Henty George Alfred

By Conduct and Courage: A Story of the Days of Nelson

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Содержание

Henty G. A.
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PUBLISHERS' NOTE

Mr. George A. Henty, who died in November, 1902, had completed three new stories, *With the Allies to Pekin*, *Through Three Campaigns*, and *By Conduct and Courage*. Of these, *Through Three Campaigns* and *With the Allies to Pekin* were published in the autumn of 1903; the present story is therefore the last of Mr. Henty's great series of historical stories for boys.

The proofs have been revised by Mr. G. A. Henty's son, Captain C. G. Henty.

CHAPTER I
AN ORPHAN

A wandering musician was a rarity in the village of Scarcombe. In fact, such a thing had not been known in the memory of the oldest inhabitant. What could have brought him here? men and women asked themselves. There was surely nobody who could dance in the village, and the few coppers he would gain by performing on his violin would not repay him for his trouble. Moreover, Scarcombe was a bleak place, and the man looked sorely shaken with the storm of life. He seemed, indeed, almost unable to hold out much longer; his breath was short, and he had a hacking cough.

To the surprise of the people, he did not attempt to play for their amusement or to ask, in any way, for alms. He had taken a lodging in the cottage of one of the fishermen, and on fine days he would wander out with his boy, a child some five years old, and, lying down on the moorland, would play soft tunes to himself. So he lived for three weeks; and then the end came suddenly. The child ran out one morning from his room crying and saying that daddy was asleep and he could not wake him, and on the fisherman going in he saw that life had been extinct for some hours. Probably it had come suddenly to the musician himself, for there was found among his scanty effects no note or

memorandum giving a clue to the residence of the child's friends, or leaving any direction concerning him. The clergyman was, of course, called in to advise as to what should be done. He was a kind-hearted man, and volunteered to bury the dead musician without charging any fees.

After the funeral another question arose. What was to be done with the child?

He was a fine-looking, frank boy, who had grown and hardened beyond his years by the life he had led with his father. Fifteen pounds had been found in the dead man's kit. This, however, would fall to the share of the workhouse authorities if they took charge of him. A sort of informal council was held by the elder fishermen.

"It is hard on the child," one of them said. "I have no doubt his father intended to tell him where to find his friends, but his death came too suddenly. Here is fifteen pounds. Not much good, you will say; and it isn't. It might last a year, or maybe eighteen months, but at the end of that time he would be as badly off as he is now."

"Maybe John Hammond would take him," another suggested."He lost his boat and nets three weeks ago, and though he has a little money saved up, it is not enough to replace them. Perhaps he would take the child in return for the fifteen pounds. His old woman could do with him, too, and would soon make him a bit useful. John himself is a kind-hearted chap, and would treat him well, and in a few years the boy would make a useful

nipper on board his boat."

John Hammond was sent for, and the case was put to him."Well," he said, "I think I could do with him, and the brass would be mighty useful to me just now; but how does the law stand? If it got to be talked about, the parish might come down upon me for the money."

"That is so, John," one of the others said. "The best plan would be for you, and two of us, to go up to parson, and ask him how the matter stands. If he says that it is all right, you may be sure that you would be quite safe."

The clergyman, upon being consulted, said that he thought the arrangement was a very good one. The parish authorities had not been asked to find any money for the father's funeral, and had therefore no say in the matter, unless they were called upon to take the child. Should any question be asked, he would state that he himself had gone into the matter and had strongly approved of the arrangement, which he considered was to their advantage as well as the child's; for if they took charge of the boy they would have to keep him at least ten years, and then pay for apprenticing him out.

Accordingly the boy was handed over to John Hammond. With the buoyancy of childhood, William Gilmore, which was the best that could be made of what he gave as his name, soon felt at home in the fisherman's cottage. It was a pleasant change to him after having been a wanderer with his father for as far back as he could remember. The old woman was kind in her rough way,

and soon took to sending him on small errands. She set him on washing-days to watch the pot and tell her when it boiled. When not so employed she allowed him to play with other children of his own age.

Sometimes when the weather was fine, John, who had come to be very fond of the boy, never having had any children of his own, would take him out with him fishing, to the child's supreme enjoyment. After a year of this life he was put to the village school, which was much less to his liking. Here, fortunately for himself, he attracted the notice of the clergyman's daughter, a girl of sixteen. She, of course, knew his story, and was filled with a great pity for him. She was a little inclined to romance, and in her own mind invented many theories to account for his appearance in the village. Her father would laugh sometimes when she related some of these to him.

"My dear child," he said, "it is not necessary to go so far to account for the history of this poor wandering musician. You say that he looked to you like a broken-down gentleman; there are thousands of such men in the country, ne'er-do-wells, who have tired out all their friends, and have taken at last to a life that permits a certain amount of freedom and furnishes them with a living sufficient for necessary wants. It is from such men as these that the great body of tramps is largely recruited. Many such men drive hackney-coaches in our large towns; some of them enlist in the army; but wherever they are, and whatever they take up, they are sure to stay near the foot of the tree. They have no inclination

for better things. They work as hard as men who have steady employment, but they prefer their own liberty with a crust to a solid meal regularly earned. I agree with you myself that there was an appearance of having seen better times about this man; I can go so far with you as to admit that I think that at some time or other he moved in decent circles; but if we could get at the truth I have no doubt whatever that we should find that he had thrown away every opportunity, alienated every friend, and, having cut himself adrift from all ties, took to the life of a wanderer. For such a man nothing could be done; but I hope that the boy, beginning in vastly poorer circumstances than his father, will some day come to earn his living honestly in the position of life in which he is placed."

The interest, however, which Miss Warden took in the boy remained unabated, and had a very useful effect upon him. She persuaded him to come up every day for half an hour to the rectory, and then instructed him in his lessons, educating him in a manner very different from the perfunctory teaching of the old dame at the school. She would urge him on by telling him that if he would attend to his lessons he would some day be able to rise to a better position than that of a village fisherman. His father, no doubt, had had a good education, but from circumstances over which he had had no control he had been obliged to take to the life of a strolling musician, and she was sure that he would have wished of all things that his son should be able to obtain a good position in life when he grew up.

Under Miss Warden's teaching the boy made very rapid progress, and was, before two more years had passed, vastly in advance of the rest of the children of the village. As to this, however, by Miss Warden's advice, he remained silent. When he was ten his regular schooling was a great deal interrupted, as it was considered that when a boy reached that age it was high time that he began to assist his father in the boat. He was glad of his freedom and the sense that he was able to make himself useful, but of an evening when he was at home, or weather prevented the boat from going out, he went up for his lesson to Miss Warden, and, stealing away from the others, would lie down on the moor and work at his books.

He was now admitted to the society of watchers. He had often heard whispers among other boys of the look-out that had to be kept upon the custom-house officers, and heard thrilling tales of adventure and escape on the part of the fishermen. Smuggling was indeed carried on on a large scale on the whole Yorkshire coast, and cargoes were sometimes run under the very noses of the revenue officers, who were put off the scent by many ingenious contrivances. Before a vessel was expected in, rumours would be circulated of an intention to land the cargo on some distant spot, and a mysterious light would be shown in that direction by fishing-boats. Sometimes, however, the smugglers were caught in the act, and then there would be a fierce fight, ending in some, at least, of those engaged being taken off to prison and afterwards sent on a voyage in a ship of war.

Will Gilmore was now admitted as a helper in these proceedings, and often at night would watch one or other of the revenue men, and if he saw him stir beyond his usual beat would quickly carry the news to the village. A score of boys were thus employed, so that any movement which seemed to evidence a concentration of the coast-guard men was almost certain to be thwarted. Either the expected vessel was warned off with lights, or, if the concentration left unguarded the place fixed upon for landing, the cargo would be immediately run.

Thus another five years passed. Will was now a strong lad. His friend, Miss Warden, could teach him but little more, but she often had him up of an evening to have a chat with him.

