

HENTY GEORGE ALFRED

WHEN LONDON BURNED :
A STORY OF RESTORATION
TIMES AND THE GREAT
FIRE

George Henty

**When London Burned : a Story of
Restoration Times and the Great Fire**

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G. A. Henty

When London Burned

CHAPTER I

FATHERLESS

Lad stood looking out of the dormer window in a scantily furnished attic in the high-pitched roof of a house in Holborn, in September 1664. Numbers of persons were traversing the street below, many of them going out through the bars, fifty yards away, into the fields beyond, where some sports were being held that morning, while country people were coming in with their baskets from the villages of Highgate and Hampstead, Tyburn and Bayswater. But the lad noted nothing that was going on; his eyes were filled with tears, and his thoughts were in the little room behind him; for here, coffined in readiness for burial, lay the body of his father.

Sir Aubrey Shenstone had not been a good father in any sense of the word. He had not been harsh or cruel, but he had altogether neglected his son. Beyond the virtues of loyalty and courage, he possessed few others. He had fought, as a young man, for Charles, and even among the Cavaliers who rode behind Prince Rupert was noted for reckless bravery. When, on the fatal field of Worcester, the last hopes of the Royalists were crushed, he had effected his escape to France and taken up his abode at Dunkirk. His estates had been forfeited; and after spending the proceeds of his wife's jewels and those he had carried about with him in case fortune went against the cause for which he fought, he sank lower and lower, and had for years lived on the scanty pension allowed by Louis to the King and his adherents.

Sir Aubrey had been one of the wild, reckless spirits whose conduct did much towards setting the people of England against the cause of Charles. He gambled and drank, interlarded his conversation with oaths, and despised as well as hated the Puritans against whom he fought. Misfortune did not improve him; he still drank when he had money to do so, gambled for small sums in low taverns with men of his own kind, and quarrelled and fought on the smallest provocation. Had it not been for his son he would have taken service in the army of some foreign Power; but he could not take the child about with him, nor could he leave it behind.

Sir Aubrey was not altogether without good points. He would divide his last crown with a comrade poorer than himself. In the worst of times he was as cheerful as when money was plentiful, making a joke of his necessities and keeping a brave face to the world.

Wholly neglected by his father, who spent the greater portion of his time abroad, Cyril would have fared badly indeed had it not been for the kindness of Lady Parton, the wife of a Cavalier of very different type to Sir Aubrey. He had been an intimate friend of Lord Falkland, and, like that nobleman, had drawn his sword with the greatest reluctance, and only when he saw that Parliament was bent upon overthrowing the other two estates in the realm and constituting itself the sole authority in England. After the execution of Charles he had retired to France, and did not take part in the later risings, but lived a secluded life with his wife and children. The eldest of these was of the same age as Cyril; and as the latter's mother had been a neighbour of hers before marriage, Lady Parton promised her, on her death-bed, to look after the child, a promise that she faithfully kept.

Sir John Parton had always been adverse to the association of his boy with the son of Sir Aubrey Shenstone; but he had reluctantly yielded to his wife's wishes, and Cyril passed the greater portion of his time at their house, sharing the lessons Harry received from an English clergyman who had been expelled from his living by the fanatics of Parliament. He was a good and pious man, as well as an excellent scholar, and under his teaching, aided by the gentle precepts of Lady Parton, and the strict

but kindly rule of her husband, Cyril received a training of a far better kind than he would ever have been likely to obtain had he been brought up in his father's house near Norfolk. Sir Aubrey exclaimed sometimes that the boy was growing up a little Puritan, and had he taken more interest in his welfare would undoubtedly have withdrawn him from the healthy influences that were benefiting him so greatly; but, with the usual acuteness of children, Cyril soon learnt that any allusion to his studies or his life at Sir John Parton's was disagreeable to his father, and therefore seldom spoke of them.

Sir Aubrey was never, even when under the influence of his potations, unkind to Cyril. The boy bore a strong likeness to his mother, whom his father had, in his rough way, really loved passionately. He seldom spoke even a harsh word to him, and although he occasionally expressed his disapproval of the teaching he was receiving, was at heart not sorry to see the boy growing up so different from himself; and Cyril, in spite of his father's faults, loved him. When Sir Aubrey came back with unsteady step, late at night, and threw himself on his pallet, Cyril would say to himself, "Poor father! How different he would have been had it not been for his misfortunes! He is to be pitied rather than blamed!" And so, as years went on, in spite of the difference between their natures, there had grown up a sort of fellowship between the two; and of an evening sometimes, when his father's purse was so low that he could not indulge in his usual stoup of wine at the tavern, they would sit together while Sir Aubrey talked of his fights and adventures.

"As to the estates, Cyril," he said one day, "I don't know that Cromwell and his Roundheads have done you much harm. I should have run through them, lad—I should have diced them away years ago—and I am not sure but that their forfeiture has been a benefit to you. If the King ever gets his own, you may come to the estates; while, if I had had the handling of them, the usurers would have had such a grip on them that you would never have had a penny of the income."

"It doesn't matter, father," the boy replied. "I mean to be a soldier some day, as you have been, and I shall take service with some of the Protestant Princes of Germany; or, if I can't do that, I shall be able to work my way somehow."

"What can you work at, lad?" his father said, contemptuously.

"I don't know yet, father; but I shall find some work to do."

Sir Aubrey was about to burst into a tirade against work, but he checked himself. If Cyril never came into the estates he would have to earn his living somehow.

"All right, my boy. But do you stick to your idea of earning your living by your sword; it is a gentleman's profession, and I would rather see you eating dry bread as a soldier of fortune than prospering in some vile trading business."

Cyril never argued with his father, and he simply nodded an assent and then asked some question that turned Sir Aubrey's thoughts on other matters.

The news that Monk had declared for the King, and that Charles would speedily return to take his place on his father's throne, caused great excitement among the Cavaliers scattered over the Continent; and as soon as the matter was settled, all prepared to return to England, in the full belief that their evil days were over, and that they would speedily be restored to their former estates, with honours and rewards for their many sacrifices.

"I must leave you behind for a short time, Cyril," his father said to the boy, when he came in one afternoon. "I must be in London before the King arrives there, to join in his welcome home, and for the moment I cannot take you; I shall be busy from morning till night. Of course, in the pressure of things at first it will be impossible for the King to do everything at once, and it may be a few weeks before all these Roundheads can be turned out of the snug nests they have made for themselves, and the rightful owners come to their own again. As I have no friends in London, I should have nowhere to bestow you, until I can take you down with me to Norfolk to present you to our tenants, and you would be grievously in my way; but as soon as things are settled I will write to you or come over myself to fetch you. In the meantime I must think over where I had best place you. It will not matter for so short a time, but I would that you should be as comfortable as possible. Think it over yourself,

and let me know if you have any wishes in the matter. Sir John Parton leaves at the end of the week, and ere another fortnight there will be scarce another Englishman left at Dunkirk."

"Don't you think you can take me with you, father?"

"Impossible," Sir Aubrey said shortly. "Lodgings will be at a great price in London, for the city will be full of people from all parts coming up to welcome the King home. I can bestow myself in a garret anywhere, but I could not leave you there all day. Besides, I shall have to get more fitting clothes, and shall have many expenses. You are at home here, and will not feel it dull for the short time you have to remain behind."

Cyril said no more, but went up, with a heavy heart, for his last day's lessons at the Partons'. Young as he was, he was accustomed to think for himself, for it was but little guidance he received from his father; and after his studies were over he laid the case before his master, Mr. Felton, and asked if he could advise him. Mr. Felton was himself in high spirits, and was hoping to be speedily reinstated in his living. He looked grave when Cyril told his story.

"I think it is a pity that your father, Sir Aubrey, does not take you over with him, for it will assuredly take longer to bring all these matters into order than he seems to think. However, that is his affair. I should think he could not do better for you than place you with the people where I lodge. You know them, and they are a worthy couple; the husband is, as you know, a fisherman, and you and Harry Parton have often been out with him in his boat, so it would not be like going among strangers. Continue your studies. I should be sorry to think that you were forgetting all that you have learnt. I will take you this afternoon, if you like, to my friend, the Curé of St. Ursula. Although we differ on religion we are good friends, and should you need advice on any matters he will give it to you, and may be of use in arranging for a passage for you to England, should your father not be able himself to come and fetch you."

Sir Aubrey at once assented to the plan when Cyril mentioned it to him, and a week later sailed for England; Cyril moving, with his few belongings, to the house of Jean Baudoin, who was the owner and master of one of the largest fishing-boats in Dunkirk. Sir Aubrey had paid for his board and lodgings for two months.

"I expect to be over to fetch you long before that, Cyril," he had said, "but it is as well to be on the safe side. Here are four crowns, which will furnish you with ample pocket-money. And I have arranged with your fencing-master for you to have lessons regularly, as before; it will not do for you to neglect so important an accomplishment, for which, as he tells me, you show great aptitude."

The two months passed. Cyril had received but one letter from his father. Although it expressed hopes of his speedy restoration to his estates, Cyril could see, by its tone, that his father was far from satisfied with the progress he had made in the matter. Madame Baudoin was a good and pious woman, and was very kind to the forlorn English boy; but when a fortnight over the two months had passed, Cyril could see that the fisherman was becoming anxious. Regularly, on his return from the fishing, he inquired if letters had arrived, and seemed much put out when he heard that there was no news. One day, when Cyril was in the garden that surrounded the cottage, he heard him say to his wife,—

"Well, I will say nothing about it until after the next voyage, and then if we don't hear, the boy must do something for his living. I can take him in the boat with me; he can earn his victuals in that way. If he won't do that, I shall wash my hands of him altogether, and he must shift for himself. I believe his father has left him with us for good. We were wrong in taking him only on the recommendation of Mr. Felton. I have been inquiring about his father, and hear little good of him."

Cyril, as soon as the fisherman had gone, stole up to his little room. He was but twelve years old, and he threw himself down on his bed and cried bitterly. Then a thought struck him; he went to his box, and took out from it a sealed parcel; on it was written, "To my son. This parcel is only to be opened should you find yourself in great need, Your Loving Mother." He remembered how she had placed it in his hands a few hours before her death, and had said to him,—

"Put this away, Cyril. I charge you let no one see it. Do not speak of it to anyone—not even to your father. Keep it as a sacred gift, and do not open it unless you are in sore need. It is for you, and you alone. It is the sole thing that I have to leave you; use it with discretion. I fear that hard times will come upon you."

Cyril felt that his need could hardly be sorer than it was now, and without hesitation he broke the seals, and opened the packet. He found first a letter directed to himself. It began,—

"MY DARLING CYRIL,—I trust that it will be many years before you open this parcel and read these words. I have left the enclosed as a parting gift to you. I know not how long this exile may last, or whether you will ever be able to return to England. But whether you do or not, it may well be that the time will arrive when you may find yourself in sore need. Your father has been a loving husband to me, and will, I am sure, do what he can for you; but he is not provident in his habits, and may not, after he is left alone, be as careful in his expenditure as I have tried to be. I fear then that the time will come when you will be in need of money, possibly even in want of the necessaries of life. All my other trinkets I have given to him; but the one enclosed, which belonged to my mother, I leave to you. It is worth a good deal of money, and this it is my desire that you shall spend upon yourself. Use it wisely, my son. If, when you open this, you are of age to enter the service of a foreign Prince, as is, I know, the intention of your father, it will provide you with a suitable outfit. If, as is possible, you may lose your father by death or otherwise while you are still young, spend it on your education, which is the best of all heritages. Should your father be alive when you open this, I pray you not to inform him of it. The money, in his hands, would last but a short time, and might, I fear, be wasted. Think not that I am speaking or thinking hardly of him. All men, even the best, have their faults, and his is a carelessness as to money matters, and a certain recklessness concerning them; therefore, I pray you to keep it secret from him, though I do not say that you should not use the money for your common good, if it be needful; only, in that case, I beg you will not inform him as to what money you have in your possession, but use it carefully and prudently for the household wants, and make it last as long as may be. My good friend, Lady Parton, if still near you, will doubtless aid you in disposing of the jewels to the best advantage. God bless you, my son! This is the only secret I ever had from your father, but for your good I have hidden this one thing from him, and I pray that this deceit, which is practised for your advantage, may be forgiven me. YOUR LOVING MOTHER."

It was some time before Cyril opened the parcel; it contained a jewel-box in which was a necklace of pearls. After some consideration he took this to the Curé of St. Ursula, and, giving him his mother's letter to read, asked him for his advice as to its disposal.

"Your mother was a thoughtful and pious woman," the good priest said, after he had read the letter, "and has acted wisely in your behalf. The need she foresaw might come, has arisen, and you are surely justified in using her gift. I will dispose of this trinket for you; it is doubtless of considerable value. If it should be that your father speedily sends for you, you ought to lay aside the money for some future necessity. If he does not come for some time, as may well be—for, from the news that comes from England, it is like to be many months before affairs are settled—then draw from it only such amounts as are needed for your living and education. Study hard, my son, for so will you best be fulfilling the intentions of your mother. If you like, I will keep the money in my hands, serving it out to you as you need it; and in order that you may keep the matter a secret, I will myself go to Baudoin, and tell him that he need not be disquieted as to the cost of your maintenance, for that I have money in hand with which to discharge your expenses, so long as you may remain with him."

The next day the Curé informed Cyril that he had disposed of the necklace for fifty louis. Upon this sum Cyril lived for two years.

Things had gone very hardly with Sir Aubrey Shenstone. The King had a difficult course to steer. To have evicted all those who had obtained possession of the forfeited estates of the Cavaliers would have been to excite a deep feeling of resentment among the Nonconformists. In vain Sir Aubrey pressed his claims, in season and out of season. He had no powerful friends to aid him; his conduct

had alienated the men who could have assisted him, and, like so many other Cavaliers who had fought and suffered for Charles I., Sir Aubrey Shenstone found himself left altogether in the cold. For a time he was able to keep up a fair appearance, as he obtained loans from Prince Rupert and other Royalists whom he had known in the old days, and who had been more fortunate than himself; but the money so obtained lasted but a short time, and it was not long before he was again in dire straits.

Cyril had from the first but little hope that his father would recover his estates. He had, shortly before his father left France, heard a conversation between Sir John Parton and a gentleman who was in the inner circle of Charles's advisers. The latter had said,—

"One of the King's great difficulties will be to satisfy the exiles. Undoubtedly, could he consult his own inclinations only, he would on his return at once reinstate all those who have suffered in their estates from their loyalty to his father and himself. But this will be impossible. It was absolutely necessary for him, in his proclamation at Breda, to promise an amnesty for all offences, liberty of conscience and an oblivion as to the past, and he specially says that all questions of grants, sales and purchases of land, and titles, shall be referred to Parliament. The Nonconformists are at present in a majority, and although it seems that all parties are willing to welcome the King back, you may be sure that no Parliament will consent to anything like a general disturbance of the possessors of estates formerly owned by Royalists. In a vast number of cases, the persons to whom such grants were made disposed of them by sale to others, and it would be as hard on them to be ousted as it is upon the original proprietors to be kept out of their possession. Truly it is a most difficult position, and one that will have to be approached with great judgment, the more so since most of those to whom the lands were granted were generals, officers, and soldiers of the Parliament, and Monk would naturally oppose any steps to the detriment of his old comrades.

"I fear there will be much bitter disappointment among the exiles, and that the King will be charged with ingratitude by those who think that he has only to sign an order for their reinstatement, whereas Charles will have himself a most difficult course to steer, and will have to govern himself most circumspectly, so as to give offence to none of the governing parties. As to his granting estates, or dispossessing their holders, he will have no more power to do so than you or I. Doubtless some of the exiles will be restored to their estates; but I fear that the great bulk are doomed to disappointment. At any rate, for a time no extensive changes can be made, though it may be that in the distance, when the temper of the nation at large is better understood, the King will be able to do something for those who suffered in the cause.

"It was all very well for Cromwell, who leant solely on the Army, to dispense with a Parliament, and to govern far more autocratically than James or Charles even dreamt of doing; but the Army that supported Cromwell would certainly not support Charles. It is composed for the most part of stern fanatics, and will be the first to oppose any attempt of the King to override the law. No doubt it will ere long be disbanded; but you will see that Parliament will then recover the authority of which Cromwell deprived it; and Charles is a far wiser man than his father, and will never set himself against the feeling of the country. Certainly, anything like a general reinstatement of the men who have been for the last ten years haunting the taverns of the Continent is out of the question; they would speedily create such a revulsion of public opinion as might bring about another rebellion. Hyde, staunch Royalist as he is, would never suffer the King to make so grievous an error; nor do I think for a moment that Charles, who is shrewd and politic, and above all things a lover of ease and quiet, would think of bringing such a nest of hornets about his ears."

When, after his return to England, it became evident that Sir Aubrey had but small chance of reinstatement in his lands, his former friends began to close their purses and to refuse to grant further loans, and he was presently reduced to straits as severe as those he had suffered during his exile. The good spirits that had borne him up so long failed now, and he grew morose and petulant. His loyalty to the King was unshaken; Charles had several times granted him audiences, and had assured him that, did it rest with him, justice should be at once dealt to him, but that he was practically powerless

in the matter, and the knight's resentment was concentrated upon Hyde, now Lord Clarendon, and the rest of the King's advisers. He wrote but seldom to Cyril; he had no wish to have the boy with him until he could take him down with him in triumph to Norfolk, and show him to the tenants as his heir. Living from hand to mouth as he did, he worried but little as to how Cyril was getting on.

