a moment to spare, for already they were attempting to turn one of the brass swivels on the poop upon the crew.

"Follow me, lads!" cried the captain, as he sprang aft and up the companion ladder, and every man who could leave his post followed him, including Jamie and his chum.

A dreadful hand-to-hand fight took place. The men fought like tigers. Only two of the enemy escaped who had reached the poop, and these were glad to leap into the sea, to escape those avenging English, who fought like demons.

While this fierce scuffle was taking place, something happened that had passed unnoticed until it was too late. The wind, which had dropped to a dead calm, had sprung up and freshened rapidly from the nor'-east, and the frigate, receiving the first benefit of the breeze, had crept in nearer to the ship, and almost before Captain Forbes could get his vessel under way, the enemy poured in his first broadside of thirteen guns, with an awful, crashing effect. The ship staggered, and shook from stem to stern at this fearful impact. Down came the foremast, and went over the side, carrying with it a tangle of wreckage, torn sails and rigging, giving the vessel a heavy list to starboard, and killing several men on the spot. More than twenty men were killed or wounded within a few minutes, for broadside now followed broadside.

"Cut away that rigging, lads!" cried the captain.

They were almost his last words. As he seized a hatchet and sprang forward to cut away the wreckage, a cannon ball shattered his right arm, and even as he fell, a musket ball pierced his breast, and he fell upon the blood-stained deck. Jack rushed forward to support him, and tried to staunch his wounds, but the captain shook his head and lapsed into unconsciousness.

It was a most unequal fight, but the men still fought on stubbornly. Half the guns were dismantled, and there were not enough unwounded men to serve the rest, but every gun that could be manned was double-loaded and fired with such precision, that great havoc was worked upon the enemy's decks, which were much more crowded than those of the English ship.

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