"I am afraid, William," she said one evening, "that a good deal of smuggling is carried on here. Last week there was a fight, and three of the men of the village were killed and several were taken away to prison. It is a terrible state of affairs."

William did not for a moment answer. It was something entirely new to him that there was anything wrong in smuggling. He regarded it as a mere contest of wits between the coast-guard and the fishermen, and had taken a keen pleasure in outwitting the former.

"But there is no harm in smuggling, Miss Warden. Almost everyone takes part in it, and the farmers round all send their carts in when a run is expected."

"But it is very wrong, William, and the fact that so many people are ready to aid in it is no evidence in its favour. People

band together to cheat the King's Revenue, and thereby bring additional taxation upon those who deal fairly. It is as much robbery to avoid the excise duties as it is to carry off property from a house, and it has been a great grief to my father that his parishioners, otherwise honest and God-fearing people, should take part in such doings, as is evidenced by the fact that so many of them were involved in the fray last week. He only abstains from denouncing it in the pulpit because he fears that he might thereby lose the affection of the people and impair his power of doing good in other respects."

"I never thought of it in that way, miss," the lad said seriously.

"Just think in your own case, William: suppose you were caught and sent off to sea; there would be an end of the work you have been doing. You would be mixed up with rough sailors, and, after being away on a long voyage, you would forget all that you have learnt, and would be as rough as themselves. This would be a poor ending indeed to all the pains I have taken with you, and all the labour you have yourself expended in trying to improve yourself. It would be a great grief to me, I can assure you, and a cruel disappointment, to know that my hopes for you had all come to naught."

"They sha'n't, Miss Warden," the boy said firmly. "I know it will be hard for me to draw back, but, if necessary, I will leave the village now that you are going to be married. If you had been going to stay I would have stopped too, but the village will not be like itself to me after you have left."

"I am glad to think you mean that. I have remained here as long as I could be of use to you, for though I have taught you as much as I could in all branches of education that would be likely to be useful to you, have lent you my father's books, and pushed you forward till I could no longer lead the way, there are still, of course, many things for you to learn. You have got a fair start, but you must not be content with that. If you have to leave, and I don't think a longer stay here would be of use to you, I will endeavour to obtain some situation for you at Scarborough or Whitby, where you could, after your work is done, continue your education. But I beg you to do nothing rashly. It would be better if you could stay here for another year or so. We may hope that the men will not be so annoyed as you think at your refusal to take further part in the smuggling operations. At any rate, stay if you can for a time. It will be two months before I leave, and three more before I am settled in my new home at Scarborough. When I am so I have no doubt that my husband will aid me in obtaining a situation for you. He has been there for years, and will, of course, have very many friends and acquaintances who would interest themselves in you. If, however, you find that your position would be intolerable, you might remain quiet as to your determination. After the fight of last week it is not likely that there will be any attempt at a landing for some little time to come, and I shall not blame you, therefore, if you at least keep up the semblance of still taking part in their proceedings."

"No, Miss Warden," the boy said sturdily, "I didn't know that

it was wrong, and therefore joined in it willingly enough, but now you tell me that it is so I will take no further share in it, whatever comes of it."

"I am glad to hear you say so, William, for it shows that the aid I have given you has not been thrown away. What sort of work would you like yourself, if we can get it for you?"

"I would rather go to sea, Miss Warden, than do anything else. I have, for the last year, taken a lot of pains to understand those books of navigation you bought for me. I don't say that I have mastered them all, but I understand a good deal, and feel sure that after a few years at sea I shall be able to pass as a mate."

"Well, William, you know that, when I got the books for you, I told you that I could not help you with them, but I can quite understand that with your knowledge of mathematics you would be able at any rate to grasp a great deal of the subject. I was afraid then that you would take to the sea. It is a hard life, but one in which a young man capable of navigating a ship should be able to make his way. Brought up, as you have been, on the sea, it is not wonderful that you should choose it as a profession, and, though I may regret it, I should not think of trying to turn you from it. Very well, then, I will endeavour to get you apprenticed. It is a hard life, but not harder than that of a fisherman, to which you are accustomed."

When William returned to his foster-father he informed him that he did not mean to have anything more to do with the smuggling.

The old man looked at him in astonishment. “Are you mad?” he said. “Don’t I get five shillings for every night you are out, generally four or five nights a month, which pays for all your food.”

“I am sorry,” the lad said, “but I never knew that it was wrong before, and now I know it I mean to have nothing more to do with it. What good comes of it? Here we have three empty cottages, and five or six others from which the heads will be absent for years. It is dear at any price. I work hard with you, father, and am never slack; surely the money I earn in the boat more than pays for my grub.”

“I can guess who told you this,” the old man said angrily.“It was that parson’s daughter you are always with.”

“Don’t say anything against her,” the boy said earnestly;“she has been the best friend to me that ever a fellow had, and as long as I live I shall feel grateful to her. You know that I am not like the other boys of the village; I can read and write well, and I have gathered a lot of knowledge from books. Abuse me as much as you like, but say nothing against her. You know that the terms on which you took me expired a year ago, but I have gone on just as before and am ready to do the same for a time.”

“You have been a good lad,” the old man said, mollified,“and I don’t know what I should have done without you. I am nigh past work now, but in the ten years you have been with me things have always gone well with me, and I have money enough to make a shift with for the rest of my life, even if I work no longer. But

I don't like this freak that you have taken into your head. It will mean trouble, lad, as sure as you are standing there. The men here won't understand you, and will like enough think that the revenue people have got hold of you. You will be shown the cold shoulder, and even worse than that may befall you. We fisher-folk are rough and ready in our ways, and if there is one thing we hate more than another it is a spy."

"I have no intention of being a spy," the boy said. "I have spoken to none of the revenue men, and don't mean to do so, and I would not peach even if I were certain that a cargo was going to be landed. Surely it is possible to stand aside from it all without being suspected of having gone over to the enemy. No gold that they could give me would tempt me to say a word that would lead to the failure of a landing, and surely there can be no great offence in declining to act longer as a watcher."

The old man shook his head.

"A wilful man must have his way," he said; "but I know our fellows better than you do, and I foresee that serious trouble is likely to come of this."

"Well, if it must be, it must," the boy said doggedly. "I mean, if I live, to be a good man, and now that I know that it is wrong to cheat the revenue I will have no more to do with it. It would be a nice reward for all the pains Miss Warden has spent upon me to turn round and do what she tells me is wrong."

John Hammond was getting to the age when few things excite more than a feeble surprise. He felt that the loss of the boy's

assistance would be a heavy one, for he had done no small share of the work for the past two years. But he had more than once lately talked to his wife of the necessity for selling his boat and nets and remaining at home. With this decision she quite agreed, feeling that he was indeed becoming incapable of doing the work, and every time he had gone out in anything but the calmest weather she had been filled with apprehension as to what would happen if a storm were to blow up. He was really sorry for the boy, being convinced that harm would befall him as the result of this, to him, astonishing decision. To John Hammond smuggling appeared to be quite justifiable. The village had always been noted as a nest of smugglers, and to him it came as natural as fishing. It was a pity, a grievous pity, that the boy should have taken so strange a fancy.

He was a good boy, a hard-working boy, and the only fault he had to find with him was his unaccountable liking for study. John could neither read nor write, and for the life of him could not see what good came of it. He had always got on well without it, and when the school was first started he and many others shook their heads gravely over it, and regarded it as a fad of the parson's. Still, as it only affected children too young to be useful in the boats, they offered no active opposition, and in time the school had come to be regarded as chiefly a place where the youngsters were kept out of their mothers' way when washing and cooking were going on.

He went slowly back into the cottage and acquainted his wife

with this new and astonishing development on the part of the boy. His wife was full of indignation, which was, however, modified at the thought that she would now have her husband always at home with her.

"I shall speak my mind to Miss Warden," she said, "and tell her how much harm her advice has done."