"The lad has fallen on his feet somehow," he said, "and he is better where he is than he would be with me. I suppose when he wants money he will write and say so, though where I should get any to send to him I know not. Anyhow, I need not worry about him at present."

Cyril, indeed, had written to him soon after the sale of the necklace, telling him that he need not distress himself about his condition, for that he had obtained sufficient money for his present necessities from the sale of a small trinket his mother had given him before her death, and that when this was spent he should doubtless find some means of earning his living until he could rejoin him. His father never inquired into the matter, though he made a casual reference to it in his next letter, saying that he was glad Cyril had obtained some money, as it would, at the moment, have been inconvenient to him to send any over.

Cyril worked assiduously at the school that had been recommended to him by the Curé, and at the end of two years he had still twenty louis left. He had several conversations with his adviser as to the best way of earning his living.

"I do not wish to spend any more, Father," he said, "and would fain keep this for some future necessity."

The Curé agreed with him as to this, and, learning from his master that he was extremely quick at figures and wrote an excellent hand, he obtained a place for him with one of the principal traders of the town. He was to receive no salary for a year, but was to learn book-keeping and accounts. Although but fourteen, the boy was so intelligent and zealous that his employer told the Curé that he found him of real service, and that he was able to entrust some of his books entirely to his charge.

Six months after entering his service, however, Cyril received a letter from his father, saying that he believed his affairs were on the point of settlement, and therefore wished him to come over in the first ship sailing. He enclosed an order on a house at Dunkirk for fifty francs, to pay his passage. His employer parted with him with regret, and the kind Curé bade him farewell in terms of real affection, for he had come to take a great interest in him.

"At any rate, Cyril," he said, "your time here has not been wasted, and your mother's gift has been turned to as much advantage as even she can have hoped that it would be. Should your father's hopes be again disappointed, and fresh delays arise, you may, with the practice you have had, be able to earn your living in London. There must be there, as in France, many persons in trade who have had but little education, and you may be able to obtain employment in keeping the books of such people, who are, I believe, more common in England than here. Here are the sixteen louis that still remain; put them aside, Cyril, and use them only for urgent necessity."

Cyril, on arriving in London, was heartily welcomed by his father, who had, for the moment, high hopes of recovering his estates. These, however, soon faded, and although Sir Aubrey would not allow it, even to himself, no chance remained of those Royalists, who had, like him, parted with their estates for trifling sums, to be spent in the King's service, ever regaining possession of them.

It was not long before Cyril perceived that unless he himself obtained work of some sort they would soon be face to face with actual starvation. He said nothing to his father, but started out one morning on a round of visits among the smaller class of shopkeepers, offering to make up their books and write out their bills and accounts for a small remuneration. As he had a frank and pleasant face, and his foreign bringing up had given him an ease and politeness of manner rare among English lads of the day, it was not long before he obtained several clients. To some of the smaller class of traders he went only for an hour or two, once a week, while others required their bills and accounts to be made out daily. The pay was very small, but it sufficed to keep absolute want from the door. When he told his father of the arrangements he had made, Sir Aubrey at first raged and stormed; but he had

come, during the last year or two, to recognise the good sense and strong will of his son, and although he never verbally acquiesced in what he considered a degradation, he offered no actual opposition to a plan that at least enabled them to live, and furnished him occasionally with a few groats with which he could visit a tavern.

So things had gone on for more than a year. Cyril was now sixteen, and his punctuality, and the neatness of his work, had been so appreciated by the tradesmen who first employed him, that his time was now fully occupied, and that at rates more remunerative than those he had at first obtained. He kept the state of his resources to himself, and had no difficulty in doing this, as his father never alluded to the subject of his work. Cyril knew that, did he hand over to him all the money he made, it would be wasted in drink or at cards; consequently, he kept the table furnished as modestly as at first, and regularly placed after dinner on the corner of the mantel a few coins, which his father as regularly dropped into his pocket.

A few days before the story opens, Sir Aubrey had, late one evening, been carried upstairs, mortally wounded in a brawl; he only recovered consciousness a few minutes before his death.

"You have been a good lad, Cyril," he said faintly, as he feebly pressed the boy's hand; "far better than I deserve to have had. Don't cry, lad; you will get on better without me, and things are just as well as they are. I hope you will come to your estates some day; you will make a better master than I should ever have done. I hope that in time you will carry out your plan of entering some foreign service; there is no chance here. I don't want you to settle down as a city scrivener. Still, do as you like, lad, and unless your wishes go with mine, think no further of service."

"I would rather be a soldier, father. I only undertook this work because I could see nothing else."

"That is right, my boy, that is right. I know you won't forget that you come of a race of gentlemen."

He spoke but little after that. A few broken words came from his lips that showed that his thoughts had gone back to old times. "Boot and saddle," he murmured. "That is right. Now we are ready for them. Down with the prick-eared knaves! God and King Charles!" These were the last words he spoke.

Cyril had done all that was necessary. He had laid by more than half his earnings for the last eight or nine months. One of his clients, an undertaker, had made all the necessary preparations for the funeral, and in a few hours his father would be borne to his last resting-place. As he stood at the open window he thought sadly over the past, and of his father's wasted life. Had it not been for the war he might have lived and died a country gentleman. It was the war, with its wild excitements, that had ruined him. What was there for him to do in a foreign country, without resource or employment, having no love for reading, but to waste his life as he had done? Had his wife lived it might have been different. Cyril had still a vivid remembrance of his mother, and, though his father had but seldom spoken to him of her, he knew that he had loved her, and that, had she lived, he would never have given way to drink as he had done of late years.

To his father's faults he could not be blind; but they stood for nothing now. He had been his only friend, and of late they had been drawn closer to each other in their loneliness; and although scarce a word of endearment had passed between them, he knew that his father had cared for him more than was apparent in his manner.

A few hours later, Sir Aubrey Shenstone was laid to rest in a little graveyard outside the city walls. Cyril was the only mourner; and when it was over, instead of going back to his lonely room, he turned away and wandered far out through the fields towards Hampstead, and then sat himself down to think what he had best do. Another three or four years must pass before he could try to get service abroad. When the time came he should find Sir John Parton, and beg him to procure for him some letter of introduction to the many British gentlemen serving abroad. He had not seen him since he came to England. His father had met him, but had quarrelled with him upon Sir John

declining to interest himself actively to push his claims, and had forbidden Cyril to go near those who had been so kind to him.

The boy had felt it greatly at first, but he came, after a time, to see that it was best so. It seemed to him that he had fallen altogether out of their station in life when the hope of his father's recovering his estates vanished, and although he was sure of a kindly reception from Lady Parton, he shrank from going there in his present position. They had done so much for him already, that the thought that his visit might seem to them a sort of petition for further benefits was intolerable to him.

For the present, the question in his mind was whether he should continue at his present work, which at any rate sufficed to keep him, or should seek other employment. He would greatly have preferred some life of action,—something that would fit him better to bear the fatigues and hardships of war,—but he saw no prospect of obtaining any such position.

"I should be a fool to throw up what I have," he said to himself at last. "I will stick to it anyhow until some opportunity offers; but the sooner I leave it the better. It was bad enough before; it will be worse now. If I had but a friend or two it would not be so hard; but to have no one to speak to, and no one to think about, when work is done, will be lonely indeed."

At any rate, he determined to change his room as soon as possible. It mattered little where he went so that it was a change. He thought over various tradesmen for whom he worked. Some of them might have an attic, he cared not how small, that they might let him have in lieu of paying him for his work. Even if they never spoke to him, it would be better to be in a house where he knew something of those downstairs, than to lodge in one where he was an utter stranger to all. He had gone round to the shops where he worked, on the day after his father's death, to explain that he could not come again until after the funeral, and he resolved that next morning he would ask each in turn whether he could obtain a lodging with them.

The sun was already setting when he rose from the bank on which he had seated himself, and returned to the city. The room did not feel so lonely to him as it would have done had he not been accustomed to spending the evenings alone. He took out his little hoard and counted it. After paying the expenses of the funeral there would still remain sufficient to keep him for three or four months should he fall ill, or, from any cause, lose his work. He had one good suit of clothes that had been bought on his return to England,—when his father thought that they would assuredly be going down almost immediately to take possession of the old Hall,—and the rest were all in fair condition.

The next day he began his work again; he had two visits to pay of an hour each, and one of two hours, and the spare time between these he filled up by calling at two or three other shops to make up for the arrears of work during the last few days.

The last place he had to visit was that at which he had the longest task to perform. It was at a ship-chandler's in Tower Street, a large and dingy house, the lower portion being filled with canvas, cordage, barrels of pitch and tar, candles, oil, and matters of all sorts needed by ship-masters, including many cannon of different sizes, piles of balls, anchors, and other heavy work, all of which were stowed away in a yard behind it. The owner of this store was a one-armed man. His father had kept it before him, but he himself, after working there long enough to become a citizen and a member of the Ironmongers' Guild, had quarrelled with his father and had taken to the sea. For twenty years he had voyaged to many lands, principally in ships trading in the Levant, and had passed through a great many adventures, including several fights with the Moorish corsairs. In the last voyage he took, he had had his arm shot off by a ball from a Greek pirate among the Islands. He had long before made up his differences with his father, but had resisted the latter's entreaties that he should give up the sea and settle down at the shop; on his return after this unfortunate voyage he told him that he had come home to stay.

"I shall be able to help about the stores after a while," he said, "but I shall never be the man I was on board ship. It will be hard work to take to measuring out canvas and to weighing iron, after a free life on the sea, but I don't so much mind now I have had my share of adventures; though I dare

say I should have gone on for a few more years if that rascally ball had not carried away my arm. I don't know but that it is best as it is, for the older I got the harder I should find it to fall into new ways and to settle down here."

"Anyhow, I am glad you are back, David," his father said.

"You are forty-five, and though I don't say it would not have been better if you had remained here from the first, you have learnt many things you would not have learnt here. You know just the sort of things that masters of ships require, and what canvas and cables and cordage will suit their wants. Besides, customers like to talk with men of their own way of thinking, and sailors more, I think, than other men. You know, too, most of the captains who sail up the Mediterranean, and may be able to bring fresh custom into the shop. Therefore, do not think that you will be of no use to me. As to your wife and child, there is plenty of room for them as well as for you, and it will be better for them here, with you always at hand, than it would be for them to remain over at Rotherhithe and only to see you after the shutters are up."

Eight years later Captain Dave, as he was always called, became sole owner of the house and business. A year after he did so he was lamenting to a friend the trouble that he had with his accounts.

"My father always kept that part of the business in his own hands," he said, "and I find it a mighty heavy burden. Beyond checking a bill of lading, or reading the marks on the bales and boxes, I never had occasion to read or write for twenty years, and there has not been much more of it for the last fifteen; and although I was a smart scholar enough in my young days, my fingers are stiff with hauling at ropes and using the marling-spike, and my eyes are not so clear as they used to be, and it is no slight toil and labour to me to make up an account for goods sold. John Wilkes, my head shopman, is a handy fellow; he was my boatswain in the *Kate*, and I took him on when we found that the man who had been my father's right hand for twenty years had been cheating him all along. We got on well enough as long as I could give all my time in the shop; but he is no good with the pen—all he can do is to enter receipts and sales.

"He has a man under him, who helps him in measuring out the right length of canvas and cables or for weighing a chain or an anchor, and knows enough to put down the figures; but that is all. Then there are the two smiths and the two apprentices; they don't count in the matter. Robert Ashford, the eldest apprentice, could do the work, but I have no fancy for him; he does not look one straight in the face as one who is honest and above board should do. I shall have to keep a clerk, and I know what it will be—he will be setting me right, and I shall not feel my own master; he will be out of place in my crew altogether. I never liked pursers; most of them are rogues. Still, I suppose it must come to that."

"I have a boy come in to write my bills and to make up my accounts, who would be just the lad for you, Captain Dave. He is the son of a broken-down Cavalier, but he is a steady, honest young fellow, and I fancy his pen keeps his father, who is a roystering blade, and spends most of his time at the taverns. The boy comes to me for an hour, twice a week; he writes as good a hand as any clerk and can reckon as quickly, and I pay him but a groat a week, which was all he asked."

"Tell him to come to me, then. I should want him every day, if he could manage it, and it would be the very thing for me."

"I am sure you would like him," the other said; "he is a good-looking young fellow, and his face speaks for him without any recommendation. I was afraid at first that he would not do for me; I thought there was too much of the gentleman about him. He has good manners, and a gentle sort of way. He has been living in France all his life, and though he has never said anything about his family—indeed he talks but little, he just comes in and does his work and goes away—I fancy his father was one of King Charles's men and of good blood."

"Well, that doesn't sound so well," the sailor said, "but anyhow I should like to have a look at him."

"He comes to me to-morrow at eleven and goes at twelve," the man said, "and I will send him round to you when he has done."

Cyril had gone round the next morning to the ships' store.

"So you are the lad that works for my neighbour Anderson?" Captain Dave said, as he surveyed him closely. "I like your looks, lad, but I doubt whether we shall get on together. I am an old sailor, you know, and I am quick of speech and don't stop to choose my words, so if you are quick to take offence it would be of no use your coming to me."

"I don't think I am likely to take offence," Cyril said quietly; "and if we don't get on well together, sir, you will only have to tell me that you don't want me any longer; but I trust you will not have often the occasion to use hard words, for at any rate I will do my best to please you."

"You can't say more, lad. Well, let us have a taste of your quality. Come in here," and he led him into a little room partitioned off from the shop. "There, you see," and he opened a book, "is the account of the sales and orders yesterday; the ready-money sales have got to be entered in that ledger with the red cover; the sales where no money passed have to be entered to the various customers or ships in the ledger. I have made out a list—here it is—of twelve accounts that have to be drawn out from that ledger and sent in to customers. You will find some of them are of somewhat long standing, for I have been putting off that job. Sit you down here. When you have done one or two of them I will have a look at your work, and if that is satisfactory we will have a talk as to what hours you have got disengaged, and what days in the week will suit you best."

It was two hours before Captain Dave came in again. Cyril had just finished the work; some of the accounts were long ones, and the writing was so crabbed that it took him some time to decipher it.

"Well, how are you getting on, lad?" the Captain asked.

"I have this moment finished the last account."

"What! Do you mean to say that you have done them all! Why, it would have taken me all my evenings for a week. Now, hand me the books; it is best to do things ship-shape."

He first compared the list of the sales with the entries, and then Cyril handed him the twelve accounts he had drawn up. Captain David did not speak until he had finished looking through them.

"I would not have believed all that work could have been done in two hours," he said, getting up from his chair. "Orderly and well written, and without a blot. The King's secretary could not have done better! Well, now you have seen the list of sales for a day, and I take it that be about the average, so if you come three times a week you will always have two days' sales to enter in the ledger. There are a lot of other books my father used to keep, but I have never had time to bother myself about them, and as I have got on very well so far, I do not see any occasion for you to do so, for my part it seems to me that all these books are only invented by clerks to give themselves something to do to fill up their time. Of course, there won't be accounts to send out every day. Do you think with two hours, three times a week, you could keep things straight?"

"I should certainly think so, sir, but I can hardly say until I try, because it seems to me that there must be a great many items, and I can't say how long it will take entering all the goods received under their proper headings; but if the books are thoroughly made up now, I should think I could keep them all going."

"That they are not," Captain David said ruefully; "they are all horribly in arrears. I took charge of them myself three years ago, and though I spend three hours every evening worrying over them, they get further and further in arrears. Look at those files over there," and he pointed to three long wires, on each of which was strung a large bundle of papers; "I am afraid you will have to enter them all up before you can get matters into ship-shape order. The daily sale book is the only one that has been kept up regularly."

"But these accounts I have made up, sir? Probably in those files there are many other goods supplied to the same people."

"Of course there are, lad, though I did not think of it before. Well, we must wait, then, until you can make up the arrears a bit, though I really want to get some money in."

"Well, sir, I might write at the bottom of each bill 'Account made up to,' and then put in the date of the latest entry charged."

"That would do capitally, lad—I did not think of that. I see you will be of great use to me. I can buy and sell, for I know the value of the goods I deal in; but as to accounts, they are altogether out of my way. And now, lad, what do you charge?"

"I charge a groat for two hours' work, sir; but if I came to you three times a week, I would do it for a little less."

"No, lad, I don't want to beat you down; indeed, I don't think you charge enough. However, let us say, to begin with, three groats a week."

This had been six weeks before Sir Aubrey Shenstone's death; and in the interval Cyril had gradually wiped off all the arrears, and had all the books in order up to date, to the astonishment of his employer.

CHAPTER II

A CHANGE FOR THE BETTER

"I am glad to see you again, lad," Captain David said, when Cyril entered his shop. "I have been thinking of the news you gave me last week, and the mistress and I have been talking it over. Where are you lodging?"

"I have been lodging until now in Holborn," Cyril replied; "but I am going to move."

"Yes; that is what we thought you would be doing. It is always better to make a change after a loss. I don't want to interfere in your business, lad, but have you any friends you are thinking of going to?"

"No, sir; I do not know a soul in London save those I work for."