"No, no, Jenny," her husband said; "what is the use of that? It is the parson's duty to be meddling in all sorts of matters, and it will do no good to fight against it. Parson is a good man, all allow, and he always finishes his sermons in time for us to get home to dinner. I agree with you that the young madam has done harm, and I greatly fear that trouble will come to the boy. There are places where smuggling is thought to be wrong, but this place ain't among them. I don't know what will happen when Will says that he doesn't mean to go any more as a watcher, but there is sure to be trouble of some sort."

It was not long indeed before Will felt a change in the village. Previous to this he had been generally popular, now men passed without seeing him. He was glad when John Hammond called upon him to go out in the boat, when the weather was fine, but at other times his only recourse was to steal away to the moors with his books. Presently the elder boys took to throwing sods at him as he passed, and calling spy and other opprobrious epithets after him. This brought on several severe fights, and as Will made up for want of weight by pluck and activity his opponents more than once found themselves badly beaten. One day he learned from a

subdued excitement in the village that it was time for one of the smuggling vessels to arrive. One of his boyish friends had stuck to him, and was himself almost under a ban for associating with so unpopular a character.

"Don't you come with me, Stevens," Will had urged again and again; "you will only make it bad for yourself, and it will do me no good."

"I don't care," the former said sturdily. "We have always been good friends, and you know I don't in the least believe that you have anything to do with the revenue men. It is too bad of them to say so. I fought Tom Dickson only this morning for abusing you. He said if you were not working with them, why did you give up being on the watch. I told him it was no odds to me why you gave it up, I supposed that you had a right to do as you liked. Then from words we came to blows. I don't say I beat him, for he is a good bit bigger than I am, but I gave him as good as I got, and he was as glad to stop as I was. You talk of going away soon. If you do, and you will take me, I will go with you."

"I don't know yet where I am going, Tommy, but if I go to a town I have no doubt I shall be able in a short time to hear of someone there who wants a strong lad, or perhaps I may be able to get you a berth as cabin-boy in the ship in which I go. I mean to go for a sailor myself if I can, and I shall be glad to have you as a chum on board. We have always been great friends, and I am sure we always shall be, Tommy. If I were you I would think it over a good many times before you decide upon it. You see I have

learnt a great deal from books to prepare myself for a sea life. Miss Warden is going to try to get me taken as an apprentice, and in that case I may hope to get to be an officer when my time is out, but you would not have much chance of doing so. Of course if we were together I could help you on. So far you have never cared for books or to improve yourself, and without that you can never rise to be any more than a common sailor."

"I hate books," the boy said; "still, I will try what I can do. But at any rate I don't care much so that I am with you."

"Well, we will see about it when the time comes, Tommy. Miss Warden was married, as you know, last week. In another three months she will be at Scarborough, and she has promised that her husband will try to get me apprenticed either there or at Whitby, which is a large port. Directly I get on board a ship I will let you know if there is a vacancy in her for a cabin-boy. But you think it over well first; you will find it difficult, for I don't expect your uncle will let you go."

"I don't care a snap about him. He is always knocking me about, and I don't care what he likes and what he don't. You may be sure that I sha'n't ask him, but shall make off at night as soon as I hear from you. You won't forget me, will you, Will?"

"Certainly I will not; you may be quite sure of that. Mind, I don't promise that I shall be able to get you a berth as cabin-boy at once, or as an apprentice. I only promise that I will do so as soon as I have a chance. It may be a month, and it may be a year; it may even be three or four years, for though there is always a

demand for men, at least so I have heard, there may not be any demand for boys. But you may be sure that I will not keep you waiting any longer than I can help."

One day Will was walking along the cliffs, feeling very solitary, when he heard a faint cry, and, looking down, saw Tom Stevens in a deep pool. It had precipitous sides, and he was evidently unable to climb out. "Hold on, Tom," he shouted, "I will come to you."

It was half a mile before he could get to a place where he was able to climb down, and when he reached the shore he ran with breathless speed to the spot where Tom's head was still above the water. He saw at once that his friend's strength was well-nigh spent, and, leaping in, he swam to him. "Put your arms round my neck," he said. "I will swim down with you to the point where the creek ends." The boy was too far gone to speak, and it needed all Will's strength to help him down the deep pool to the point where it joined the sea, and then to haul him ashore.

"I was nearly gone, Will," the boy said when he recovered a little.

"Yes, I saw that. But how on earth did you manage to get into the water?"

"I was running along by the side of the cliff, when my foot slipped. I came down on my knee and hurt myself frightfully; I was in such pain that I could not stop myself from rolling over. I tried to swim, which, of course, would have been nothing for me, but I think my knee is smashed, and it hurt me so frightfully that

I screamed out with pain, and had to give up. I could not have held on much longer, and should certainly have been drowned had you not seen me. I was never so pleased as when I heard your voice above."

"Can you walk now, do you think?"

"No, I am sure I can't walk by myself, but I might if I leant on you. I will try anyhow."

He hobbled along for a short distance, but at last said: "It is of no use, Will, I can't go any farther."

"Well, get on my back and I will see what I can do for you."

Slowly and with many stoppages Will got him to the point where he descended the cliff. "I must get help to carry you up here, Tom; it is very steep, and I am sure I could not take you myself. I must go into the village and bring assistance."

"I will wait here till morning, Will. There will be no hardship in that, and I know that you don't like speaking to anyone."

"I will manage it," Will said cheerfully. "I will tell John Hammond, and he will go to your uncle and get help."

"Ah, that will do! Most of the men are out, but I dare say there will be two or three at home."

Will ran all the way back to the village, which was more than a mile away. "Tom Stevens is lying at the foot of the cliff, father. I think he has broken his leg, and he has been nearly drowned. Will you go and see his uncle, and get three or four men to carry him home. You know very well it is no use my going to his uncle. He would not listen to what I have to say, and would simply shower

abuse upon me."

"I will go," the old man said. "The boy can't be left there."

In a quarter of an hour the men started. Will went ahead of them for some distance until he reached the top of the path. "He is down at the bottom," he said, and turned away. Tom was brought home, and roundly abused by his uncle for injuring himself so that he would be unable to accompany him in his boat for some days. He lay for a week in bed, and was then only able to hobble about with the aid of a stick. When he related how Will had saved him there was a slight revulsion of feeling among the better-disposed boys, but this was of short duration. It became known that a French lugger would soon be on the coast. Will was not allowed to approach the edge of the cliff, being assailed by curses and threats if he ventured to do so. Every care was taken to throw the coast-guard off the scent, but things went badly. There was some sharp fighting, and a considerable portion of the cargo was seized as it was being carried up the cliff.

The next day Tom hurried up to Will, who was a short way out on the moor.

"You must run for your life, Will. There are four or five of the men who say that you betrayed them last night, and I do believe they will throw you over the cliff. Here they come! The best thing you can do is to make for the coast-guard station."

Will saw that the four men who were coming along were among the roughest in the village, and started off immediately at full speed. With oaths and shouts the men pursued him. The

coast-guard station was two miles away, and he reached it fifty yards in front of them. The men stopped, shouting:"You are safe there, but as soon as you leave it we will have you."

"What is the matter, lad?" the sub-officer in charge of the station said.

"Those men say that I betrayed them, but you know 'tis false, sir."

"Certainly I do. I know you well by sight, and believe that you are a good young fellow. I have always heard you well spoken of. What makes them think that?"

"It is because I would not agree to go on acting as watcher. I did not know that there was any harm in it till Miss Warden told me, and then I would not do it any longer, and that set all the village against me."

"What are you going to do?"

"I will stay here to-night if you will let me. I am sure they will keep up a watch for me."

"I will sling a hammock for you," the man said. "Now we are just going to have dinner, and I dare say you can eat something. You are the boy they call Miss Warden's pet, are you not?"

"Yes, they call me so. She has been very kind to me, and has helped me on with my books."

"Ah, well, a boy is sure to get disliked by his fellows when he is cleverer with his books than they are!"