"That is bad, lad—very bad. I was talking it over with my wife, and I said that maybe you were lonely. I am sure, lad, you are one of the right sort. I don't mean only in your work, for as for that I would back you against any scrivener in London, but I mean about yourself. It don't need half an eye to see that you have not been brought up to this sort of thing, though you have taken to it so kindly, but there is not one in a thousand boys of your age who would have settled down to work and made their way without a friend to help them as you have done; it shows that there is right good stuff in you. There, I am so long getting under weigh that I shall never get into port if I don't steer a straight course. Now, my ideas and my wife's come to this: if you have got no friends you will have to take a lodging somewhere among strangers, and then it would be one of two things—you would either stop at home and mope by yourself, or you would go out, and maybe get into bad company. If I had not come across you I should have had to employ a clerk, and he would either have lived here with us or I should have had to pay him enough to keep house for himself. Now in fact you are a clerk; for though you are only here for six hours a week—you do all the work there is to do, and no clerk could do more. Well, we have got an attic upstairs which is not used, and if you like to come here and live with us, my wife and I will make you heartily welcome."

"Thank you, indeed," Cyril said warmly. "It is of all things what I should like; but of course I should wish to pay you for my board. I can afford to do so if you will employ me for the same hours as at present."

"No, I would not have that, lad; but if you like we can reckon your board against what I now pay you. We feed John Wilkes and the two apprentices, and one mouth extra will make but little difference. I don't want it to be a matter of obligation, so we will put your board against the work you do for me. I shall consider that we are making a good bargain."

"It is your pleasure to say so, sir, but I cannot tell you what a load your kind offer takes off my mind. The future has seemed very dark to me."

"Very well. That matter is settled, then. Come upstairs with me and I will present you to my wife and daughter; they have heard me speak of you so often that they will be glad to see you. In the first place, though, I must ask you your name. Since you first signed articles and entered the crew I have never thought of asking you."

"My name is Cyril, sir—Cyril Shenstone."

His employer nodded and at once led the way upstairs. A motherly looking woman rose from the seat where she was sitting at work, as they entered the living-room.

"This is my Prince of Scriveners, Mary, the lad I have often spoken to you about. His name is Cyril; he has accepted the proposal we talked over last night, and is going to become one of the crew on board our ship."

"I am glad to see you," she said to Cyril, holding out her hand to him. "I have not met you before, but I feel very grateful to you. Till you came, my husband was bothered nearly out of his wits;

he used to sit here worrying over his books, and writing from the time the shop closed till the hour for bed, and Nellie and I dared not to say as much as a word. Now we see no more of his books, and he is able to go out for a walk in the fields with us as he used to do before."

"It is very kind of you to say so, Mistress," Cyril said earnestly; "but it is I, on the contrary, who am deeply grateful to you for the offer Captain Dave has been good enough to make me. You cannot tell the pleasure it has given me, for you cannot understand how lonely and friendless I have been feeling. Believe me, I will strive to give you as little trouble as possible, and to conform myself in all ways to your wishes."

At this moment Nellie Dowsett came into the room. She was a pretty girl some eighteen years of age.

"This is Cyril, your father's assistant, Nellie," her mother said.

"You are welcome, Master Cyril. I have been wanting to see you. Father has been praising you up to the skies so often that I have had quite a curiosity to see what you could be like."

"Your father is altogether too good, Mistress Nellie, and makes far more of my poor ability than it deserves."

"And is he going to live with us, mother?" Nellie asked.

"Yes, child; he has accepted your father's offer."

Nellie clapped her hands.

"That is good," she said. "I shall expect you to escort me out sometimes, Cyril. Father always wants me to go down to the wharf to look at the ships or to go into the fields; but I want to go sometimes to see the fashions, and there is no one to take me, for John Wilkes always goes off to smoke a pipe with some sailor or other, and the apprentices are stupid and have nothing to say for themselves; and besides, one can't walk alongside a boy in an apprentice cap."

"I shall be very happy to, Mistress, when my work is done, though I fear that I shall make but a poor escort, for indeed I have had no practice whatever in the esquireing of dames."

"I am sure you will do very well," Nellie said, nodding approvingly. "Is it true that you have been in France? Father said he was told so."

"Yes; I have lived almost all my life in France."

"And do you speak French?"

"Yes; I speak it as well as English."

"It must have been very hard to learn?"

"Not at all. It came to me naturally, just as English did."

"You must not keep him any longer now, Nellie; he has other appointments to keep, and when he has done that, to go and pack up his things and see that they are brought here by a porter. He can answer some more of your questions when he comes here this evening."

Cyril returned to Holborn with a lighter heart than he had felt for a long time. His preparations for the move took him but a short time, and two hours later he was installed in a little attic in the ship-chandler's house. He spent half-an-hour in unpacking his things, and then heard a stentorian shout from below,—

"Masthead, ahoy! Supper's waiting."

Supposing that this hail was intended for himself, he at once went downstairs. The table was laid. Mistress Dowsett took her seat at the head; her husband sat on one side of her, and Nellie on the other. John Wilkes sat next to his master, and beyond him the elder of the two apprentices. A seat was left between Nellie and the other apprentice for Cyril.

"Now our crew is complete, John," Captain Dave said. "We have been wanting a supercargo badly."

"Ay, ay, Captain Dave, there is no doubt we have been short-handed in that respect; but things have been more ship-shape lately."

"That is so, John. I can make a shift to keep the vessel on her course, but when it comes to writing up the log, and keeping the reckoning, I make but a poor hand at it. It was getting to be as bad as that voyage of the *Jane* in the Levant, when the supercargo had got himself stabbed at Lemnos."

"I mind it, Captain—I mind it well. And what a trouble there was with the owners when we got back again!"

"Yes, yes," the Captain said; "it was worse work than having a brush with a Barbary corsair. I shall never forget that day. When I went to the office to report, the three owners were all in."

"Well, Captain Dave, back from your voyage?" said the littlest of the three. "Made a good voyage, I hope?"

"First-rate, says I, except that the supercargo got killed at Lemnos by one of them rascally Greeks."

"Dear, dear," said another of them—he was a prim, sanctimonious sort—"Has our brother Jenkins left us?"

"I don't know about his leaving us, says I, but we left him sure enough in a burying-place there."

"And how did you manage without him?"

"I made as good a shift as I could, I said. I have sold all the cargo, and I have brought back a freight of six tons of Turkey figs, and four hundred boxes of currants. And these two bags hold the difference."

"Have you brought the books with you, Captain?"

"Never a book, said I. I have had to navigate the ship and to look after the crew, and do the best I could at each port. The books are on board, made out up to the day before the supercargo was killed, three months ago; but I have never had time to make an entry since."

"They looked at each other like owls for a minute or two, and then they all began to talk at once. How had I sold the goods? had I charged the prices mentioned in the invoice? what percentage had I put on for profit? and a lot of other things. I waited until they were all out of breath, and then I said I had not bothered about invoices. I knew pretty well the prices such things cost in England. I clapped on so much more for the expenses of the voyage and a fair profit. I could tell them what I had paid for the figs and the currants, and for some bags of Smyrna sponges I had bought, but as to the prices I had charged, it was too much to expect that I could carry them in my head. All I knew was I had paid for the things I had bought, I had paid all the port dues and other charges, I had advanced the men one-fourth of their wages each month, and I had brought them back the balance."

"Such a hubbub you never heard. One would have thought they would have gone raving mad. The sanctimonious partner was the worst of the lot. He threatened me with the Lord Mayor and the Aldermen, and went on till I thought he would have had a fit."

"Look here, says I, at last, I'll tell you what I will do. You tell me what the cargo cost you altogether, and put on so much for the hire of the ship. I will pay you for them and settle up with the crew, and take the cargo and sell it. That is a fair offer. And I advise you to keep civil tongues in your heads, or I will knock them off and take my chance before the Lord Mayor for assault and battery."

"With that I took off my coat and laid it on a bench. I reckon they saw that I was in earnest, and they just sat as mum as mice. Then the little man said, in a quieter sort of voice,—

"You are too hasty, Captain Dowsett. We know you to be an honest man and a good sailor, and had no suspicion that you would wrong us; but no merchant in the City of London could hear that his business had been conducted in such a way as you have carried it through without for a time losing countenance. Let us talk the matter over reasonably and quietly."

"That is just what I am wanting, I said; and if there hasn't been reason and quiet it is from no fault of mine."

"Well, please to put your coat on again, Captain, and let us see how matters stand!"

"Then they took their ink-horns and pens, and, on finding out what I had paid for the figs and other matters, they reckoned them up; then they put down what I said was due to the sailors and

the mate and myself; then they got out some books, and for an hour they were busy reckoning up figures; then they opened the bags and counted up the gold we had brought home. Well, when they had done, you would hardly have known them for the same men. First of all, they went through all their calculations again to be sure they had made no mistake about them; then they laid down their pens, and the sanctimonious man mopped the perspiration from his face, and the others smiled at each other. Then the biggest of the three, who had scarcely spoken before, said,—

"Well, Captain Dowsett, I must own that my partners were a little hasty. The result of our calculations is that the voyage has been a satisfactory one, I may almost say very satisfactory, and that you must have disposed of the goods to much advantage. It has been a new and somewhat extraordinary way of doing business, but I am bound to say that the result has exceeded our expectations, and we trust that you will command the *Jane* for many more voyages.'

"Not for me, says I. You can hand me over the wages due to me, and you will find the *Jane* moored in the stream just above the Tower. You will find her in order and shipshape; but never again do I set my foot on board her or on any other vessel belonging to men who have doubted my honesty.

"Nor did I. I had a pretty good name among traders, and ten days later I started for the Levant again in command of a far smarter vessel than the *Jane* had ever been."

"And we all went with you, Captain," John Wilkes said, "every man jack of us. And on her very next voyage the *Jane* was captured by the Algerines, and I reckon there are some of the poor fellows working as slaves there now; for though Blake did blow the place pretty nigh out of water a few years afterwards, it is certain that the Christian slaves handed over to him were not half those the Moors had in their hands."

"It would seem, Captain Dowsett, from your story, that you can manage very well without a supercargo?" Cyril said quietly.

"Ay, lad; but you see that was a ready-money business. I handed over the goods and took the cash; there was no accounts to be kept. It was all clear and above board. But it is a different thing in this ship altogether, when, instead of paying down on the nail for what they get, you have got to keep an account of everything and send in all their items jotted down in order. Why, Nellie, your tongue seems quieter than usual."

"You have not given me a chance, father. You have been talking ever since we sat down to table."

Supper was now over. The two apprentices at once retired. Cyril would have done the same, but Mistress Dowsett said,—

"Sit you still, Cyril. The Captain says that you are to be considered as one of the officers of the ship, and we shall be always glad to have you here, though of course you can always go up to your own room, or go out, when you feel inclined."

"I have to go out three times a week to work," Cyril said; "but all the other evenings I shall be glad indeed to sit here, Mistress Dowsett. You cannot tell what a pleasure it is to me to be in an English home like this."

It was not long before John Wilkes went out.

"He is off to smoke his pipe," the Captain said. "I never light mine till he goes. I can't persuade him to take his with me; he insists it would not be manners to smoke in the cabin."

"He is quite right, father," Nellie said. "It is bad enough having you smoke here. When mother's friends or mine come in they are well-nigh choked; they are not accustomed to it as we are, for a respectable London citizen does not think of taking tobacco."

"I am a London citizen, Nellie, but I don't set up any special claim to respectability. I am a sea-captain, though that rascally Greek cannon-ball and other circumstances have made a trader of me, sorely against my will; and if I could not have my pipe and my glass of grog here I would go and sit with John Wilkes in the tavern at the corner of the street, and I suppose that would not be even as respectable as smoking here."

"Nellie doesn't mean, David, that she wants you to give up smoking; only she thinks that John is quite right to go out to take his pipe. And I must say I think so too. You know that when you have sea-captains of your acquaintance here, you always send the maid off to bed and smoke in the kitchen."

"Ay, ay, my dear, I don't want to turn your room into a fo'castle. There is reason in all things. I suppose you don't smoke, Master Cyril?"

"No, Captain Dave, I have never so much as thought of such a thing. In France it is the fashion to take snuff, but the habit seemed to me a useless one, and I don't think that I should ever have taken to it."

"I wonder," Captain Dave said, after they had talked for some time, "that after living in sight of the sea for so long your thoughts never turned that way."

"I cannot say that I have never thought of it," Cyril said. "I have thought that I should greatly like to take foreign voyages, but I should not have cared to go as a ship's boy, and to live with men so ignorant that they could not even write their own names. My thoughts have turned rather to the Army; and when I get older I think of entering some foreign service, either that of Sweden or of one of the Protestant German princes. I could obtain introductions through which I might enter as a cadet, or gentleman volunteer. I have learnt German, and though I cannot speak it as I can French or English, I know enough to make my way in it."

"Can you use your sword, Cyril?" Nellie Dowsett asked.

"I have had very good teaching," Cyril replied, "and hope to be able to hold my own."

"Then you are not satisfied with this mode of life?" Mistress Dowsett said.

"I am satisfied with it, Mistress, inasmuch as I can earn money sufficient to keep me. But rather than settle down for life as a city scrivener, I would go down to the river and ship on board the first vessel that would take me, no matter where she sailed for."

"I think you are wrong," Mistress Dowsett said gravely. "My husband tells me how clever you are at figures, and you might some day get a good post in the house of one of our great merchants."

"Maybe it would be so," Cyril said; "but such a life would ill suit me. I have truly a great desire to earn money: but it must be in some way to suit my taste."

"And why do you want to earn a great deal of money, Cyril?" Nellie laughed, while her mother shook her head disapprovingly.

"I wish to have enough to buy my father's estate back again," he said, "and though I know well enough that it is not likely I shall ever do it, I shall fight none the worse that I have such a hope in my mind."

"Bravo, lad!" Captain Dave said. "I knew not that there was an estate in the case, though I did hear that you were the son of a Royalist. It is a worthy ambition, boy, though if it is a large one 'tis scarce like that you will get enough to buy it back again."

"It is not a very large one," Cyril said. "'Tis down in Norfolk, but it was a grand old house—at least, so I have heard my father say, though I have but little remembrance of it, as I was but three years old when I left it. My father, who was Sir Aubrey Shenstone, had hoped to recover it; but he was one of the many who sold their estates for far less than their value in order to raise money in the King's service, and, as you are aware, none of those who did so have been reinstated, but only those who, having had their land taken from them by Parliament, recovered them because their owners had no title-deeds to show, save the grant of Parliament that was of no effect in the Courts. Thus the most loyal men—those who sold their estates to aid the King—have lost all, while those that did not so dispossess themselves in his service are now replaced on their land."

"It seems very unfair," Nellie said indignantly.

"It is unfair to them, assuredly, Mistress Nellie. And yet it would be unfair to the men who bought, though often they gave but a tenth of their value, to be turned out again unless they received their money back. It is not easy to see where that money could come from, for assuredly the King's

privy purse would not suffice to pay all the money, and equally certain is it that Parliament would not vote a great sum for that purpose."

"It is a hard case, lad—a hard case," Captain Dave said, as he puffed the smoke from his pipe. "Now I know how you stand, I blame, you in no way that you long more for a life of adventure than to settle down as a city scrivener. I don't think even my wife, much as she thinks of the city, could say otherwise."

"It alters the case much," Mistress Dowsett said. "I did not know that Cyril was the son of a Knight, though it was easy enough to see that his manners accord not with his present position. Still there are fortunes made in the city, and no honest work is dishonouring even to a gentleman's son."

"Not at all, Mistress," Cyril said warmly. "'Tis assuredly not on that account that I would fain seek more stirring employment; but it was always my father's wish and intention that, should there be no chance of his ever regaining the estate, I should enter foreign service, and I have always looked forward to that career."

"Well, I will wager that you will do credit to it, lad," Captain Dave said. "You have proved that you are ready to turn your hand to any work that may come to you. You have shown a manly spirit, my boy, and I honour you for it; and by St. Anthony I believe that some day, unless a musket-ball or a pike-thrust brings you up with a round turn, you will live to get your own back again."

Cyril remained talking for another two hours, and then betook himself to bed. After he had gone, Mistress Dowsett said, after a pause,—

"Do you not think, David, that, seeing that Cyril is the son of a Knight, it would be more becoming to give him the room downstairs instead of the attic where he is now lodged?"

The old sailor laughed.

"That is woman-kind all over," he said. "It was good enough for him before, and now forsooth, because the lad mentioned, and assuredly in no boasting way, that his father had been a Knight, he is to be treated differently. He would not thank you himself for making the change, dame. In the first place, it would make him uncomfortable, and he might make an excuse to leave us altogether; and in the second, you may be sure that he has been used to no better quarters than those he has got. The Royalists in France were put to sore shifts to live, and I fancy that he has fared no better since he came home. His father would never have consented to his going out to earn money by keeping the accounts of little city traders like myself had it not been that he was driven to it by want. No, no, wife; let the boy go on as he is, and make no difference in any way. I liked him before, and I like him all the better now, for putting his gentlemanship in his pocket and setting manfully to work instead of hanging on the skirts of some Royalist who has fared better than his father did. He is grateful as it is—that is easy to see—for our taking him in here. We did that partly because he proved a good worker and has taken a lot of care off my shoulders, partly because he was fatherless and alone. I would not have him think that we are ready to do more because he is a Knight's son. Let the boy be, and suffer him to steer his ship his own course. If, when the time comes, we can further his objects in any way we will do it with right good will. What do you think of him, Nellie?" he asked, changing the subject.