After dinner the officer said: "It is quite clear that you won't be able to return to the village. I think I have heard that you have

no father. Is it not so?"

"Yes, he died when I was five years old. He left a little money, and John Hammond took me in and bought a boat with that and what he had saved. I was bound to stay with him until I was fourteen years old, but was soon going to leave him, for he is really too old to go out any longer."

"Have you ever thought of going into the royal navy?"

"I have thought of it, sir, but I have not settled anything. I thought of going into the merchant navy."

"Bah! I am surprised at a lad of spirit like you thinking of such a thing. If you have learned a lot you will, if you are steady, be sure to get on in time, and may very well become a petty officer. No lad of spirit would take to the life of a merchantman who could enter the navy. I don't say that some of the Indiamen are not fine ships, but you would find it very hard to get a berth on one of them. Our lieutenant will be over here in a day or two, and I have no doubt that if I speak to him for you he will ship you as a boy in a fine ship."

"How long does one ship for, sir?"

"You engage for the time that the ship is in commission, at the outside for five years; and if you find that you do not like it, at the end of that time it is open to you to choose some other berth."

"I can enter the merchant navy then if I like?"

"Of course you could, but I don't think that you would. On a merchantman you would be kicked and cuffed all round, whereas on a man-of-war I don't say it would be all easy sailing, but if

you were sharp and obliging things would go smoothly enough for you."

"Well, sir, I will think it over to-night."

"Good, my boy! you are quite right not to decide in a hurry. It is a serious thing for a young chap to make a choice like that; but it seems to me that, being without friends as you are, and having made enemies of all the people of your village, it would be better for you to get out of it as soon as possible."

"I quite see that; and really I think I could not do better than pass a few years on a man-of-war, for after that I should be fit for any work I might find to do."

"Well, sleep upon it, lad."

Will sat down on the low wall in front of the station and thought it over. After all, it seemed to him that it would be better to be on a fine ship and have a chance of fighting with the French than to sail in a merchantman. At the end of five years he would be twenty, and could pass as a mate if he chose, or settle on land. He would have liked to consult Miss Warden, but this was out of the question. He knew the men who had pursued him well enough to be sure that his life would not be safe if they caught him. He might make his way out of the station at night, but even that was doubtful. Besides, if he were to do so he had no one to go to at Scarborough; he had not a penny in his pocket, and would find it impossible to maintain himself until Miss Warden returned. He did not wish to appear before her as a beggar. He was still thinking when a shadow fell across him, and, looking

up, he saw his friend Tom.

"I have come round to see you, Will," he said. "I don't know what is to be done. Nothing will convince the village that you did not betray them."

"The thing is too absurd," Will said angrily. "I never spoke to a coast-guardsman in my life till to-day, except, perhaps, in passing, and then I would do no more than make a remark about the weather. Besides, no one in the village has spoken to me for a month, so how could I tell that the lugger was coming in that night?"

"Well, I really don't think it would be safe for you to go back."

"I am not going back. I have not quite settled what I shall do, but certainly I don't intend to return to the village."

"Then what are you going to do, Will?"

"I don't know exactly, but I have half decided to ship as a boy on one of the king's ships."

"I should like to go with you wherever you go, but I should like more than anything to do that."

"It is a serious business, you know; you would have to make up your mind to be kicked and cuffed."

"I get that at home," Tom said; "it can't be harder for me at sea than it is there."

"Well, I have not got to decide until to-morrow; you go home and think it over, and if you come in the morning with your mind made up, I will speak to the officer here and ask him if they will take us both."

CHAPTER II
IN THE KING'S SERVICE

Before morning came Will had thought the matter over in every light, and concluded that he could not do better than join the navy for a few years. Putting all other things aside, it was a life of adventure, and adventure is always tempting to boys. It really did not seem to him that, if he entered the merchant service at once, he would be any better off than he would be if he had a preliminary training in the royal navy. He knew that the man-of-war training would make him a smarter sailor, and he hoped that he would find time enough on board ship to continue his work, so that afterwards he might be able to pass as a mate in the merchant service.

Tom Stevens came round in the morning.

"I have quite made up my mind to go with you if you will let me," he said.

"I will let you readily enough, Tom, but I must warn you that you will not have such a good look-out as I shall. You know, I have learnt a good deal, and if the first cruise lasts for five years I have no doubt that at the end of it I shall be able to pass as a mate in the merchant service, and I am afraid you will have very little chance of doing so."

"I can't help that," Tom said. "I know that I am not like you,

and I haven't learnt things, and I don't suppose that if I had had anyone to help me it would have made any difference. I know I shall never rise much above a sailor before the mast. If you leave the service and go into a merchantman I will go there with you. It does not matter to me where I am. I felt so before, and of course I feel it all the more now that you have saved my life. I am quite sure you will get on in the world, Will, and sha'n't grudge you your success a bit, however high you rise, for I know how hard you have worked, and how well you deserve it. Besides, even if I had had the pains bestowed upon me, and had worked ever so hard myself, I should never have been a bit like you. You seem different from us somehow. I don't know how it is, but you are smarter and quicker and more active. I expect some day you will find out something about your father, and then probably we shall be able to understand the difference between us. At any rate I am quite prepared to see you rise, and I shall be well content if you will always allow me to remain your friend."

Will gratified the sub-officer later by telling him that he had made up his mind to ship on board one of the king's vessels, and that his friend and chum, Tom Stevens, had made up his mind to go with him.

The coxswain looked Tom up and down.

"You have the makings of a fine strong man," he said,"and ought to turn out a good sailor. The training you have had in the fishing-boats will be all in your favour. Well, I will let you know when the lieutenant makes his rounds. I am sure there will be no

difficulty in shipping you. Boys ain't what they were when I was young. Then we thought it an honour to be shipped on board a man-of-war, now most of them seem to me mollycoddled, and we have difficulty in getting enough boys for the ships. You see, we are not allowed to press boys, but only able-bodied men; so the youngsters can laugh in our faces. Most of the crimps get one or two of them to watch the sailors as the boys of the village watch our men, and give notice when they are going to make a raid. I don't think, therefore, that there is any fear of your being refused, especially when I say that one of you has got into great trouble from refusing to aid in throwing us off the scent when a lugger is due. If for no other reason he owes you a debt for that."

Three days passed. Will still remained at the coast-guard station, and men still hovered near. Tom came over once and said that it had been decided among a number of the fishermen that no great harm should be done to Will when they got him, but that he should be thrashed within an inch of his life. On the third day the coxswain said to Will:

"I have a message this morning from the lieutenant, that he will be here by eleven o'clock. If you will write a line to your friend I will send it over by one of the men."

Tom arrived breathless two minutes before the officer.

"My eye, I have had a run of it," he said. "The man brought me the letter just as I was going to start in the boat with my uncle. I pretended to have left something behind me and ran back to the cottage, he swearing after me all the way for my stupidity. I

ran into the house, and then got out of the window behind, and started for the moors, taking good care to keep the house in a line between him and me. My, what a mad rage he will be in when I don't come back, and he goes up and finds that I have disappeared! I stopped a minute to take a clean shirt and my Sunday clothes. I expect, when he sees I am not in the cottage, he will look round, and he will discover that they have gone from their pegs, and guess that I have made a bolt of it. He won't guess, however, that I have come here, but will think I have gone across the moors. He knows very well how hard he has made my life; still, that won't console him for losing me, just as I am getting really useful in the boat."

The lieutenant landed from his cutter at the foot of the path leading up to the station. The sub-officer received him at the top, and after a few words they walked up to the station together.

"Who are these two boys?" he asked as he came up to them.

"Two lads who wish to enter the navy, sir."

"Umph! runaways, I suppose?"