"He is a proper young fellow, father, and I shall be well content to go abroad escorted by him instead of having your apprentice, Robert Ashford, in attendance on me. He has not a word to say for himself, and truly I like him not in anyway."

"He is not a bad apprentice, Nellie, and John Wilkes has but seldom cause to find fault with him, though I own that I have no great liking myself for him; he never seems to look one well in the face, which, I take it, is always a bad sign. I know no harm of him; but when his apprenticeship is out, which it will be in another year, I shall let him go his own way, for I should not care to have him on the premises."

"Methinks you are very unjust, David. The lad is quiet and regular in his ways; he goes twice every Sunday to the Church of St. Alphage, and always tells me the texts of the sermons."

The Captain grunted.

"Maybe so, wife; but it is easy to get hold of the text of a sermon without having heard it. I have my doubts whether he goes as regularly to St. Alphage's as he says he does. Why could he not go with us to St. Bennet's?"

"He says he likes the administrations of Mr. Catlin better, David. And, in truth, our parson is not one of the stirring kind."

"So much the better," Captain Dave said bluntly. "I like not these men that thump the pulpit and make as if they were about to jump out head foremost. However, I don't suppose there is much harm in the lad, and it may be that his failure to look one in the face is not so much his fault as that of nature, which endowed him with a villainous squint. Well, let us turn in; it is past nine o'clock, and high time to be a-bed."

Cyril seemed to himself to have entered upon a new life when he stepped across the threshold of David Dowsett's store. All his cares and anxieties had dropped from him. For the past two years he had lived the life of an automaton, starting early to his work, returning in the middle of the day to his dinner,—to which as often as not he sat down alone,—and spending his evenings in utter loneliness in the bare garret, where he was generally in bed long before his father returned. He blamed himself sometimes during the first fortnight of his stay here for the feeling of light-heartedness that at times came over him. He had loved his father in spite of his faults, and should, he told himself, have felt deeply depressed at his loss; but nature was too strong for him. The pleasant evenings with Captain Dave and his family were to him delightful; he was like a traveller who, after a cold and cheerless journey, comes in to the warmth of a fire, and feels a glow of comfort as the blood circulates briskly through his veins. Sometimes, when he had no other engagements, he went out with Nellie Dowsett, whose lively chatter was new and very amusing to him. Sometimes they went up into Cheapside, and into St. Paul's, but more often sallied out of the city at Aldgate, and walked into the fields. On these occasions he carried a stout cane that had been his father's, for Nellie tried in vain to persuade him to gird on a sword.

"You are a gentleman, Cyril," she would argue, "and have a right to carry one."

"I am for the present a sober citizen, Mistress Nellie, and do not wish to assume to be of any other condition. Those one sees with swords are either gentlemen of the Court, or common bullies, or maybe highwaymen. After nightfall it is different; for then many citizens carry their swords, which indeed are necessary to protect them from the ruffians who, in spite of the city watch, oftentimes attack quiet passers-by; and if at any time I escort you to the house of one of your friends, I shall be ready to take my sword with me. But in the daytime there is no occasion for a weapon, and, moreover, I am full young to carry one, and this stout cane would, were it necessary, do me good service, for I learned in France the exercise that they call the *bâton*, which differs little from our English singlestick."

While Cyril was received almost as a member of the family by Captain Dave and his wife, and found himself on excellent terms with John Wilkes, he saw that he was viewed with dislike by the two apprentices. He was scarcely surprised at this. Before his coming, Robert Ashford had been in the habit of escorting his young mistress when she went out, and had no doubt liked these expeditions, as a change from the measuring out of ropes and weighing of iron in the store. Then, again, the apprentices did not join in the conversation at table unless a remark was specially addressed to them; and as Captain Dave was by no means fond of his elder apprentice, it was but seldom that he spoke to him. Robert Ashford was between eighteen and nineteen. He was no taller than Cyril, but it would have been difficult to judge his age by his face, which had a wizened look; and, as Nellie said one day, in his absence, he might pass very well for sixty.

It was easy enough for Cyril to see that Robert Ashford heartily disliked him; the covert scowls that he threw across the table at meal-time, and the way in which he turned his head and feigned to be too busy to notice him as he passed through the shop, were sufficient indications of ill-will. The younger apprentice, Tom Frost, was but a boy of fifteen; he gave Cyril the idea of being a timid lad.

He did not appear to share his comrade's hostility to him, but once or twice, when Cyril came out from the office after making up the accounts of the day, he fancied that the boy glanced at him with an expression of anxiety, if not of terror.

"If it were not," Cyril said to himself, "that Tom is clearly too nervous and timid to venture upon an act of dishonesty, I should say that he had been pilfering something; but I feel sure that he would not attempt such a thing as that, though I am by no means certain that Robert Ashford, with his foxy face and cross eyes, would not steal his master's goods or any one else's did he get the chance. Unless he were caught in the act, he could do it with impunity, for everything here is carried on in such a free-and-easy fashion that any amount of goods might be carried off without their being missed."

After thinking the matter over, he said, one afternoon when his employer came in while he was occupied at the accounts,—

"I have not seen anything of a stock-book, Captain Dave. Everything else is now straight, and balanced up to to-day. Here is the book of goods sold, the book of goods received, and the ledger with the accounts; but there is no stock-book such as I find in almost all the other places where I work."

"What do I want with a stock-book?" Captain Dave asked.

"You cannot know how you stand without it," Cyril replied. "You know how much you have paid, and how much you have received during the year; but unless you have a stock-book you do not know whether the difference between the receipts and expenditure represents profit, for the stock may have so fallen in value during the year that you may really have made a loss while seeming to make a profit."

"How can that be?" Captain Dave asked. "I get a fair profit on every article."

"There ought to be a profit, of course," Cyril said; "but sometimes it is found not to be so. Moreover, if there is a stock-book you can tell at any time, without the trouble of opening bins and weighing metal, how much stock you have of each article you sell, and can order your goods accordingly."

"How would you do that?"

"It is very simple, Captain Dave," Cyril said. "After taking stock of the whole of the goods, I should have a ledger in which each article would have a page or more to itself, and every day I should enter from John Wilkes's sales-book a list of the goods that have gone out, each under its own heading. Thus, at any moment, if you were to ask how much chain you had got in stock I could tell you within a fathom. When did you take stock last?"

"I should say it was about fifteen months since. It was only yesterday John Wilkes was saying we had better have a thorough overhauling."

"Quite time, too, I should think, Captain Dave. I suppose you have got the account of your last stock-taking, with the date of it?"

"Oh, yes, I have got that;" and the Captain unlocked his desk and took out an account-book. "It has been lying there ever since. It took a wonderful lot of trouble to do, and I had a clerk and two men in for a fortnight, for of course John and the boys were attending to their usual duties. I have often wondered since why I should have had all that trouble over a matter that has never been of the slightest use to me."

"Well, I hope you will take it again, sir; it is a trouble, no doubt, but you will find it a great advantage."

"Are you sure you think it needful, Cyril?"

"Most needful, Captain Dave. You will see the advantage of it afterwards."

"Well, if you think so, I suppose it must be done," the Captain said, with a sigh; "but it will be giving you a lot of trouble to keep this new book of yours."

"That is nothing, sir. Now that I have got all the back work up it will be a simple matter to keep the daily work straight. I shall find ample time to do it without any need of lengthening my hours."

Cyril now set to work in earnest, and telling Mrs. Dowsett he had some books that he wanted to make up in his room before going to bed, he asked her to allow him to keep his light burning.

Mrs. Dowsett consented, but shook her head and said he would assuredly injure his health if he worked by candle light.

Fortunately, John Wilkes had just opened a fresh sales-book, and Cyril told him that he wished to refer to some particulars in the back books. He first opened the ledger by inscribing under their different heads the amount of each description of goods kept in stock at the last stock-taking, and then entered under their respective heads all the sales that had been made, while on an opposite page he entered the amount purchased. It took him a month's hard work, and he finished it on the very day that the new stock-taking concluded.

CHAPTER III

A THIEF SOMEWHERE

Two days after the conclusion of the stock-taking, Cyril said, after breakfast was over,—

"Would it trouble you, Captain Dave, to give me an hour up here before you go downstairs to the counting-house. I am free for two hours now, and there is a matter upon which I should like to speak to you privately."

"Certainly, lad," the old sailor said, somewhat surprised. "We shall be quiet enough here, as soon as the table is cleared. My dame and Nellie will be helping the maid do up the cabins, and will then be sallying out marketing."

When the maid had cleared the table, Cyril went up to his room and returned with a large ledger and several smaller books.

"I have, for the last month, Captain Dave, been making up this stock-book for my own satisfaction."

"Bless me, lad, why have you taken all that trouble? This accounts, then, for your writing so long at night, for which my dame has been quarrelling with you!"

"It was interesting work," Cyril said quietly. "Now, you see, sir," he went on, opening the big ledger, "here are the separate accounts under each head. These pages, you see, are for heavy cables for hawsers; of these, at the date of the last stock-taking, there were, according to the book you handed to me, five hundred fathoms in stock. These are the amounts you have purchased since. Now, upon the other side are all the sales of this cable entered in the sales-book. Adding them together, and deducting them from the other side, you will see there should remain in stock four hundred and fifty fathoms. According to the new stock-taking there are four hundred and thirty-eight. That is, I take it, as near as you could expect to get, for, in the measuring out of so many thousand fathoms of cable during the fifteen months between the two stock-takings, there may well have been a loss of the twelve fathoms in giving good measurement."

"That is so," Captain Dave said. "I always say to John Wilkes, 'Give good measurement, John—better a little over than a little under.' Nothing can be clearer or more satisfactory."

Cyril closed the book.

"I am sorry to say, Captain Dave, all the items are not so satisfactory, and that I greatly fear that you have been robbed to a considerable amount."

"Robbed, lad!" the Captain said, starting up from his chair. "Who should rob me? Not John Wilkes, I can be sworn! Not the two apprentices for a surety, for they never go out during the day, and John keeps a sharp look-out upon them, and the entrance to the shop is always locked and barred after work is over, so that none can enter without getting the key, which, as you know, John always brings up and hands to me as soon as he has fastened the door! You are mistaken, lad, and although I know that your intentions are good, you should be careful how you make a charge that might bring ruin to innocent men. Carelessness there may be; but robbery! No; assuredly not."

"I have not brought the charge without warrant, Captain Dave," Cyril said gravely, "and if you will bear with me for a few minutes, I think you will see that there is at least something that wants looking into."

"Well, it is only fair after the trouble you have taken, lad, that I should hear what you have to say; but it will need strong evidence indeed to make me believe that there has been foul play."

"Well, sir," Cyril said, opening the ledger again, "in the first place, I would point out that in all the heavy articles, such as could not conveniently be carried away, the tally of the stock-takers corresponds closely with the figures in this book. In best bower anchors the figures are absolutely the same and, as you have seen, in heavy cables they closely correspond. In the large ship's compasses,

the ship's boilers, and ship's galleys, the numbers tally exactly. So it is with all the heavy articles; the main blocks are correct, and all other heavy gear. This shows that John Wilkes's book is carefully kept, and it would be strange indeed if heavy goods had all been properly entered, and light ones omitted; but yet when we turn to small articles, we find that there is a great discrepancy between the figures. Here is the account, for instance, of the half-inch rope. According to my ledger, there should be eighteen hundred fathoms in stock, whereas the stock-takers found but three hundred and eighty. In two-inch rope there is a deficiency of two hundred and thirty fathoms, in one-inch rope of six hundred and twenty. These sizes, as you know, are always in requisition, and a thief would find ready purchasers for a coil of any of them. But, as might be expected, it is in copper that the deficiency is most serious. Of fourteen-inch bolts, eighty-two are short, of twelve-inch bolts a hundred and thirty, of eight-inch three hundred and nine; and so on throughout almost all the copper stores. According to your expenditure and receipt-book, Captain Dave, you have made, in the last fifteen months, twelve hundred and thirty pounds; but according to this book your stock is less in value, by two thousand and thirty-four pounds, than it should have been. You are, therefore, a poorer man than you were at the beginning of this fifteen months' trading, by eight hundred and four pounds."

Captain Dave sat down in his chair, breathing hard. He took out his handkerchief and wiped the drops of perspiration from his forehead.

"Are you sure of this, boy?" he said hoarsely. "Are you sure that you have made no mistake in your figures?"

"Quite sure," Cyril said firmly. "In all cases in which I have found deficiencies I have gone through the books three times and compared the figures, and I am sure that if you put the books into the hands of any city accountant, he will bear out my figures."

For a time Captain Dave sat silent.

"Hast any idea," he said at last, "how this has come about?"

"I have none," Cyril replied. "That John Wilkes is not concerned in it I am as sure as you are; and, thinking the matter over, I see not how the apprentices could have carried off so many articles, some heavy and some bulky, when they left the shop in the evening, without John Wilkes noticing them. So sure am I, that my advice would be that you should take John Wilkes into your confidence, and tell him how matters stand. My only objection to that is that he is a hasty man, and that I fear he would not be able to keep his countenance, so that the apprentices would remark that something was wrong. I am far from saying that they have any hand in it; it would be a grievous wrong to them to have suspicions when there is no shadow of evidence against them; but at any rate, if this matter is to be stopped and the thieves detected, it is most important that they should have, if they are guilty, no suspicion that they are in any way being watched, or that these deficiencies have been discovered. If they have had a hand in the matter they most assuredly had accomplices, for such goods could not be disposed of by an apprentice to any dealer without his being sure that they must have been stolen."

"You are right there, lad—quite right. Did John Wilkes know that I had been robbed in this way he would get into a fury, and no words could restrain him from falling upon the apprentices and beating them till he got some of the truth out of them."

"They may be quite innocent," Cyril said. "It may be that the thieves have discovered some mode of entry into the store either by opening the shutters at the back, or by loosening a board, or even by delving up under the ground. It is surely easier to believe this than that the boys can have contrived to carry off so large a quantity of goods under John Wilkes's eye."

"That is so, lad. I have never liked Robert Ashford, but God forbid that I should suspect him of such crime only because his forehead is as wrinkled as an ape's, and Providence has set his eyes crossways in his head. You cannot always judge a ship by her upper works; she may be ugly to the eye and yet have a clear run under water. Still, you can't help going by what you see. I agree with you that if we tell John Wilkes about this, those boys will know five minutes afterwards that the ship is on fire; but if we don't tell him, how are we to get to the bottom of what is going on?"

"That is a difficult question, but a few days will not make much difference, when we know that it has been going on for over a year, and may, for aught we know, have been going on much longer. The first thing, Captain Dave, is to send these books to an accountant, for him to go through them and check my figures."

"There is no need for that, lad. I know how careful you are, and you cannot have gone so far wrong as all this."

"No, sir, I am sure that there is no mistake; but, for your own sake as well as mine, it were well that you should have the signature of an accountant to the correctness of the books. If you have to lay the matter before the magistrates, they would not take my testimony as to your losses, and might even say that you were rash in acting upon the word of a boy like myself, and you might then be obliged to have the accounts made up anew, which would cost you more, and cause much delay in the process; whereas, if you put in your books and say that their correctness is vouched for by an accountant, no question would arise on it; nor would there be any delay now, for while the books are being gone into, we can be trying to get to the bottom of the matter here."

"Ay, ay, it shall be done, Master Cyril, as you say. But for the life of me I don't see how we are to get at the bottom of the ship to find out where she is leaking!"

"It seems to me that the first thing, Captain Dave, is to see to the warehouse. As we agreed that the apprentices cannot have carried out all these goods under John Wilkes's eye, and cannot have come down night after night through the house, the warehouse must have been entered from without. As I never go in there, it would be best that you should see to this matter yourself. There are the fastenings of the shutters in the first place, then the boardings all round. As for me, I will look round outside. The window of my room looks into the street, but if you will take me to one of the rooms at the back we can look at the surroundings of the yard, and may gather some idea whether the goods can have been passed over into any of the houses abutting on it, or, as is more likely, into the lane that runs up by its side."

The Captain led the way into one of the rooms at the back of the house, and opening the casement, he and Cyril leaned out. The store occupied fully half the yard, the rest being occupied by anchors, piles of iron, ballast, etc. There were two or three score of guns of various sizes piled on each other. A large store of cannon-ball was ranged in a great pyramid close by. A wall some ten feet high separated the yard from the lane Cyril had spoken of. On the left, adjoining the warehouse, was the yard of the next shop, which belonged to a wool-stapler. Behind were the backs of a number of small houses crowded in between Tower Street and Leadenhall Street.

"I suppose you do not know who lives in those houses, Captain Dave?"

"No, indeed. The land is not like the sea. Afloat, when one sees a sail, one wonders what is her nationality, and whither she is bound, and still more whether she is an honest trader or a rascally pirate; but here on land, one scarcely gives a thought as to who may dwell in the houses round."

"I will walk round presently," Cyril said, "and gather, as far as I can, who they are that live there; but, as I have said, I fancy it is over that wall and into the alley that your goods have departed. The apprentices' room is this side of the house, is it not?"

"Yes; John Wilkes sleeps in the room next to yours, and the door opposite to his is that of the lads' room."

"Do the windows of any of the rooms look into that lane?"

"No; it is a blank wall on that side."

"There is the clock striking nine," Cyril said, starting. "It is time for me to be off. Then you will take the books to-day, Captain Dave?"

"I will carry them off at once, and when I return will look narrowly into the fastenings of the two windows and door from the warehouse into the yard; and will take care to do so when the boys are engaged in the front shop."

When his work was done, Cyril went round to the houses behind the yard, and he found that they stood in a small court, with three or four trees growing in the centre, and were evidently inhabited by respectable citizens. Over the door of one was painted, "Joshua Heddings, Attorney"; next to him was Gilbert Gushing, who dealt in jewels, silks, and other precious commodities from the East; next to him was a doctor, and beyond a dealer in spices. This was enough to assure him that it was not through such houses as these that the goods had been carried.

Cyril had not been back at the mid-day meal, for his work that day lay up by Holborn Bar, where he had two customers whom he attended with but half an hour's interval between the visits, and on the days on which he went there he was accustomed to get something to eat at a tavern hard by.

Supper was an unusually quiet meal. Captain Dave now and then asked John Wilkes a question as to the business matters of the day, but evidently spoke with an effort. Nellie rattled on as usual; but the burden of keeping up the conversation lay entirely on her shoulders and those of Cyril. After the apprentices had left, and John Wilkes had started for his usual resort, the Captain lit his pipe. Nellie signed to Cyril to come and seat himself by her in the window that projected out over the street, and enabled the occupants of the seats at either side to have a view up and down it.

"What have you been doing to father, Cyril?" she asked, in low tones; "he has been quite unlike himself all day. Generally when he is out of temper he rates everyone heartily, as if we were a mutinous crew, but to-day he has gone about scarcely speaking; he hasn't said a cross word to any of us, but several times when I spoke to him I got no answer, and it is easy to see that he is terribly put out about something. He was in his usual spirits at breakfast; then, you know, he was talking with you for an hour, and it does not take much guessing to see that it must have been something that passed between you that has put him out. Now what was it?"

"I don't see why you should say that, Mistress Nellie. It is true we did have a talk together, and he examined some fresh books I have been making out and said that he was mightily pleased with my work. I went away at nine o'clock, and something may have occurred to upset him between that and dinner."

"All which means that you don't mean to tell me anything about it, Master Cyril. Well, then, you may consider yourself in my black books altogether," she said petulantly.

"I am sorry that you should say so," he said. "If it were true that anything that I had said to him had ruffled him, it would be for him to tell you, and not for me."

"Methinks I have treated Robert Ashford scurvily, and I shall take him for my escort to see His Majesty attend service at St. Paul's to-morrow."

Cyril smiled.

"I think it would be fair to give him a turn, Mistress, and I am glad to see that you have such a kind thought."

Nellie rose indignantly, and taking her work sat down by the side of her mother.

"It is a fine evening," Cyril said to Captain Dave, "and I think I shall take a walk round. I shall return in an hour."

The Captain understood, by a glance Cyril gave him, that he was going out for some purpose connected with the matter they had in hand.

"Ay, ay, lad," he said. "It is not good for you to be sitting moping at home every evening. I have often wondered before that you did not take a walk on deck before you turned in. I always used to do so myself."

"I don't think there is any moping in it, Captain Dave," Cyril said, with a laugh. "If you knew how pleasant the evenings have been to me after the life I lived before, you would not say so."

Cyril's only object in going out, however, was to avoid the necessity of having to talk with Dame Dowsett and Nellie. His thoughts were running on nothing but the robbery, and he had found it very difficult to talk in his usual manner, and to answer Nellie's sprightly sallies. It was dark already. A few oil lamps gave a feeble light here and there. At present he had formed no plan whatever of

detecting the thieves; he was as much puzzled as the Captain himself as to how the goods could have been removed. It would be necessary, of course, to watch the apprentices, but he did not think that anything was likely to come out of this. It was the warehouse itself that must be watched, in order to discover how the thieves made an entry. His own idea was that they got over the wall by means of a rope, and in some way managed to effect an entry into the warehouse. The apprentices could hardly aid them unless they came down through the house.

If they had managed to get a duplicate key of the door leading from the bottom of the stairs to the shop, they could, of course, unbar the windows, and pass things out—that part of the business would be easy; but he could not believe that they would venture frequently to pass down through the house. It was an old one, and the stairs creaked. He himself was a light sleeper; he had got into the way of waking at the slightest sound, from the long watches he had had for his father's return, and felt sure that he should have heard them open their door and steal along the passage past his room, however quietly they might do it. He walked up the Exchange, then along Cheapside as far as St. Paul's, and back. Quiet as it was in Thames Street there was no lack of animation elsewhere. Apprentices were generally allowed to go out for an hour after supper, the regulation being that they returned to their homes by eight o'clock. Numbers of these were about. A good many citizens were on their way home after supping with friends. The city watch, with lanterns, patrolled the streets, and not infrequently interfered in quarrels which broke out among the apprentices. Cyril felt more solitary among the knots of laughing, noisy lads than in the quiet streets, and was glad to be home again. Captain Dave himself came down to open the door.

"I have just sent the women to bed," he said. "The two boys came in five minutes ago. I thought you would not be long."

"I did not go out for anything particular," Cyril said; "but Mistress Nellie insisted that there was something wrong with you, and that I must know what it was about, so, feeling indeed indisposed to talk, I thought it best to go out for a short time."

"Yes, yes. Women always want to know, lad. I have been long enough at sea, you may be sure, to know that when anything is wrong, it is the best thing to keep it from the passengers as long as you can."

"You took the books away this morning, Captain Dave?" Cyril asked as they sat down.

"Ay, lad, I took them to Master Skinner, who bears as good a reputation as any accountant in the city, and he promised to take them in hand without loss of time; but I have been able to do nothing here. John, or one or other of the boys, was always in the warehouse, and I have had no opportunity of examining the door and shutters closely. When the house is sound asleep we will take a lantern and go down to look at them. I have been thinking that we must let John Wilkes into this matter; it is too much to bear on my mind by myself. He is my first mate, you see, and in time of danger, the first mate, if he is worth anything, is the man the captain relies on for help."

"By all means tell him, then," Cyril said. "I can keep books, but I have no experience in matters like this, and shall be very glad to have his opinion and advice."

"There he is—half-past eight. He is as punctual as clockwork."

Cyril ran down and let John in.

"The Captain wants to speak to you," he said, "before you go up to bed."

John, after carefully bolting the door, followed him upstairs.

"I have got some bad news for you, John. There, light your pipe again, and sit down. My good dame has gone off to bed, and we have got the cabin to ourselves."

John touched an imaginary hat and obeyed orders.

"The ship has sprung a bad leak, John. This lad here has found it out, and it is well he did, for unless he had done so we should have had her foundering under our feet without so much as suspecting anything was going wrong."

The sailor took his newly-lighted pipe from between his lips and stared at the Captain in astonishment.

"Yes, it is hard to believe, mate, but, by the Lord Harry, it is as I say. There is a pirate about somewhere, and the books show that, since the stock-taking fifteen months ago, he has eased the craft of her goods to the tune of two thousand pounds and odd."

John Wilkes flung his pipe on to the table with such force that it shivered into fragments.

"Dash my timbers!" he exclaimed. "Who is the man? You only give me the orders, sir, and I am ready to range alongside and board him."

"That is what we have got to find out, John. That the goods have gone is certain, but how they can have gone beats us altogether."

"Do you mean to say, Captain, that they have stolen them out of the place under my eyes and me know nothing about it? It can't be, sir. There must be some mistake. I know naught about figures, save enough to put down the things I sell, but I don't believe as a thing has gone out of the shop unbeknown to me. That yarn won't do for me, sir," and he looked angrily at Cyril.

"It is true enough, John, for all that. The books have been balanced up. We knew what was in stock fifteen months ago, and we knew from your sale-book what has passed out of the shop, and from your entry-book what has come in. We know now what there is remaining. We find that in bulky goods, such as cables and anchors and ships' boilers and suchlike, the accounts tally exactly, but in the small rope, and above all in the copper, there is a big shrinkage. I will read you the figures of some of them."

John's face grew longer and longer as he heard the totals read.

"Well, I'm jiggered!" he said, when the list was concluded. "I could have sworn that the cargo was right according to the manifest. Well, Captain, all I can say is, if that 'ere list be correct, the best thing you can do is to send me adrift as a blind fool. I have kept my tallies as correct as I could, and I thought I had marked down every package that has left the ship, and here they must have been passing out pretty nigh in cart-loads under my very eyes, and I knew nothing about it."

"I don't blame you, John, more than I blame myself. I am generally about on deck, and had no more idea that the cargo was being meddled with than you had. I have been wrong in letting matters go on so long without taking stock of them and seeing that it was all right; but I never saw the need for it. This is what comes of taking to a trade you know nothing about; we have just been like two children, thinking that it was all plain and above board, and that we had nothing to do but to sell our goods and to fill up again when the hold got empty. Well, it is of no use talking over that part of the business. What we have got to do is to find out this leak and stop it. We are pretty well agreed, Cyril and me, that the things don't go out of the shop by daylight. The question is, how do they go out at night?"

"I always lock up the hatches according to orders, Captain."

"Yes, I have no doubt you do, John; but maybe the fastenings have been tampered with. The only way in which we see it can have been managed is that someone has been in the habit of getting over the wall between the yard and the lane, and then getting into the warehouse somehow. It must have been done very often, for if the things had been taken in considerable quantities you would have noticed that the stock was short directly the next order came in. Now I propose we light these two lanterns I have got here, and that we go down and have a look round the hold."

Lighting the candles, they went downstairs. The Captain took out the key and turned the lock. It grated loudly as he did so.

"That is a noisy lock," Cyril said.

"It wants oiling," John replied. "I have been thinking of doing it for the last month, but it has always slipped out of my mind."

"At any rate," Cyril said, "it is certain that thieves could not have got into the shop this way, for the noise would have been heard all over the house."

The door between the shop and the warehouse was next unlocked. The fastenings of the shutters and doors were first examined; there was no sign of their having been tampered with. Each bolt and hasp was tried, and the screws examined. Then they went round trying every one of the stout planks that formed the side; all were firm and in good condition.

"It beats me altogether," the Captain said, when they had finished their examination. "The things cannot walk out of themselves; they have got to be carried. But how the fellows who carry them get in is more than I can say. There is nowhere else to look, is there, John?"

"Not that I can see, Captain."

They went to the door into the shop, and were about to close it, when Cyril said,—

"Some of the things that are gone are generally kept in here, Captain—the rope up to two inch, for example, and a good deal of canvas, and most of the smaller copper fittings; so that, whoever the thief is, he must have been in the habit of coming in here as well as into the warehouse."

"That is so, lad. Perhaps they entered from this side."

"Will you hold the lantern here, John?" Cyril said.

The sailor held the lantern to the lock.

"There are no scratches nor signs of tools having been used here," Cyril said, examining both the lock and the door-post. "Whether the thief came into the warehouse first, or not, he must have had a key."

The Captain nodded.

"Thieves generally carry a lot of keys with them, Cyril; and if one does not quite fit they can file it until it does."

The shutters of the shop window and its fastenings, and those of the door, were as secure as those of the warehouse, and, completely puzzled, the party went upstairs again.

"There must be some way of getting in and out, although we can't find it," Captain Dave said. "Things can't have gone off by themselves."

"It may be, Captain," John Wilkes said, "that some of the planks may be loose."

"But we tried them all, John."

"Ay, they seem firm enough, but it may be that one of them is wedged in, and that when the wedges are taken out it could be pulled off."

"I think you would have noticed it, John. If there was anything of that sort it must be outside. However, we will take a good look round the yard to-morrow. The warehouse is strongly built, and I don't believe that any plank could be taken off and put back again, time after time, without making a noise that would be heard in the house. What do you think, Cyril?"

"I agree with you, Captain Dave. How the thieves make an entry I can't imagine, but I don't believe that it is through the wall of the warehouse. I am convinced that the robberies must have been very frequent. Had a large amount been taken at a time, John Wilkes would have been sure to notice it. Then, again, the thieves would not come so often, and each time for a comparatively small amount of booty, unless it could be managed without any serious risk or trouble. However, now that we do know that they come, we shall have, I should think, very little difficulty in finding out how it is done."

"You may warrant we will keep a sharp look-out," John Wilkes said savagely. "If the Captain will give me the use of a room at the back of the house, you may be sure I shan't close an eye till I have got to the bottom of the matter. I am responsible for the cargo below, and if I had kept as sharp an eye on the stores as I ought to have done, this would not have happened. Only let me catch them trying to board, and I will give them such a reception that I warrant me they will sheer off with a bullet or two in them. I have got that pair of boarding pistols, and a cutlass, hung up over my bed."

"You must not do that, John," the Captain said. "It isn't a matter of beating off the pirates by pouring a broadside into them. Maybe you might cripple them, more likely they would make off, and we want to capture them. Therefore, I say, let us watch, and find out how they do it. When we

once know that, we can lay our plans for capturing them the next time they come. I will take watch and watch with you."

"Well, if it goes on long, Captain, I won't say no to that; but for to-night anyhow I will sit up alone."

"Very well, let it be so, John. But mind, whatever you see, you keep as still as a mouse. Just steal to my room in your stockinged feet directly you see anything moving. Open the door and say, 'Strange sail in sight!' and I will be over at your window in no time. And now, Cyril, you and I may as well turn in."

The night passed quietly.

"You saw nothing, I suppose, John?" the Captain said next morning, after the apprentices had gone down from breakfast.

"Not a thing, Captain."

"Now we will go and have a look in the yard. Will you come, Cyril?"

"I should like to come," Cyril replied, "but, as I have never been out there before, had you not better make some pretext for me to do so. You might say, in the hearing of the apprentices, 'We may as well take the measurements for that new shed we were talking about, and see how much boarding it will require.' Then you can call to me out from the office to come and help you to measure."

"Then you still think the apprentices are in it?" John Wilkes asked sharply.

"I don't say I think so, John. I have nothing against them. I don't believe they could come down at night without being heard; I feel sure they could not get into the shop without that stiff bolt making a noise. Still, as it is possible they may be concerned in the matter, I think that, now we have it in good train for getting to the bottom of it, it would be well to keep the matter altogether to ourselves."

"Quite right," Captain Dave said approvingly. "When you suspect treachery, don't let a soul think that you have got such a matter in your mind, until you are in a position to take the traitor by the collar and put a pistol to his ear. That idea of yours is a very good one; I will say something about the shed to John this morning, and then when you go down to the counting-house after dinner I will call to you to come out to the yard with us."

After dinner, Captain Dave went with Cyril into the counting-house.

"We had an order in this morning for a set of ship's anchors, and John and I have been in the yard looking them out; we looked over the place pretty sharply, as you may be sure, but as far as we could see the place is as solid as when it was built, fifty years ago, by my father."

The Captain went out into the store, and ten minutes afterwards re-entered the shop and shouted,—

"Come out here, Cyril, and lend a hand. We are going to take those measurements. Bring out your ink-horn, and a bit of paper to put them down as we take them."

The yard was some sixty feet long by twenty-five broad, exclusive of the space occupied by the warehouse. This, as Cyril had observed from the window above, did not extend as far as the back wall; but on walking round there with the two men, he found that the distance was greater than he had expected, and that there was a space of some twenty feet clear.

"This is where we are thinking of putting the shed," the Captain said in a loud voice.

"But I see that you have a crane and door into the loft over the warehouse there," Cyril said, looking up.

"We never use that now. When my father first began business, he used to buy up old junk and such-like stores, and store them up there, but it didn't pay for the trouble; and, besides, as you see, he wanted every foot of the yard room, and of course at that time they had to leave a space clear for the carts to come up from the gate round here, so it was given up, and the loft is empty now."

Cyril looked up at the crane. It was swung round so as to lie flat against the wooden shutters. The rope was still through the block, and passed into the loft through a hole cut at the junction of the shutters.

They now measured the space between the warehouse and the wall, the Captain repeating the figures, still in a loud voice; then they discussed the height of the walls, and after some argument between the Captain and John Wilkes agreed that this should be the same as the rest of the building. Still talking on the subject, they returned through the warehouse, Cyril on the way taking a look at the massive gate that opened into the lane. In addition to a heavy bar it had a strong hasp, fastened by a great padlock. The apprentices were busy at work coiling up some rope when they passed by.

"When we have knocked a door through the end there, John," Captain Dave said, "it will give you a deal more room, and you will be able to get rid of all these cables and heavy dunnage, and to have matters more ship-shape here."

While they had been taking the measurements, all three had carefully examined the wall of the warehouse.

"There is nothing wrong there, Cyril," his employer said, as, leaving John Wilkes in the warehouse, they went through the shop into the little office.

"Certainly nothing that I could see, Captain Dave. I did not before know the loft had any opening to the outside. Of course I have seen the ladder going up from the warehouse to that trap-door; but as it was closed I thought no more of it."

"I don't suppose anyone has been up there for years, lad. What, are you thinking that someone might get in through those shutters? Why, they are twenty feet from the ground, so that you would want a long ladder, and when you got up there you would find that you could not open the shutters. I said nobody had been up there, but I did go up myself to have a look round when I first settled down here, and there is a big bar with a padlock."