"Not exactly, sir. Both of them are fatherless. That one has received a fair education from the daughter of the clergyman of the village, who took a great fancy to him. He has for some years now been assisting in one of the fishing-boats and, as he acknowledges, in the spying upon our men, as practically everyone else in the village does. When, however, Miss Warden told him that smuggling was very wrong, he openly announced his intention of having nothing more to do with it. This has had

the effect of making the ignorant villagers think that he must have taken bribes from us to keep us informed of what was going on. In consequence he has suffered severe persecution and has been sent to Coventry. After the fight we had with them the other day they appear to think that there could be no further doubt of his being concerned in the matter, and four men set out after him to take his life. He fled here as his nearest possible refuge, and if you will look over there you will see two men on the watch for him. He had made up his mind to ship as an apprentice on a merchantman, but I have talked the matter over with him, and he has now decided to join a man-of-war."

"A very good choice," the officer said. "I suppose you can read and write, lad?"

"Yes, sir," Will said, suppressing a smile.

"Know a bit more, perhaps?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, if you are civil and well behaved, you will get on. And who is the other one?"

"He is Gilmore's special chum, sir. He has a brute of an uncle who is always knocking him about, and he wants to go to sea with his friend."

"Well, they are two likely youngsters. The second is more heavily built than the other, but there is no doubt as to which is the more intelligent. I will test them at once, and then take them off with me in the cutter and hand them over to the tender at Whitby. Now send four men and catch those two fellows and

bring them in here. I will give them a sharp lesson against ill-treating a lad who refuses to join them in their rascally work."

A minute later four of the men strolled off by the cliffs, two in each direction. When they had got out of sight of the watchers, they struck inland, and, making a detour, came down behind them. The fishermen did not take the alarm until it was too late. They started to run, but the sailors were more active and quick-footed, and, presently capturing them, brought them back to the coast-guard station.

"So my men," the lieutenant said sternly, "you have been threatening to ill-treat one of His Majesty's subjects for refusing to join you in your attempts to cheat the revenue? I might send you off to a magistrate for trial, in which case you would certainly get three months' imprisonment. I prefer, however, settling such matters myself. Strip them to the waist, lads."

The orders were executed in spite of the men's struggles and execrations.

"Now tie them up to the flag-post and give them a dozen heartily."

As the men were all indignant at the treatment that had been given to Will they laid the lash on heavily, and the execrations that followed the first few blows speedily subsided into shrieks for mercy, followed at last by low moaning.

When both had received their punishment, the lieutenant said: "Now you can put on your clothes again and carry the news of what you have had to your village, and tell your friends that I wish

I had had every man concerned in the matter before me. If I had I would have dealt out the same punishment to all. Now, lads, I shall be leaving in an hour's time; if you like to send back to the village for your clothes, one of the men will take the message."

Tom already had all his scanty belongings, but Will was glad to send a note to John Hammond, briefly stating his reasons for leaving, and thanking him for his kindness in the past, and asking him to send his clothes to him by the bearer. An hour and a half later they embarked in the lieutenant's gig and were rowed off to the revenue cutter lying a quarter of a mile away. Here they were put under the charge of the boatswain.

"They have shipped for the service, Thompson," the lieutenant said. "I think they are good lads. Make them as comfortable as you can."

"So you have shipped, have you?" the boatswain said as he led them forward. "Well, you are plucky young cockerels. It ain't exactly a bed of roses, you will find, at first, but if you can always keep your temper and return a civil answer to a question you will soon get on all right. You will have more trouble with the other boys than with the men, and will have a battle or two to fight."

"We sha'n't mind that," Will said; "we have had to deal with some tough ones already in our own village, and have proved that we are better than most of our own age. At any rate we won't be licked easily, even if they are a bit bigger and stronger than ourselves, and after all a licking doesn't go for much anyway. What ship do you think they will send us to, sir?"

"Ah, that is a good deal more than I can say! There is a cutter that acts as a receiving-ship at Whitby, and you will be sent off from it as opportunity offers and the ships of war want hands. Like enough you will go off with a batch down to the south in a fortnight or so, and will be put on board some ship being commissioned at Portsmouth or Devonport. A large cutter comes round the coast once a month, to pick up the hands from the various receiving-ships, and as often as not she goes back with a hundred. And a rum lot you will think them. There are jail-birds who have had the offer of release on condition that they enter the navy; there are farm-labourers who don't know one end of a boat from the other; there are drunkards who have been sold by the crimps when their money has run out; but, Lord bless you, it don't make much difference what they are, they are all knocked into shape before they have been three months on board. I think, however, you will have a better time than this. Our lieutenant is a kind-hearted man, though he is strict enough in the way of business, and I have no doubt he will say a good word for you to the commander of the tender, which, as he is the senior officer, will go a long way."

The two boys were soon on good terms with the crew, who divined at once that they were lads of mettle, and were specially attracted to Will on account of the persecution he had suffered by refusing to act as the smugglers' watcher, and also when they heard from Tom how he had saved his life.

"You will do," was the verdict of an old sailor. "I can see that

you have both got the right stuff in you. When one fellow saves another's life, and that fellow runs away and ships in order to be near his friend, you may be sure that there is plenty of good stuff in them, and that they will turn out a credit to His Majesty's service."

They were a week on board before the cutter finished her trip at Whitby. Both boys had done their best to acquire knowledge, and had learnt the names of the ropes and their uses by the time they got to port.

"You need not go on board the depot ship until to-morrow,"the lieutenant said. "I will go across with you myself. I have had my eye upon you ever since you came on board, and I have seen that you have been trying hard to learn, and have always been ready to give a pull on a rope when necessary. I have no fear of your getting on. It is a pity we don't get more lads of your type in the navy."

On the following morning the lieutenant took them on board the depot and put them under the charge of the boatswain."You will have to mix with a roughish crew here," the latter said, "but everything will go smoothly enough when you once join your ship. You had better hand over your kits to me to keep for you, otherwise there won't be much left at the end of the first night; and if you like I will let you stow yourselves away at night in the bitts forward. It is not cold, and I will throw a bit of old sail-cloth over you; you will be better there than down with the others, where the air is almost thick enough to cut."

"Thank you very much, sir; we should prefer that. We have both been accustomed to sleep at night in the bottom of an open boat, so it will come natural enough to us. Are there any more boys on board?"

"No, you are the only ones. We get more boys down in the west, but up here very few ship."

They went below together. "Dimchurch," the boatswain said to a tall sailor-like man, "these boys have just joined. I wish you would keep an eye on them, and prevent anyone from bullying them. I know that you are a pressed man, and that we have no right to expect anything of you until you have joined your ship, but I can see that for all that you are a true British sailor, and I trust to you to look after these boys."

"All right, mate!" the sailor said. "I will take the nippers under my charge, and see that no one meddles with them. I know what I had to go through when I first went to sea, and am glad enough to do a good turn to any youngsters joining."

"Thank you! Then I will leave them now in your charge."

"This is your first voyage, I suppose," the sailor said as he sat down on the table and looked at the boys. "I see by your togs that you have been fishing."

"Yes, we both had seven or eight years of it, though of course we were of no real use till the last five."

"You don't speak like a fisherman's boy either," the man said.

"No. A lady interested herself in me and got me to work all my spare time at books."

"Well, they will be of no use to you at present, but they may come in handy some day to get you a rating. I never learnt to read or write myself or I should have been mate long ago. This is my first voyage in a ship of war. Hitherto I have always escaped being pressed when I was ashore, but now they have caught me I don't mind having a try at it. I believe, from all I hear, that the grub and treatment are better than aboard most merchantmen, and the work nothing like so hard. Of course the great drawback is the cat, but I expect that a well-behaved man doesn't often feel it."

The others had looked on curiously when the lads first came down, but they soon turned away indifferently and took up their former pursuits. Some were playing cards, others lying about half-asleep. Two or three who were fortunate enough to be possessed of tobacco were smoking. In all there were some forty men. When the evening meal was served out the sailor placed one of the boys on each side of him, and saw that they got their share.

"I must find a place for you to sleep," he said when they had finished.

"The officer who brought us down has given us permission to sleep on deck near the bitts."