Cyril thought no more about it, and after supper it was arranged that he and Captain Dave should keep watch by turns at the window of the room that had been now given to John Wilkes, and that the latter should have a night in his berth, as the Captain expressed it. John Wilkes had made some opposition, saying that he would be quite willing to take his watch.

"You will just obey orders, John," the Captain said. "You have had thirty-six hours off the reel on duty, and you have got to be at work all day to-morrow again. You shall take the middle watch to-morrow night if you like, but one can see with half an eye that you are not fit to be on the lookout to-night. I doubt if any of us could see as far as the length of the bowsprit. It is pretty nearly pitch dark; there is not a star to be seen, and it looked to me, when I turned out before supper, as if we were going to have a storm."

CHAPTER IV

CAPTURED

It was settled that Cyril was to take the first watch, and that the Captain should relieve him at one o'clock. At nine, the family went to bed. A quarter of an hour later, Cyril stole noiselessly from his attic down to John Wilkes's room. The door had been left ajar, and the candle was still burning.

"I put a chair by the window," the sailor said, from his bed, "and left the light, for you might run foul of something or other in the dark, though I have left a pretty clear gangway for you."

Cyril blew out the candle, and seated himself at the window. For a time he could see nothing, and told himself that the whole contents of the warehouse might be carried off without his being any the wiser.

"I shall certainly see nothing," he said to himself; "but, at least, I may hear something."

So saying, he turned the fastening of the casement and opened it about half an inch. As his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he was able to make out the line of the roof of the warehouse, which was some three or four feet below the level of his eyes, and some twenty feet away on his left. The time passed slowly. He kept himself awake by thinking over the old days in France, the lessons he had learnt with his friend, Harry Parton, and the teaching of the old clergyman.

He heard the bell of St. Paul's strike ten and eleven. The last stroke had scarcely ceased to vibrate when he rose to his feet suddenly. He heard, on his left, a scraping noise. A moment later it ceased, and then was renewed again. It lasted but a few seconds; then he heard an irregular, shuffling noise, that seemed to him upon the roof of the warehouse. Pressing his face to the casement, he suddenly became aware that the straight line of the ridge was broken by something moving along it, and a moment later he made out a second object, just behind the first. Moving with the greatest care, he made his way out of the room, half closed the door behind him, crossed the passage, and pushed at a door opposite.

"Captain Dave," he said, in a low voice, "get up at once, and please don't make a noise."

"Ay, ay, lad."

There was a movement from the bed, and a moment later the Captain stood beside him.

"What is it, lad?" he whispered.

"There are two figures moving along on the ridge of the roof of the warehouse. I think it is the apprentices. I heard a slight noise, as if they were letting themselves down from their window by a rope. It is just over that roof, you know."

There was a rustling sound as the Captain slipped his doublet on.

"That is so. The young scoundrels! What can they be doing on the roof?"

They went to the window behind. Just as they reached it there was a vivid flash of lightning. It sufficed to show them a figure lying at full length at the farther end of the roof; then all was dark again, and a second or two later came a sharp, crashing roar of thunder.

"We had better stand well back from the window," Cyril whispered. "Another flash might show us to anyone looking this way."

"What does it mean, lad? What on earth is that boy doing there? I could not see which it was."

"I think it is Ashford," Cyril said. "The figure in front seemed the smaller of the two."

"But where on earth can Tom have got to?"

"I should fancy, sir, that Robert has lowered him so that he can get his feet on the crane and swing it outwards; then he might sit down on it and swing himself by the rope into the loft if the doors are not fastened inside. Robert, being taller, would have no difficulty in lowering himself—There!" he broke off, as another flash of lightning lit up the sky. "He has gone, now; there is no one on the roof."

John Wilkes was by this time standing beside them, having started up at the first flash of lightning.

"Do you go up, John, into their room," the Captain said. "I think there can be no doubt that these fellows on the roof are Ashford and Frost, but it is as well to be able to swear to it."

The foreman returned in a minute or two.

"The room is empty, Captain; the window is open, and there is a rope hanging down from it. Shall I cast it adrift?"

"Certainly not, John. We do not mean to take them tonight, and they must be allowed to go back to their beds without a suspicion that they have been watched. I hope and trust that it is not so bad as it looks, and that the boys have only broken out from devilry. You know, boys will do things of that sort just because it is forbidden."

"There must be more than that," John Wilkes said. "If it had been just after they went to their rooms, it might be that they went to some tavern or other low resort, but the town is all asleep now."

They again went close to the window, pushed the casement a little more open, and stood listening there. In two or three minutes there was a very slight sound heard.

"They are unbolting the door into the yard," John Wilkes whispered. "I would give a month's pay to be behind them with a rope's end."

Half a minute later there was a sudden gleam of light below, and they could see the door open. The light disappeared again, but they heard footsteps; then they saw the light thrown on the fastening to the outer gate, and could make out that two figures below were applying a key to the padlock. This was taken off and laid down; then the heavy wooden bar was lifted, and also laid on the ground. The gate opened as if pushed from the other side. The two figures went out; the sound of a low murmur of conversation could be heard; then they returned, the gate was closed and fastened again, they entered the warehouse, the light disappeared, and the door was closed.

"That's how the things went, John."

"Ay, ay, sir," the foreman growled.

"As they were undoing the gate, the light fell on a coil of rope they had set down there, and a bag which I guess had copper of some kind in it. They have done us cleverly, the young villains! There was not noise enough to wake a cat. They must have had every bolt and hinge well oiled."

"We had better close the casement now, sir, for as they come back along the ridge they will be facing it, and if a flash of lightning came they would see that it was half open, and even if they did not catch sight of our faces they would think it suspicious that the window should be open, and it might put them on their guard."

"Yes; and we may as well turn in at once, John. Like enough when they get back they will listen for a bit at their door, so as to make sure that everything is quiet before they turn in. There is nothing more to see now. Of course they will get in as they got out. You had better turn in as you are, Cyril; they may listen at your door."

Cyril at once went up to his room, closed the door, placed a chair against it, and then lay down on his bed. He listened intently, and four or five minutes later thought that he heard a door open; but he could not be sure, for just at that moment heavy drops began to patter down upon the tiles. The noise rose louder and louder until he could scarce have heard himself speak. Then there was a bright flash and the deep rumble of the thunder mingled with the sharp rattle of the raindrops overhead. He listened for a time to the storm, and then dropped off to sleep.

Things went on as usual at breakfast the next morning. During the meal, Captain Dave gave the foreman several instructions as to the morning's work.

"I am going on board the *Royalist*," he said. "John Browning wants me to overhaul all the gear, and see what will do for another voyage or two, and what must be new. His skipper asked for new running rigging all over, but he thinks that there can't be any occasion for its all being renewed. I don't expect I shall be in till dinner-time, so anyone that wants to see me must come again in the afternoon."

Ten minutes later, Cyril went out, on his way to his work. Captain Dave was standing a few doors away.

"Before I go on board the brig, lad, I am going up to the Chief Constable's to arrange about this business. I want to get four men of the watch. Of course, it may be some nights before this is tried again, so I shall have the men stowed away in the kitchen. Then we must keep watch, and as soon as we see those young villains on the roof, we will let the men out at the front door. Two will post themselves this end of the lane, and two go round into Leadenhall Street and station themselves at the other end. When the boys go out after supper we will unlock the door at the bottom of the stairs into the shop, and the door into the warehouse. Then we will steal down into the shop and listen there until we hear them open the door into the yard, and then go into the warehouse and be ready to make a rush out as soon as they get the gate open. John will have his boatswain's whistle ready, and will give the signal. That will bring the watch up, so they will be caught in a trap."

"I should think that would be a very good plan, Captain Dave, though I wish that it could have been done without Tom Frost being taken. He is a timid sort of boy, and I have no doubt that he has been entirely under the thumb of Robert."

"Well, if he has he will get off lightly," the Captain said. "Even if a boy is a timid boy, he knows what will be the consequences if he is caught robbing his master. Cowardice is no excuse for crime, lad. The boys have always been well treated, and though I dare say Ashford is the worst of the two, if the other had been honest he would not have seen him robbing me without letting me know."

For six nights watch was kept without success. Every evening, when the family and apprentices had retired to rest, John Wilkes went quietly downstairs and admitted the four constables, letting them out in the morning before anyone was astir. Mrs. Dowsett had been taken into her husband's confidence so far as to know that he had discovered he had been robbed, and was keeping a watch for the thieves. She was not told that the apprentices were concerned in the matter, for Captain Dave felt sure that, however much she might try to conceal it, Robert Ashford would perceive, by her looks, that something was wrong.

Nellie was told a day or two later, for, although ignorant of her father's nightly watchings, she was conscious from his manner, and that of her mother, that something was amiss, and was so persistent in her inquiries, that the Captain consented to her mother telling her that he had a suspicion he was being robbed, and warning her that it was essential that the subject must not be in any way alluded to.

"Your father is worrying over it a good deal, Nellie, and it is better that he should not perceive that you are aware of it. Just let things go on as they were."

"Is the loss serious, mother?"

"Yes; he thinks that a good deal of money has gone. I don't think he minds that so much as the fact that, so far, he doesn't know who the people most concerned in it may be. He has some sort of suspicion in one quarter, but has no clue whatever to the men most to blame."

"Does Cyril know anything about it?" Nellie asked suddenly.

"Yes, he knows, my dear; indeed, it was owing to his cleverness that your father first came to have suspicions."

"Oh! that explains it," Nellie said. "He had been talking to father, and I asked what it was about and he would not tell me, and I have been very angry with him ever since."

"I have noticed that you have been behaving very foolishly," Mrs. Dowsett said quietly, "and that for the last week you have been taking Robert with you as an escort when you went out of an evening. I suppose you did that to annoy Cyril, but I don't think that he minded much."

"I don't think he did, mother," Nellie agreed, with a laugh which betrayed a certain amount of irritation. "I saw that he smiled, two or three evenings back, when I told Robert at supper that I wanted him to go out with me, and I was rarely angry, I can tell you."

Cyril had indeed troubled himself in no way about Nellie's coolness; but when she had so pointedly asked Robert to go with her, he had been amused at the thought of how greatly she would be mortified, when Robert was haled up to the Guildhall for robbing her father, at the thought that he had been accompanying her as an escort.

"I rather hope this will be our last watch, Captain Dave," he said, on the seventh evening.

"Why do you hope so specially to-night, lad?"

"Of course I have been hoping so every night. But I think it is likely that the men who take the goods come regularly once a week; for in that case there would be no occasion for them to meet at other times to arrange on what night they should be in the lane."

"Yes, that is like enough, Cyril; and the hour will probably be the same, too. John and I will share your watch to-night, so as to be ready to get the men off without loss of time."

Cyril had always taken the first watch, which was from half-past nine till twelve. The Captain and Wilkes had taken the other watches by turns.

As before, just as the bell finished striking eleven, the three watchers again heard through the slightly open casement the scraping noise on the left. It had been agreed that they should not move, lest the sound should be heard outside. Each grasped the stout cudgel he held in his hand, and gazed at the roof of the warehouse, which could now be plainly seen, for the moon was half full and the sky was clear. As before, the two figures went along, and this time they could clearly recognise them. They were both sitting astride of the ridge tiles, and moved themselves along by means of their hands. They waited until they saw one after the other disappear at the end of the roof, and then John Wilkes quietly stole downstairs. The four constables had been warned to be specially wakeful.

"They are at it again to-night," John said to them, as he entered. "Now, do you two who go round into Leadenhall Street start at once, but don't take your post at the end of the lane for another five or six minutes. The thieves outside may not have come up at present. As you go out, leave the door ajar; in five minutes you others should stand ready. Don't go to the corner, but wait in the doorway below until you hear the whistle. They will be only fifteen or twenty yards up the lane, and would see you if you took up your station at the corner; but the moment you hear the whistle, rush out and have at them. We shall be there before you will."

John went down with the last two men, entered the shop, and stood there waiting until he should be joined by his master. The latter and Cyril remained at the window until they saw the door of the warehouse open, and then hurried downstairs. Both were in their stockinged feet, so that their movements should be noiseless.

"Come on, John; they are in the yard," the Captain whispered; and they entered the warehouse and went noiselessly on, until they stood at the door. The process of unbarring the gate was nearly accomplished. As it swung open, John Wilkes put his whistle to his lips and blew a loud, shrill call, and the three rushed forward. There was a shout of alarm, a fierce imprecation, and three of the four figures at the gate sprang at them. Scarce a blow had been struck when the two constables ran up and joined in the fray. Two men fought stoutly, but were soon overpowered. Robert Ashford, knife in hand, had attacked John Wilkes with fury, and would have stabbed him, as his attention was engaged upon one of the men outside, had not Cyril brought his cudgel down sharply on his knuckles, when, with a yell of pain, he dropped the knife and fled up the lane. He had gone but a short distance, however, when he fell into the hands of the two constables, who were running towards him. One of them promptly knocked him down with his cudgel, and then proceeded to bind his hands behind him, while the other ran on to join in the fray. It was over before he got there, and his comrades were engaged in binding the two robbers. Tom Frost had taken no part in the fight. He stood looking on, paralysed with terror, and when the two men were overpowered he fell on his knees beseeching his master to have mercy on him.

"It is too late, Tom," the Captain said. "You have been robbing me for months, and now you have been caught in the act you will have to take your share in the punishment. You are a prisoner

of the constables here, and not of mine, and even if I were willing to let you go, they would have their say in the matter. Still, if you make a clean breast of what you know about it, I will do all I can to get you off lightly; and seeing that you are but a boy, and have been, perhaps, led into this, they will not be disposed to be hard on you. Pick up that lantern and bring it here, John; let us see what plunder, they were making off with."

There was no rope this time, but a bag containing some fifty pounds' weight of brass and copper fittings. One of the constables took possession of this.

"You had better come along with us to the Bridewell, Master Dowsett, to sign the charge sheet, though I don't know whether it is altogether needful, seeing that we have caught them in the act; and you will all three have to be at the Court to-morrow at ten o'clock."

"I will go with you," the Captain said; "but I will first slip in and put my shoes on; I brought them down in my hand and shall be ready in a minute. You may as well lock up this gate again, John. I will go out through the front door and join them in the lane." As he went into the house, John Wilkes closed the gate and put up the bar, then took up the lantern and said to Cyril,—

"Well, Master Cyril, this has been a good night's work, and mighty thankful I am that we have caught the pirates. It was a good day for us all when you came to the Captain, or they might have gone on robbing him till the time came that there was nothing more to rob; and I should never have held up my head again, for though the Captain would never believe that I had had a hand in bringing him to ruin, other people would not have thought so, and I might never have got a chance of proving my innocence. Now we will just go to the end of the yard and see if they did manage to get into the warehouse by means of that crane, as you thought they did."

They found that the crane had been swung out just far enough to afford a foot-hold to those lowering themselves on to it from the roof. The door of the loft stood open.

"Just as you said. You could not have been righter, not if you had seen them at it. And now I reckon we may as well lock up the place again, and turn in. The Captain has got the key of the front door, and we will leave the lantern burning at the bottom of the stairs."

Cyril got up as soon as he heard a movement in the house, and went down to the shop, which had been already opened by John Wilkes.

"It seems quiet here, without the apprentices, John. Is there any way in which I can help?"

"No, thank you, sir. We shan't be moving the goods about till after breakfast, and then, no doubt, the Captain will get an extra man in to help me. I reckon he will have to get a neighbour in to give an eye to the place while we are all away at the Court."

"I see there is the rope still hanging from their window," Cyril said, as he went out into the yard.

"I thought it best to leave it there," John Wilkes replied, "and I ain't been up into the loft either. It is best to leave matters just as they were. Like enough, they will send an officer down from the Court to look at them."

When the family assembled at breakfast, Mrs. Dowsett was looking very grave. The Captain, on the other hand, was in capital spirits. Nellie, as usual, was somewhat late.

"Where is everybody?" she asked in surprise, seeing that Cyril alone was in his place with her father and mother.

"John Wilkes is downstairs, looking after the shop, and will come up and have his breakfast when we have done," her father replied.

"Are both the apprentices out, then?" she asked.

"The apprentices are in limbo," the Captain said grimly.

"In limbo, father! What does that mean?"

"It means that they are in gaol, my dear."

Nellie put down the knife and fork that she had just taken up.

"Are you joking, father?"

"Very far from it, my dear; it is no joke to any of us—certainly not to me, and not to Robert Ashford, or Tom Frost. They have been robbing me for the last year, and, for aught I know, before that. If it had not been for Master Cyril it would not have been very long before I should have had to put my shutters up."

"But how could they rob you, father?"

"By stealing my goods, and selling them, Nellie. The way they did it was to lower themselves by a rope from their window on to the roof of the warehouse, and to get down at the other end on to the crane, and then into the loft. Then they went down and took what they had a fancy to, undid the door, and went into the yard, and then handed over their booty to the fellows waiting at the gate for it. Last night we caught them at it, after having been on the watch for ten days."

"That is what I heard last night, then," she said. "I was woke by a loud whistle, and then I heard a sound of quarrelling and fighting in the lane. I thought it was some roysterers going home late. Oh, father, it is dreadful to think of! And what will they do to them?"

"It is a hanging matter," the Captain said; "it is not only theft, but mutiny. No doubt the judges will take a lenient view of Tom Frost's case, both on the ground of his youth, and because, no doubt, he was influenced by Ashford; but I would not give much for Robert's chances. No doubt it will be a blow to you, Nellie, for you seem to have taken to him mightily of late."

Nellie was about to give an emphatic contradiction, but as she remembered how pointedly she had asked for his escort during the last few days, she flushed up, and was silent.

"It is terrible to think of," she said, after a pause. "I suppose this is what you and Cyril were consulting about, father. I have to ask your pardon, Master Cyril, for my rudeness to you; but of course I did not think it was anything of consequence, or that you could not have told me if you had wished to do so."

"You need not beg my pardon, Mistress Nellie. No doubt you thought it churlish on my part to refuse to gratify your curiosity, and I am not surprised that you took offence. I knew that when you learned how important it was to keep silence over the matter, that you would acquit me of the intention of making a mystery about nothing."

"I suppose you knew, mother?" Nellie asked.

"I knew that your father believed that he was being robbed, Nellie, and that he was keeping watch for some hours every night, but I did not know that he suspected the apprentices. I am glad that we did not, for assuredly we should have found it very hard to school our faces so that they should not guess that aught was wrong."

"That was why we said nothing about it, Nellie. It has been as much as I have been able to do to sit at table, and talk in the shop as usual, with boys I knew were robbing me; and I know honest John Wilkes must have felt it still more. But till a week ago we would not believe that they had a hand in the matter. It is seven nights since Cyril caught them creeping along the roof, and called me to the window in John Wilkes's room, whence he was watching the yard, not thinking the enemy was in the house."

"And how did you come to suspect that robbery was going on, Cyril?"

"Simply because, on making up the books, I found there was a great deficiency in the stores."

"That is what he was doing when he was sitting up at night, after you were in bed, Miss Nellie," her father said. "You may thank your stars that he took a berth in this ship, for the scoundrels would have foundered her to a certainty, if he had not done so. I tell you, child, he has saved this craft from going to the bottom. I have not said much to him about it, but he knows that I don't feel it any the less."

"And who were the other men who were taken, father?"

"That I can't tell you, Nellie. I went to the Bridewell with them, and as soon as I saw them safely lodged there I came home. They will be had up before the Lord Mayor this morning, and then I dare say I shall know all about them. Now I must go and take my watch below, and let John Wilkes come off duty."

"Why, John, what is the matter?" Mrs. Dowsett said, when the foreman entered.

"Nothing worth speaking of, Mistress. I got a clip over the eye from one of the pirates we were capturing. The thing mattered nothing, one way or the other, but it might have cost me my life, because, for a moment, it pretty well dazed me. That young villain, Bob, was just coming at me with his knife, and I reckon it would have gone hard with me if Master Cyril here hadn't, just in the nick of time, brought his stick down on Robert's knuckles, and that so sharply that the fellow dropped his knife with a yell, and took to his heels, only to fall into the hands of two of the watch coming from the other end of the lane. You did me a good turn, lad, and if ever I get the chance of ranging up alongside of you in a fray, you may trust me to return it."

He held out his hand to Cyril, and gave a warm grip to the hand the latter laid in it.

"It is a rum start, Mistress," John went on, as he sat down to his meal, "that two old hands like the Captain and I were sailing on, not dreaming of hidden rocks or sand-banks, when this lad, who I used to look upon as a young cockerel who was rather above his position, should come forward and have saved us all from shipwreck."

"It is indeed, John," his mistress said earnestly, "and I thank God indeed that He put the thought into the minds of Captain Dave and myself to ask him to take up his abode with us. It seemed to us then that we were doing a little kindness that would cost us nothing, whereas it has turned out the saving of us."

"Dear, dear!" Nellie, who had been sitting with a frown on her pretty face, said pettishly. "What a talk there will be about it all, and how Jane Greenwood and Martha Stebbings and the rest of them will laugh at me! They used to say they wondered how I could go about with such an ugly wretch behind me, and of course I spoke up for him and said that he was an honest knave and faithful; and now it turns out that he is a villain and a robber. I shall never hear the last of him."

"You will get over that, Nellie," her mother said severely. "It would be much better if, instead of thinking of such trifles, you would consider how sad a thing it is that two lads should lose their character, and perhaps their lives, simply for their greed of other people's goods. I could cry when I think of it. I know that Robert Ashford has neither father nor mother to grieve about him, for my husband's father took him out of sheer charity; but Tom's parents are living, and it will be heart-breaking indeed to them when they hear of their son's misdoings."

"I trust that Captain Dave will get him off," Cyril said. "As he is so young he may turn King's evidence, and I feel sure that he did not go willingly into the affair. I have noticed many times that he had a frightened look, as if he had something on his mind. I believe that he acted under fear of the other."

As soon as John Wilkes had finished his breakfast he went with Captain Dave and Cyril to the Magistrates' Court at the Guildhall. Some other cases were first heard, and then the apprentices, with the two men who had been captured in the lane, were brought in and placed in the dock. The men bore marks that showed they had been engaged in a severe struggle, and that the watch had used their staves with effect. One was an elderly man with shaggy grey eyebrows; the other was a very powerfully built fellow, who seemed, from his attire, to follow the profession of a sailor. Tom Frost was sobbing bitterly. One of Robert Ashford's hands was bandaged up. As he was placed in the dock he cast furtive glances round with his shifty eyes, and as they fell upon Cyril an expression of deadly hate came over his face. The men of the watch who had captured them first gave their evidence as to finding them in the act of robbery, and testified to the desperate resistance they had offered to capture. Captain Dave then entered the witness-box, and swore first to the goods that were found on them being his property, and then related how, it having come to his knowledge that he was being robbed, he had set a watch, and had, eight days previously, seen his two apprentices getting along the roof, and how they had come out from the warehouse door, had opened the outer gate, and had handed over some goods they had brought out to persons unknown waiting to receive them.

"Why did you not stop them in their commission of the theft?" the Alderman in the Chair asked.

"Because, sir, had I done so, the men I considered to be the chief criminals, and who had doubtless tempted my apprentices to rob me, would then have made off. Therefore, I thought it better to wait until I could lay hands on them also, and so got four men of the watch to remain in the house at night."

Then he went on to relate how, after watching seven nights, he had again seen the apprentices make their way along the roof, and how they and the receivers of their booty were taken by the watch, aided by himself, his foreman, and Master Cyril Shenstone, who was dwelling in his house.

After John Wilkes had given his evidence, Cyril went into the box and related how, being engaged by Captain David Dowsett to make up his books, he found, upon stock being taken, that there was a deficiency to the amount of many hundreds of pounds in certain stores, notably such as were valuable without being bulky.

"Is anything known as to the prisoners?" the magistrate asked the officer of the city watch in charge of the case.

"Nothing is known of the two boys, your honour; but the men are well known. The elder, who gave the name of Peter Johnson, is one Joseph Marner; he keeps a marine shop close to the Tower. For a long time he has been suspected of being a receiver of stolen goods, but we have never been able to lay finger on him before. The other man has, for the last year, acted as his assistant in the shop; he answers closely to the description of a man, Ephraim Fowler, who has long been wanted. This man was a seaman in a brig trading to Yarmouth. After an altercation with the captain he stabbed him, and then slew the mate who was coming to his assistance; then with threats he compelled the other two men on board to let him take the boat. When they were off Brightlingsea he rowed away, and has not been heard of since. If you will remand them, before he comes up again I hope to find the men who were on board, and see if they identify him. We are in possession of Joseph Marner's shop, and have found large quantities of goods that we have reason to believe are the proceeds of these and other robberies."

After the prisoners had left the dock, Captain Dave went up to the officer.

"I believe," he said, "that the boy has not voluntarily taken part in these robberies, but has been led away, or perhaps obliged by threats to take part in them; he may be able to give you some assistance, for maybe these men are not the only persons to whom the stolen goods have been sold, and he may be able to put you on the track of other receivers."

"The matter is out of my hands now," the officer said, "but I will represent what you say in the proper quarter; and now you had better come round with me; you may be able to pick out some of your property. We only made a seizure of the place an hour ago. I had all the men who came in on duty this morning to take a look at the prisoners. Fortunately two or three of them recognised Marner, and you may guess we lost no time in getting a search warrant and going down to his place. It is the most important capture we have made for some time, and may lead to the discovery of other robberies that have been puzzling us for months past. There is a gang known as the Black Gang, but we have never been able to lay hands on any of their leaders, and such fellows as have been captured have refused to say a word, and have denied all knowledge of it. There have been a number of robberies of a mysterious kind, none of which have we been able to trace, and they have been put down to the same gang. The Chief Constable is waiting for me there, and we shall make a thorough search of the premises, and it is like enough we shall come across some clue of importance. At any rate, if we can find some of the articles stolen in the robberies I am speaking of, it will be a strong proof that Marner is one of the chiefs of the gang, and that may lead to further discoveries."

"You had better come with us, John," Captain Dave said. "You know our goods better than I do myself. Will you come, Cyril?"

"I should be of no use in identifying the goods, sir, and I am due in half an hour at one of my shops."

The search was an exhaustive one. There was no appearance of an underground cellar, but on some of the boards of the shop being taken up, it was found that there was a large one extending over the whole house. This contained an immense variety of goods. In one corner was a pile of copper bolts that Captain Dave and John were able to claim at once, as they bore the brand of the maker from whom they obtained their stock. There were boxes of copper and brass ship and house fittings, and a very large quantity of rope, principally of the sizes in which the stock had been found deficient; but to these Captain Dave was unable to swear. In addition to these articles the cellar contained a number of chests, all of which were found to be filled with miscellaneous articles of wearing apparel—rolls of silk, velvet, cloth, and other materials—curtains, watches, clocks, ornaments of all kinds, and a considerable amount of plate. As among these were many articles which answered to the descriptions given of goods that had been stolen from country houses, the whole were impounded by the Chief Constable, and carried away in carts. The upper part of the house was carefully searched, the walls tapped, wainscoting pulled down, and the floors carefully examined. Several hiding-places were found, but nothing of any importance discovered in them.

"I should advise you," the Chief Constable said to Captain Dave, "to put in a claim for every article corresponding with those you have lost. Of course, if anyone else comes forward and also puts in a claim, the matter will have to be gone into, and if neither of you can absolutely swear to the things, I suppose you will have to settle it somehow between you. If no one else claims them, you will get them all without question, for you can swear that, to the best of your knowledge and belief, they are yours, and bring samples of your own goods to show that they exactly correspond with them. I have no doubt that a good deal of the readily saleable stuff, such as ropes, brass sheaves for blocks, and things of that sort, will have been sold, but as it is clear that there is a good deal of your stuff in the stock found below, I hope your loss will not be very great. There is no doubt it has been a splendid find for us. It is likely enough that we shall discover among those boxes goods that have been obtained from a score of robberies in London, and likely enough in the country. We have arrested three men we found in the place, and two women, and may get from some of them information that will enable us to lay hands on some of the others concerned in these robberies."

CHAPTER V

KIDNAPPED

That afternoon Captain Dave went down to the Bridewell, and had an interview with Tom Frost, in the presence of the Master of the prison.

"Well, Tom, I never expected to have to come to see you in a place like this."

"I am glad I am here, master," the boy said earnestly, with tears in his eyes. "I don't mind if they hang me; I would rather anything than go on as I have been doing. I knew it must come, and whenever I heard anyone walk into the shop I made sure it was a constable. I am ready to tell everything, master; I know I deserve whatever I shall get, but that won't hurt me half as much as it has done, having to go on living in the house with you, and knowing I was helping to rob you all along."

"Anything that you say must be taken down," the officer said; "and I can't promise that it will make any difference in your sentence."

"I do not care anything about that; I am going to tell the truth."

"Very well, then, I will take down anything you say. But wait a minute."

He went to the door of the room and called.

"Is the Chief Constable in?" he asked a man who came up. "If he is, ask him to step here."

A minute later the Chief Constable came in.

"This prisoner wishes to make a confession, Master Holmes. I thought it best that you should be here. You can hear what he says then, and it may help you in your inquiry. Besides, you may think of questions on points he may not mention; he understands that he is speaking entirely of his own free will, and that I have given him no promise whatever that his so doing will alter his sentence, although no doubt it will be taken into consideration."

"Quite so," the constable said. "This is not a case where one prisoner would be ordinarily permitted to turn King's evidence against the others, because, as they were caught in the act, no such evidence is necessary. We know all about how the thing was done, and who did it."

"I want to tell how I first came to rob my master," the boy said. "I never thought of robbing him. When I came up to London, my father said to me, 'Whatever you do, Tom, be honest. They say there are rogues up in London; don't you have anything to do with them.' One evening, about a year ago I went out with Robert, and we went to a shop near the wall at Aldgate. I had never been there before, but Robert knew the master, who was the old man that was taken in the lane. Robert said the man was a relation of his father's, and had been kind to him. We sat down and talked for a time, and then Robert, who was sitting close to me, moved for something, and put his hand against my pocket.

"'Hullo!' he said; 'what have you got there?'

"'Nothing,' I said.

"'Oh, haven't you?' and he put his hand in my pocket, and brought out ten guineas. 'Hullo!' he said; 'where did you get these? You told me yesterday you had not got a groat. Why, you young villain, you must have been robbing the till!'

"I was so frightened that I could not say anything, except that I did not know how they came there and I could swear that I had not touched the till. I was too frightened to think then, but I have since thought that the guineas were never in my pocket at all, but were in Robert's hand.

"'That won't do, boy,' the man said. 'It is clear that you are a thief. I saw Robert take them from your pocket, and, as an honest man, it is my duty to take you to your master and tell him what sort of an apprentice he has. You are young, and you will get off with a whipping at the pillory, and that will teach you that honesty is the best policy.'

"So he got his hat and put it on, and took me by the collar as if to haul me out into the street. I went down on my knees to beg for mercy, and at last he said that he would keep the matter quiet if I would swear to do everything that Robert told me; and I was so frightened that I swore to do so.

"For a bit there wasn't any stealing, but Robert used to take me out over the roof, and we used to go out together and go to places where there were two or three men, and they gave us wine. Then Robert proposed that we should have a look through the warehouse. I did not know what he meant, but as we went through he filled his pockets with things and told me to take some too. I said I would not. Then he threatened to raise the alarm, and said that when Captain Dave came down he should say he heard me get up to come down by the rope on to the warehouse, and that he had followed me to see what I was doing, and had found me in the act of taking goods, and that, as he had before caught me with money stolen from the till, as a friend of his could testify, he felt that it was his duty to summon you at once. I know I ought to have refused, and to have let him call you down, but I was too frightened. At last I agreed to do what he told me, and ever since then we have been robbing you."

"What have you done with the money you got for the things?" the constable asked.

"I had a groat sometimes," the boy said, "but that is all. Robert said first that I should have a share, but I said I would have nothing to do with it. I did as he ordered me because I could not help it. Though I have taken a groat or two sometimes, that is all I have had."

"Do you know anything about how much Robert had?"

"No, sir; I never saw him paid any money. I supposed that he had some because he has said sometimes he should set up a shop for himself, down at some seaport town, when he was out of his apprenticeship; but I have never seen him with any money beyond a little silver. I don't know what he used to do when we had given the things to the men that met us in the lane. I used always to come straight back to bed, but generally he went out with them. I used to fasten the gate after him, and he got back over the wall by a rope. Most times he didn't come in till a little before daybreak."

"Were they always the same men that met you in the lane?"

"No, sir. The master of the shop was very seldom there. The big man has come for the last three or four months, and there were two other men. They used to be waiting for us together until the big man came, but since then one or other of them came with him, except when the master of the shop was there himself."

"Describe them to me."

The boy described them as well as he could.

"Could you swear to them if you saw them?"

"I think so. Of course, sometimes it was moonlight, and I could see their faces well; and besides, the light of the lantern often fell upon their faces."

The constable nodded.

"The descriptions answer exactly," he said to Captain Dave, "to the two men we found in the shop. The place was evidently the headquarters of a gang of thieves."

"Please, sir," the boy said, "would you have me shut up in another place? I am afraid of being with the others. They have sworn they will kill me if I say a word, and when I get back they will ask me who I have seen and what I have said."

Captain Dave took the other two men aside.

"Could you not let the boy come home with me?" he said. "I believe his story is a true one. He has been terrified into helping that rascal, Robert Ashford. Of course he himself was of no good to them, but they were obliged to force him into it, as otherwise he would have found out Robert's absences and might have reported them to me. I will give what bail you like, and will undertake to produce him whenever he is required."

"I could not do that myself," the constable said, "but I will go round to the Court now with the boy's confession, and I have no doubt the Alderman will let him go. But let me give you a word of advice: don't let him stir out of the house after dark. We have no doubt that there is a big gang

concerned in this robbery, and the others of which we found the booty at the receiver's. They would not know how much this boy could tell about them, but if he went back to you they would guess that he had peached. If he went out after dark, the chances would be against his ever coming back again. No, now I think of it, I am sure you had better let him stay where he is. The Master will put him apart from the others, and make him comfortable. You see, at present we have no clue as to the men concerned in the robberies. You may be sure that they are watching every move on our part, and if they knew that this boy was out, they might take the alarm and make off."

"Well, if you think so, I will leave him here."

"I am sure that it would be the best plan."

"You will make him comfortable, Master Holroyd?"