"Ah, yes, that is quite in the bows of the ship! You will do very well there, much better than you would down here. I will go up on deck and show you the place. How is it that he is looking specially after you?"

"I believe Lieutenant Jones of the *Antelope* was good enough to speak to the officer in command of this craft in our favour."

"How did you make him your friend?"

Will told briefly the story of his troubles with the smugglers. The sailor laughed.

"Well," he said, "you must be a pretty plucky one to fly in the face of a smuggling village in that way. You must have known what the consequence would be, and it is not every boy, nor every man either, if it comes to that, that would venture to do as you did."

"It did not seem to me that I had any choice when I once found out that it was wrong."

The sailor laughed again. "Well, you know, it is not what you could call a crime, though it is against the law of the land, but everyone does a bit of smuggling when they get the chance. Lord bless you! I have come home from abroad when there was not one of the passengers and crew who did not have a bit of something hidden about him or his luggage – brandy, 'baccy, French wines, or knick-knacks of some sort. Pretty nigh half of them got found out and fined, but the value of the things got ashore was six or eight times as much as what was collared."

"Still it was not right," Will persisted.

"Oh, no! it was not right," the sailor said carelessly, "but everyone took his chance. It is a sort of game, you see, between the passengers and crew on one side and the custom-house officers on the other. It was enough to make one laugh to see the passengers land. Women who had been as thin as whistles came out as stout matrons, owing to the yards and yards of laces and

silk they had wound round them. All sorts of odd places were choke-full of tobacco; there were cases that looked like baggage, but really had a tin lining, which was full of brandy. It was a rare game for those who got through, I can tell you, though I own it was not so pleasant for those who got caught and had their contraband goods confiscated, besides having to pay five times the proper duty. As a rule the men took it quietly enough, they had played the game and lost; but as for the women, they were just raging tigers.

"For myself, I laughed fit to split. If I lost anything it was a pound or two of tobacco which I was taking home for my old father, and I felt that things might have been a deal worse if they had searched the legs of my trousers, where I had a couple of bladders filled with good brandy. You see, young 'un, though everyone knows that it is against the law, no one thinks it a crime. It is a game you play; if you lose you pay handsomely, but if you win you get off scot-free. I think the lady who told you it was wrong did you a very bad service, for if she lived near that village she must have known that you would get into no end of trouble if you were to say you would have nothing more to do with it. And how is it" – turning to Tom – "that you came to go with him? You did not take it into your head that smuggling was wrong too?"

"I never thought of it," Tom said, "and if I had been told so should only have answered that what was good enough for others was good enough for me. I came because Will came. We had always been great friends, and more than once joined to thrash

a big fellow who put upon us. But the principal thing was that a little while ago he saved me from drowning. There was a deep cut running up to the foot of the cliffs. One day I was running past there, when I slipped, and in falling hurt my leg badly. I am only just beginning to use it a bit now. The pain was so great that I did not know what I was doing; I rolled off the rock into the water. My knee was so bad that I could not swim, and the rock was too high for me to crawl out. I had been there for some time, and was beginning to get weak, when Will came along on the top of the cliff and saw me. He shouted to me to hold on till he could get down to me. Then he ran half a mile to a place where he was able to climb down, and tore back again along the shore till he reached the cut, and then jumped in and swam to me. There was no getting out on either side, so he swam with me to the end of the cut and landed me there. I was by that time pretty nigh insensible, but he half-helped and half-carried me till we got to the point of the cliff where he had come down. Then he left me and ran off to the village to get help. So you will understand now why I should wish to stick to him."

"I should think so," the sailor said warmly. "It was a fine thing to do, and I would be glad to do it myself. Stick to him, lad, as long as he will let you. I fancy, from the way he speaks and his manner, that he will mount up above you, but never you mind that."

"I won't, as long as I can keep by him, and I hope that soon I may have a chance of returning him the service he has done

me. He knows well enough that if I could I would give my life for him willingly."

"I think," the sailor said to Will seriously, "you are a fortunate fellow to have made a friend like that. A good chum is the next best thing to a good wife. In fact, I don't know if it is not a bit better. Ah, here comes the boatswain with a bit of sail-cloth, so you had better lie down at once. We shall most of us turn in soon down below, for there is nothing to pass the time, and I for one shall be very glad when the cutter comes for us."

The boys chatted for some time under cover of the sail-cloth. They agreed that things were much better than they could have expected. The protection of the boatswain was a great thing, but that of their sailor friend was better. They hoped that he would be told off to the ship in which they went, for they felt sure that he would be a valuable friend to them. The life on board the cutter, too, had been pleasant, and altogether they congratulated themselves on the course they had taken.

"I have no doubt we shall like it very much when we are once settled. They look a rough lot down below, and that sentry standing with a loaded musket at the gangway shows pretty well what sort of men they are. I am not surprised that the pressed men should try to get away, but I have no pity for the drunken fellows who joined when they had spent their last shilling. Our fishermen go on a spree sometimes, but not often, and when they do, they quarrel and fight a bit, but they always go to work the next morning."

"That is a different thing altogether, for I heard that in the towns men will spend every penny they have, give up work altogether, and become idle, lazy loafers."

Two days later, to the great satisfaction of the boys, a large cutter flying the white ensign was seen approaching the harbour. No doubt was entertained that she was the receiving-ship. This was confirmed when the officer in charge of the depot-ship was rowed to the new arrival as soon as the anchor was dropped. A quarter of an hour later he returned, and it became known that the new hands were to be taken to Portsmouth. The next morning two boats rowed alongside. Will could not but admire the neat and natty appearance of the crew, which formed a somewhat striking contrast to the slovenly appearance of the gang on the depot-ship. A list of the new men was handed over to the officer in charge, and these were at once transferred to the big cutter.

Here everything was exquisitely clean and neat. The new-comers were at once supplied with uniforms, and told off as supernumeraries to each watch. Will and Tom received no special orders, and were informed that they were to make themselves generally useful. Beyond having to carry an occasional message from one or other of the midshipmen, or boatswain, their duties were of the lightest kind. They helped at the distribution of the messes, the washing of the decks, the paring of the potatoes for dinner, and other odd jobs. When not wanted they could do as they pleased, and Will employed every spare moment in gaining what information he could from

his friend Dimchurch, or from any sailor he saw disengaged and wearing a look that invited interrogation.

"You seem to want to know a lot all at once, youngster,"one said.

"I have got to learn it sooner or later," Will replied, "and it is just as well to learn as much as I can while I have time on my hands. I expect I shall get plenty to do when I join a ship at Portsmouth. May I go up the rigging?"

"That you may not. You don't suppose that His Majesty's ships are intended to look like trees with rooks perched all over them? You will be taught all that in due time. There is plenty to learn on deck, and when you know all that, it will be time enough to think of going aloft. You don't want to become a Blake or a Benbow all at once, do you?"

"No," Will laughed, "it will be time to think of that in another twenty years."

The sailor broke into a roar of laughter.

"Well, there is nothing like flying high, young 'un; but there is no reason why in time you should not get to be captain of the fore-top or coxswain of the captain's gig. I suppose either of these would content you?"

"I suppose it ought," Will said with a merry laugh. "At any rate it will be time to think of higher posts when I have gained one of these."

The voyage to Portsmouth was uneventful. They stopped at several receiving-stations on their way down, and before they

reached their destination they had gathered a hundred and twenty men. Will and Tom were astonished at the bustle and activity of the port. Frigates and men-of-war lay off Portsmouth and out at Spithead; boats of various sizes rowed between them, or to and from the shore. Never had they imagined such a scene; the enormous bulk of the men-of-war struck them with wonder. Will admired equally the tapering spars and the more graceful lines of the frigates and corvettes, and his heart thrilled with pride as he felt that he too was a sailor, and a portion, however insignificant, of one of these mighty engines of war.

The officer in command of the receiving-ship at Whitby had passed on to the captain of the cutter what had been told him of the two boys by the lieutenant of the *Antelope*, and he in turn related the story to one of the chief officers of the dockyard. It happened that they were the only two boys that had been brought down, and the dockyard official said it would be a pity to separate them.

"I will put them down as part of the crew of the *Furious*. I want a few specially strong and active men for her; her commander is a very dashing officer, and I should like to see that he is well manned."

The two boys had especially noticed and admired the*Furious*, which was a thirty-four-gun frigate, so next morning, when the new hands were mustered and told off to different ships, they were delighted when they found their names appear at the end of the list for that vessel, all the more so because Dimchurch was

to join her also.

"I am pleased, Dimchurch, that we are to be in the same ship with you," Will exclaimed as soon as the men were dismissed.

"I am glad too, youngster. I have taken a fancy to you, as you seem to have done to me, and it will be very pleasant for us to be together. But now you must go and get your kit-bags ready at once; we are sure to be sent off to the *Furious* in a short time, and it will be a bad mark against you if you keep the boat waiting."

In a quarter of an hour a boat was seen approaching from the *Furious*. The officer in charge ascended to the deck of the cutter, and after a chat with the captain called out the list, and counted the men one by one as they went down to the boat, each carrying his kit.

"Not a bad lot," he said to the young midshipman sitting by his side. "This pretty nearly makes up our complement; the press gang are sure to pick up the few hands we want either to-day or to-morrow."

"I shall be glad when we are off, sir," the midshipman said."I am never comfortable, after beginning to get into commission, until we are out on blue water."

"Nor am I. I hope the dockyard won't keep us waiting for stores. We have got most of them, but the getting on board of the powder and shot is always a long task, and we have to be so careful with the powder. There is the captain on deck; he is looking out, no doubt, to see the new hands. I am glad they are good ones, for nothing puts him into a bad temper so readily as

having a man brought on board who is not, as he considers, up to the mark."

As they mustered on deck the captain's eye ran with a keen scrutiny over them. A slight smile crossed his lips as he came to the two boys.

"That will do, Mr. Ayling; they are not a bad lot, taking them one for all, and there are half a dozen men among them who ought to make first-rate topmen. I should say half of them have been to sea before, and the others will soon be knocked into shape. The two boys will, of course, go into the same mess as the others who have come on board. One of them looks a very sharp young fellow."

"He has been rather specially passed down, sir. He belonged to one of the most noted smuggling villages on the Yorkshire coast, which is saying a great deal, and he struck against smuggling because some lady in the place told him that it was wrong. Of course he drew upon himself the enmity of the whole village. The coast-guard stopped a landing, and two or three of the fishermen were killed. The hostility against the lad, which was entirely unfounded, rose in consequence of this to such a pitch that he was obliged to take refuge in the coast-guard station. I hear from the captain of the *Hearty* that the boy has been far better educated than the generality of fisher lads, and was specially recommended to him by the officer of the receiving-ship."

"Is there anything extraordinary about the other boy?"the captain asked with a slight smile.

"No, sir; I believe he joined chiefly to be near his companion, the two being great friends."

"He looks a different kind of boy altogether," the captain said. "You could pick him out as a fisher boy anywhere, and picture him in high boots, baggy corduroy breeches, and blue guernsey."

"He is a strong, well-built lad, and I should say a good deal more powerful than his friend."

"Well, they are good types of boys, and are not likely to give us as much trouble as some of those young scamps, run-away apprentices and so on, who want a rope's end every week or so to teach them to do their duty."

The boys were taken down to a deck below the water-level, where the crew were just going to begin dinner. At one end was a table at which six boys were sitting.

"Hillo, who are you?" the eldest among them asked. "I warn you, if you don't make things comfortable, you will get your heads punched in no time."

"My name is William Gilmore, and this is Tom Stevens. As to punching heads, you may not find it as easy as you think. I may warn you at once that we are friends and will stick together, and that there will be no punching one head without having to punch both."

"We shall see about that before long," the other said."Some of the others thought they were going to rule the roost when they joined a few days ago, but I soon taught them their place."

"Well, you can begin to teach us ours as soon as you like,"Tom

Stevens said. “We have met bullies of your sort before. Now, as dinner is going on, we will have some of it, as they didn’t victual us before we left the cutter.”

“Well, then, you had better go to the cook-house and draw rations. No doubt the cook has a list of you fellows’ names.”

The boys took the advice and soon procured a cooked ration of meat and potatoes. The cook told them where they would find plates.

“One of the mess has to wash them up,” he said, “and stow them away in the racks provided for them.”

“Johnson,” the eldest boy said to the smallest of the party,“you need not wash up to-day; that is the duty of the last comer.”

“I suppose it is the duty of each one of the mess by turn,”Will said quietly; “we learnt that much as we came down the coast.”

“You will have to learn more than that, young fellow,” the bully, who was seventeen, blustered. “You will have to learn that I am senior of the mess, and will have to do as I tell you. I have made one voyage already, and all the rest of you are greenhorns.”

“It seems to me from the manner in which you speak, that it is not a question of seniority but simply of bounce and bullying, and I hope that the other boys will no more give in to that sort of thing than Stevens or myself. I have yet to learn that one boy is in any way superior to the others, and in the course of the next hour I shall ascertain whether this is so.”

“Perhaps, after the meal is over, you will go down to the lower deck and allow me to give you a lesson.”

"As I told you," Will answered quietly, "my friend and I are one. I don't suppose that single-handed I could fight a great hulking fellow like you, but my friend and I are quite willing to do so together. So now if there is any talk of fighting, you know what to expect."

The bully eyed the two boys curiously, but, like most of the type, he was at heart a coward, and felt considerable doubt whether these two boys would not prove too much for him. He therefore muttered sullenly that he would choose his own time.

"All right! choose by all means, and whenever you like to fix a time we shall be perfectly ready to accommodate you."

"Who on earth are you with your long words? Are you a gentleman in disguise?"

"Never mind who I am," Will said. "I have learnt enough, at any rate, to know a bully and a coward when I meet him."

The lad was too furious to answer, but finished his dinner in silence, his anger being all the more acute from the fact that he saw that some of the other boys were tittering and nudging each other. But he resolved that, though it might be prudent for the present to postpone any encounter with the boys, he would take his revenge on the first opportunity.

CHAPTER III
A SEA-FIGHT

As the conflict of words came to an end, a roar of laughter burst from the sailors at the next mess-table.

"Well done, little bantam!" one said; "you have taken that lout down a good many pegs, and I would not mind backing you to thrash him single-handed. We have noticed his goings-on for the past two or three days with the other boys, and had intended to give him a lesson, but you have done it right well. He may have been on a voyage before, but I would wager that he has never been aloft, and I would back you to be at the masthead before he has crawled through the lubbers' hole. Now, my lad, just you understand that if you are ready to fight both those boys we won't interfere, but if you try it one on one of them we will."

The boys' duties consisted largely of working with the watch to which they were attached, of scrubbing decks, and cleaning brass-work. In battle their place was to bring up the powder and shot for the guns. On the second day, when the work was done, Will Gilmore went up to the boatswain.

"If you please, sir," he said, "may I go up the mast?"

The boatswain looked at him out of one eye.

"Do you really want to learn, lad?"

"I do, sir."

"Well, when there are, as at present, other hands aloft, you may go up, but not at other times."

"Thank you, sir!"

Will at once started. He was accustomed to climb the mast of John Hammond's boat, but this was a very different matter. From scrambling about the cliffs so frequently he had a steady eye, and could look down without any feeling of giddiness. The lubbers' hole had been pointed out to him, but he was determined to avoid the ignominy of having to go up through it. When he got near it he paused and looked round. It did not seem to him that there was any great difficulty in going outside it, and as he knew he could trust to his hands he went steadily up until he stood on the main-top.

"Hallo, lad," said a sailor who was busy there, "do you mean to say that you have come up outside?"