"Yes; you need not worry about him, Captain Dowsett."

They then turned to the boy.

"You will be moved away from the others, Tom," Captain Dave said, "and Mr. Holroyd has promised to make you comfortable."

"Oh, Captain Dave," the boy burst out, "will you forgive me? I don't mind being punished, but if you knew how awfully miserable I have been all this time, knowing that I was robbing you while you were so kind to me, I think you would forgive me."

"I forgive you, Tom," Captain Dave said, putting his hand on the boy's shoulder. "I hope that this will be a lesson to you, all your life. You see all this has come upon you because you were a coward. If you had been a brave lad you would have said, 'Take me to my master.' You might have been sure that I would have heard your story as well as theirs, and I don't think I should have decided against you under the circumstances. It was only your word against Robert's; and his taking you to this man's, and finding the money in your pocket in so unlikely a way, would certainly have caused me to have suspicions. There is nothing so bad as cowardice; it is the father of all faults. A coward is certain to be a liar, for he will not hesitate to tell any falsehood to shelter him from the consequences of a fault. In your case, you see, cowardice has made you a thief; and in some cases it might drive a man to commit a murder. However, lad, I forgive you freely. You have been weak, and your weakness has made you a criminal; but it has been against your own will. When all this is over, I will see what can be done for you. You may live to be an honest man and a good citizen yet."

Two days later Cyril was returning home late in the evening after being engaged longer than usual in making up a number of accounts for one of his customers. He had come through Leadenhall Street, and had entered the lane where the capture of the thieves had been made, when he heard a footstep behind him. He turned half round to see who was following him, when he received a tremendous blow on the head which struck him senseless to the ground.

After a time he was dimly conscious that he was being carried along. He was unable to move; there was something in his mouth that prevented him from calling out, and his head was muffled in a cloak. He felt too weak and confused to struggle. A minute later he heard a voice, that sounded below him, say,—

"Have you got him?"

"I have got him all right," was the answer of the man who was carrying him.

Then he felt that he was being carried down some stairs.

Someone took him, and he was thrown roughly down; then there was a slight rattling noise, followed by a regular sound. He wondered vaguely what it was, but as his senses came back it flashed upon him; it was the sound of oars; he was in a boat. It was some time before he could think why he should be in a boat. He had doubtless been carried off by some of the friends of the prisoners', partly, perhaps, to prevent his giving evidence against them, partly from revenge for the part he had played in the discovery of the crime.

In a few minutes the sound of oars ceased, and there was a bump as the boat struck against something hard. Then he was lifted up, and someone took hold of him from above. He was carried

a few steps and roughly thrust in somewhere. There was a sound of something heavy being thrown down above him, and then for a long time he knew nothing more.

When he became conscious again, he was able, as he lay there, to come to a distinct conclusion as to where he was. He had been kidnapped, carried off, taken out in a boat to some craft anchored in the river, and was now in the hold. He felt almost suffocated. The wrap round his head prevented his breathing freely, the gag in his mouth pressed on his tongue, and gave him severe pain, while his head ached acutely from the effects of the blow.

The first thing to do was, if possible, to free his hands, so as to relieve himself from the gag and muffling. An effort or two soon showed him that he was but loosely bound. Doubtless the man who had attacked him had not wasted much time in securing his arms, believing that the blow would be sufficient to keep him quiet until he was safe on board ship. It was, therefore, without much difficulty that he managed to free one of his hands, and it was then an easy task to get rid of the rope altogether. The cloak was pulled from his face, and, feeling for his knife, he cut the lashings of the gag and removed it from his mouth. He lay quiet for a few minutes, panting from his exhaustion. Putting up his hand he felt a beam about a foot above his body. He was, then, in a hold already stored with cargo. The next thing was to shift his position among the barrels and bales upon which he was lying, until he found a comparatively level spot. He was in too great pain to think of sleep; his head throbbed fiercely, and he suffered from intense thirst.

From time to time heavy footsteps passed overhead. Presently he heard a sudden rattling of blocks, and the flapping of a sail. Then he noticed that there was a slight change in the level of his position, and knew that the craft was under way on her voyage down the river.

It seemed an immense time to him before he saw a faint gleam of light, and edging himself along, found himself again under the hatchway, through a crack in which the light was shining. It was some hours before the hatch was lifted off, and he saw two men looking down.

"Water!" he said. "I am dying of thirst."

"Bring a pannikin of water," one of the men said, "but first give us a hand, and we will have him on deck."

Stooping down, they took Cyril by the shoulders and hoisted him out.

"He is a decent-looking young chap," the speaker went on. "I would have seen to him before, if I had known him to be so bad. Those fellows didn't tell us they had hurt him. Here is the water, young fellow. Can you sit up to drink it?"

Cyril sat up and drank off the contents of the pannikin.

"Why, the back of your head is all covered with blood!" the man who had before spoken said. "You must have had an ugly knock?"

"I don't care so much for that," Cyril replied. "It's the gag that hurt me. My tongue is so much swollen I can hardly speak."

"Well, you can stay here on deck if you will give me your promise not to hail any craft we may pass. If you won't do that I must put you down under hatches again."

"I will promise that willingly," Cyril said; "the more so that I can scarce speak above a whisper."

"Mind, if you as much as wave a hand, or do anything to bring an eye on us, down you go into the hold again, and when you come up next time it will be to go overboard. Now just put your head over the rail, and I will pour a few buckets of water over it. I agreed to get you out of the way, but I have got no grudge against you, and don't want to do you harm."

Getting a bucket with a rope tied to the handle, he dipped it into the river, and poured half-a-dozen pailfuls over Cyril's head. The lad felt greatly refreshed, and, sitting down on the deck, was able to look round. The craft was a coaster of about twenty tons burden. There were three men on deck besides the man who had spoken to him, and who was evidently the skipper. Besides these a boy occasionally put up his head from a hatchway forward. There was a pile of barrels and empty baskets amidship, and the men presently began to wash down the decks and to tidy up the ropes and

gear lying about. The shore on both sides was flat, and Cyril was surprised at the width of the river. Behind them was a small town, standing on higher ground.

"What place is that?" he asked a sailor who passed near him.

"That is Gravesend."

A few minutes afterwards the boy again put his head out of the hatchway and shouted,—

"Breakfast!"

"Can you eat anything, youngster?" the skipper asked Cyril.

"No, thank you, my head aches too much; and my mouth is so sore I am sure I could not get anything down."

"Well, you had best lie down, then, with your head on that coil of rope; I allow you did not sleep much last night."

In a few minutes Cyril was sound asleep, and when he awoke the sun was setting.

"You have had a good bout of it, lad," the skipper said, as he raised himself on his elbow and looked round. "How are you feeling now?"

"A great deal better," Cyril said, as he rose to his feet.

"Supper will be ready in a few minutes, and if you can manage to get a bit down it will do you good."

"I will try, anyhow," Cyril said. "I think that I feel hungry."

The land was now but a faint line on either hand. A gentle breeze was blowing from the southwest, and the craft was running along over the smooth water at the rate of three or four miles an hour. Cyril wondered where he was being taken to, and what was going to be done with him, but determined to ask no questions. The skipper was evidently a kind-hearted man, although he might be engaged in lawless business, but it was as well to wait until he chose to open the subject.

As soon as the boy hailed, the captain led the way to the hatchway. They descended a short ladder into the fo'castle, which was low, but roomy. Supper consisted of boiled skate—a fish Cyril had never tasted before—oaten bread, and beer. His mouth was still sore, but he managed to make a hearty meal of fish, though he could not manage the hard bread. One of the men was engaged at the helm, but the other two shared the meal, all being seated on lockers that ran round the cabin. The fish were placed on an earthenware dish, each man cutting off slices with his jack-knife, and using his bread as a platter. Little was said while the meal went on; but when they went on deck again, the skipper, having put another man at the tiller, while the man released went forward to get his supper, said,—

"Well, I think you are in luck, lad."

Cyril opened his eyes in surprise.

"You don't think so?" the man went on. "I don't mean that you are in luck in being knocked about and carried off, but that you are not floating down the river at present instead of walking the deck here. I can only suppose that they thought your body might be picked up, and that it would go all the harder with the prisoners, if it were proved that you had been put out of the way. You don't look like an informer either!"

"I am not an informer," Cyril said indignantly. "I found that my employer was being robbed, and I aided him to catch the thieves. I don't call that informing. That is when a man betrays others engaged in the same work as himself."

"Well, well, it makes no difference to me," the skipper said. "I was engaged by a man, with whom I do business sometimes, to take a fellow who had been troublesome out of the way, and to see that he did not come back again for some time. I bargained that there was to be no foul play; I don't hold with things of that sort. As to carrying down a bale of goods sometimes, or taking a few kegs of spirits from a French lugger, I see no harm in it; but when it comes to cutting throats, I wash my hands of it. I am sorry now I brought you off, though maybe if I had refused they would have put a knife into you, and chucked you into the river. However, now that I have got you I must go through

with it. I ain't a man to go back from my word, and what I says I always sticks to. Still, I am sorry I had anything to do with the business. You look to me a decent young gentleman, though your looks and your clothes have not been improved by what you have gone through. Well, at any rate, I promise you that no harm shall come to you as long as you are in my hands."

"And how long is that likely to be, captain?"

"Ah! that is more than I can tell you. I don't want to do you harm, lad, and more than that, I will prevent other people from doing you harm as long as you are on board this craft. But more than that I can't say. It is likely enough I shall have trouble in keeping that promise, and I can't go a step farther. There is many a man who would have chucked you overboard, and so have got rid of the trouble altogether, and of the risk of its being afterwards proved that he had a hand in getting you out of the way."

"I feel that, captain," Cyril said, "and I thank you heartily for your kind treatment of me. I promise you that if at any time I am set ashore and find my way back to London, I will say no word which can get you into trouble."

"There is Tom coming upon deck. You had better turn in. You have had a good sleep, but I have no doubt you can do with some more, and a night's rest will set you up. You take the left-hand locker. The boy sleeps on the right hand, and we have bunks overhead."

Cyril was soon soundly asleep, and did not wake when the others turned in. He was alone in the cabin when he opened his eyes, but the sun was shining brightly through the open hatchway. He sprang up and went on deck. The craft was at anchor. No land could be seen to the south, but to the north a low shore stretched away three or four miles distant. There was scarcely a breath of wind.

"Well, you have had a good sleep, lad," the captain said. "You had best dip that bucket overboard and have a wash; you will feel better after it. Now, boy, slip down and get your fire going; we shall be ready for breakfast as soon as it is ready for us."

Cyril soused his head with the cold water, and felt, as the captain had said, all the better for it, for the air in the little cabin was close and stuffy, and he had felt hot and feverish before his wash.

"The wind died out, you see," the captain said, "and we had to anchor when tide turned at two o'clock. There is a dark line behind us, and as soon as the wind reaches us, we will up anchor. The force of the tide is spent."

The wind, however, continued very light, and the vessel did little more than drift with the tide, and when it turned at two o'clock they had to drop anchor again close under some high land, on the top of which stood a lofty tower.

"That is a land-mark," the captain said. "There are some bad sands outside us, and that stands as a mark for vessels coming through."

Cyril had enjoyed the quiet passage much. The wound at the back of his head still smarted, and he had felt disinclined for any exertion. More than once, in spite of the good allowance of sleep he had had, he dozed off as he sat on the deck with his back against the bulwark, watching the shore as they drifted slowly past it, and wondering vaguely, how it would all end. They had been anchored but half an hour when the captain ordered the men to the windlass.

"There is a breeze coming, lads," he said; "and even if it only lasts for an hour, it will take us round the head and far enough into the bay to get into the tide running up the rivers."

The breeze, however, when it came, held steadily, and in two hours they were off Harwich; but on coming opposite the town they turned off up the Orwell, and anchored, after dark, at a small village some six miles up the river.

"If you will give me your word, lad, that you will not try to escape, and will not communicate with anyone who may come off from the shore, I will continue to treat you as a passenger; but if not, I must fasten you up in the cabin, and keep a watch over you."

"I will promise, captain. I should not know where to go if I landed. I heard you say, 'There is Harwich steeple,' when we first came in sight of it, but where that is I have no idea, nor how far we

are from London. As I have not a penny in my pocket, I should find it well-nigh impossible to make my way to town, which may, for aught I know, be a hundred miles away; for, in truth, I know but little of the geography of England, having been brought up in France, and not having been out of sight of London since I came over."

Just as he was speaking, the splash of an oar was heard close by.

"Up, men," the captain said in a low tone to those in the fo'castle. "Bring up the cutlasses. Who is that?" he called, hailing the boat.

"Merry men all," was the reply.

"All right. Come alongside. You saw our signal, then?"

"Ay, ay, we saw it; but there is an officer with a boat-load of sailors ashore from the King's ship at Harwich. He is spending the evening with the revenue captain here, and we had to wait until the two men left in charge of the boat went up to join their comrades at the tavern. What have you got for us?"

"Six boxes and a lot of dunnage, such as cables, chains, and some small anchors."

"Well, you had better wait for an hour before you take the hatches off. You will hear the gig with the sailors row past soon. The tide has begun to run down strong, and I expect the officer won't be long before he moves. As soon as he has gone we will come out again. We shall take the goods up half a mile farther. The revenue man on that beat has been paid to keep his eyes shut, and we shall get them all stored in a hut, a mile away in the woods, before daybreak. You know the landing-place; there will be water enough for us to row in there for another two hours."

The boat rowed away to the shore, which was not more than a hundred yards distant. A little later they heard a stir on the strand, then came the sound of oars, and two minutes later a boat shot past close to them, and then, bearing away, rowed down the river.

"Now, lads," the captain said, "get the hatches off. The wind is coming more offshore, which is all the better for us, but do not make more noise than you can help."

The hatches were taken off, and the men proceeded to get up a number of barrels and bales, some sail-cloth being thrown on the deck to deaden the sound. Lanterns, passed down into the hold, gave them light for their operations.

"This is the lot," one of the sailors said presently.

Six large boxes were then passed up and put apart from the others. Then followed eight or ten coils of rope, a quantity of chain, some kedge anchors, a number of blocks, five rolls of canvas, and some heavy bags that, by the sound they made when they were laid down, Cyril judged to contain metal articles of some sort. Then the other goods were lowered into the hold and the hatches replaced. The work had scarcely concluded when the boat again came alongside, this time with four men on board. Scarcely a word was spoken as the goods were transferred to the boat.

"You will be going to-morrow?" one of the men in the boat asked.

"Yes, I shall get up to Ipswich on the top of the tide—that is, if I don't stick fast in this crooked channel. My cargo is all either for Ipswich or Aldborough. Now let us turn in," as the boatmen made their way up the river. "We must be under way before daylight, or else we shall not save the tide down to-morrow evening. I am glad we have got that lot safely off. I always feel uncomfortable until we get rid of that part of the cargo. If it wasn't that it paid better than all the rest together I would not have anything to do with it."

Cyril was very glad to lie down on the locker, while the men turned into their berths overhead. He had not yet fully recovered from the effects of the blow he had received, but in spite of the aching of his head he was soon sound asleep. It seemed to him that he had scarcely closed his eyes when he was roused by the captain's voice,—

"Tumble up, lads. The light is beginning to show."

Ten minutes later they were under way. The breeze had almost died out, and after sailing for some two miles in nearly a straight course, the boat was thrown over, two men got into it, and, fastening a rope to the ketch's bow, proceeded to tow her along, the captain taking the helm.

To Cyril's surprise, they turned off almost at right angles to the course they had before been following, and made straight for the opposite shore. They approached it so closely that Cyril expected that in another moment the craft would take ground, when, at a shout from the captain, the men in the boat started off parallel with the shore, taking the craft's head round. For the next three-quarters of an hour they pursued a serpentine course, the boy standing in the chains and heaving the lead continually. At last the captain shouted,—“You can come on board now, lads. We are in the straight channel at last.” Twenty minutes later they again dropped their anchor opposite a town of considerable size.

“That is Ipswich, lad,” the captain said. “It is as nasty a place to get into as there is in England, unless you have got the wind due aft.”

The work of unloading began at once, and was carried on until after dark.

“That is the last of them,” the captain said, to Cyril's satisfaction. “We can be off now when the tide turns, and if we hadn't got clear to-night we might have lost hours, for there is no getting these people on shore to understand that the loss of a tide means the loss of a day, and that it is no harder to get up and do your work at one hour than it is at another. I shall have a clean up, now, and go ashore. I have got your promise, lad, that you won't try to escape?”

Cyril assented. Standing on the deck there, with the river bank but twenty yards away, it seemed hard that he should not be able to escape. But, as he told himself, he would not have been standing there if it had not been for that promise, but would have been lying, tightly bound, down in the hold.

Cyril and the men were asleep when the captain came aboard, the boy alone remaining up to fetch him off in the boat when he hailed.

“There is no wind, captain,” Cyril said, as the anchor was got up.

“No, lad, I am glad there is not. We can drop down with the tide and the boat towing us, but if there was a head wind we might have to stop here till it either dropped or shifted. I have been here three weeks at a spell. I got some news ashore,” he went on, as he took his place at the helm, while the three men rowed the boat ahead. “A man I sometimes bring things to told me that he heard there had been an attempt to rescue the men concerned in that robbery. I heard, before I left London, it was likely that it would be attempted.”

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