"Yes, there did not seem to be any difficulty about it."

"And is it the first time you have tried?"

"Yes."

"Then one day you will turn out a first-rate sailor. What are you going to do now?"

Will looked up.

"I am going up to the top of the next mast."

"You are sure that you won't get giddy?"

"Yes, I am accustomed to climbing up the cliffs on the Yorkshire coast, and I have not the least fear of losing my head."

"Well, then, fire away, lad, and if you find that you are getting

giddy shout and I will come up to you."

"Thank you! I will call if I want help."

Steadily he went up till he stood on the cap of the topmast.

"I may as well go up one more," he said. "I can't think why people make difficulties of what is so easy."

The sailor called to him as he saw him preparing to ascend still higher, but Will only waved his hand and started up. When he reached the cap of the top-gallant mast he sat upon it and looked down at the harbour. Presently he heard a hail from below, and saw the first lieutenant standing looking up at him.

"All right, sir! I will come down at once," and steadily he descended to the maintop, where the sailor who had spoken to him abused him roundly. Then he went to where the lieutenant was standing.

"How old are you, youngster?"

"I am a little past fifteen, sir."

"Have you ever been up a mast before?"

"Never, sir, except that I have climbed up a fishing-boat's mast many a time, and I am accustomed to clambering about the cliffs. I hope there was no harm in my going so high?"

"No harm as it has turned out. You are a courageous little fellow; I never before saw a lad who went outside the lubbers' hole on his first ascent. Well, I hope, my lad, that you will be as well-behaved as you are active and courageous. I shall keep my eye upon you, and you have my permission henceforth, when you have no other duties, to climb about the masts as you like."

The lieutenant afterwards told the captain of Will's exploit.

"That is the sort of lad to make a good topman," the captain remarked. "He will soon be up to the duties, but will have to wait to get some beef on him before he is of much use in furling a sail."

"I am very glad to have such a lad on board," said the lieutenant. "If we are at any station on the Mediterranean, and have sports between the ships, I should back him against any other boy in the fleet to get to the masthead and down again."

One of the midshipmen, named Forster, came up to Will when he left the lieutenant, and said: "Well done, young un! It was as much as I could do at your age, though I had been two years in the navy, to climb up where you did. If there is anything I can do for you at any time I will gladly do it. I don't say that it is likely, for midshipmen have no power to speak of; still, if there should be anything I would gladly help you."

"There is something, if you would be so very good, sir. I am learning navigation, but there are some things that I can't make out, and it would be a kindness indeed if you would spare a few minutes occasionally to explain them to me."

The midshipman opened his eyes.

"Well, I am blowed," he exclaimed in intense astonishment."The idea of a newly-joined boy wanting to be helped in navigation beats me altogether. However, lad, I will certainly do as you ask me, though I cannot think that, unless you have been at a nautical school, you can know anything about it.

But come to me this evening during the dog-watches, and then I will see what you have learned about the subject."

That evening Will went on deck rather shyly with two or three of his books. The midshipman was standing at a quiet spot on the deck. He glanced at Will enquiringly when he saw what he was carrying.

"Do you mean to say that you understand these books?"

"Not altogether, sir. I think I could work out the latitude and longitude if I knew something about a quadrant, but I have never seen one, and have no idea of its use. But what I wanted to ask you first of all was the meaning of some of these words which I cannot find in the dictionary."

"It seems to me, youngster, that you know pretty well as much as I do, for I cannot do more than fudge an observation. How on earth did you learn all this? I thought you were a fisher-boy before you joined."

"So I was, sir. I was an orphan at the age of five. My father left enough money to buy a boat, and, as one of the fishermen had lately lost his, he adopted me, and I became bound to him as an apprentice till I was fourteen. The clergyman's daughter took a fancy to me from the first, and she used to teach me for half an hour a day, which gave me a great advantage over the other boys in the school. I was very fond of reading, and she supplied me with books. As I said I meant to go to sea, she bought me some books that would help me. So there is nothing extraordinary in my knowing these things; it all came from her kindness to me

for ten years."

"Why didn't she try to get you into the mercantile marine?"

"She got married and left the place, sir, but before she went she told me that it was very wrong to have anything to do with smugglers. So I decided to give it up, and that set the whole village against me, and I should probably have been killed if I had not taken refuge in the coast-guard station. There the officer in charge spoke to me of joining the royal navy, and it seemed to me that it would do me good to serve a few years in it; for I could afterwards, if I chose, pass as an officer in the merchant service."

"You are the rummest boy that I ever came across," Forster said. "Well, I must think it over. Now, if there is anything that you specially wish to know, I will explain it to you."

For half an hour they talked together, and the midshipman solved many of the problems that had troubled the lad. Then with many thanks Will went below.

"Is it true, Will," Tom Stevens said, "that you have been right up the mast?"

"Not exactly, Tom, but I went up to the top of the top-gallant mast."

"But why did you do that?"

"I wanted to get accustomed to going up. There was not a bit of difficulty about it, except that it was necessary to keep a steady head. You could do it just as well as I, for we have climbed about the cliffs together scores of times."

"Do you think it will do any good, Will?"

"Yes, I think so. When they see that a fellow is willing and anxious to learn, it is sure to do him good in the long run. It will help him on, and perhaps in two or three years he may get rated as an able seaman, and no longer be regarded as a boy, useful only to do odd jobs. One of the midshipmen is going to give me some help with my navigation. I wish, Tom, you would take it up too, but I am afraid it would be no use. You have got to learn a tremendous lot before you can master it, and what little you were taught at our school would hardly help you at all."

"I know that well enough, Will, and I should never think of such a thing. I always was a fool, and could hardly take in the little that old woman tried to teach us. No, it is of no use trying to make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. I hope that soon I shall be able to hit a good round blow at a Frenchman; that is about all I shall be fit for, though I hope I may some day get to be a smart topman. The next time you climb the mast I will go with you. I don't think there is enough in my head to make it unsteady. At any rate I think that I can promise that I won't do anything to bring discredit upon you."

The feat that Will had performed had a great effect upon the bully of the mess. Before that he had frequently enjoyed boasting of his experience in climbing, and even hinted that he had upon one occasion reached the masthead. Now no more was heard of this, for, as Tom said openly, he was afraid that Will might challenge him to a climbing-match. The next evening the first lieutenant said to the captain: "That other lad who was brought

down from Yorkshire has been up the mast with his chum this afternoon. As I told you, sir, I heard that they were great friends, and Stevens did as well as the other."

"But there is a great difference between them. The one is as sharp and as bright as can be; the other is simply a solidly-built fisher-boy who will, I have no doubt, make a good sailor, but is not likely to set the Thames on fire."

"Do you know, sir, Mr. Forster came to me this morning, and told me that on his talking to the boy he astounded him by asking if he would be kind enough to explain a few things in navigation, as he had pretty well mastered all the book-work, but had had no opportunity of learning the use of a quadrant. Forster asked if I had any objection to his giving him lessons. It is the first time that I ever heard of such a request, and to allow it would be contrary to all idea of discipline; still, a lad of that sort deserves encouragement, and I will talk with the padre concerning him. He is one of the most good-natured of men, and I think he would not mind giving a quarter of an hour a day to this boy, after he has dismissed the midshipmen from their studies. Of course he must do the same work as the other boys, and no distinction must be made between them."

"Certainly not. I think the idea is an excellent one, and I have not much doubt that Mr. Simpson will fall in with it."

The first lieutenant went off at once to find the clergyman.

"Well, he must be a strange boy," the chaplain said when the case was laid before him; "I should not be surprised if a fellow

like that found his way to the quarter-deck some day. He appears to be a sort of admirable Crichton. Such an amount of learning is extraordinary in a boy of his age and with his opportunities, especially in one active and courageous enough to go up to the cap of the top-gallant mast on his first trial in climbing a mast. Certainly I shall be very glad to take the boy on, and will willingly give him, as you say, a quarter of an hour a day. I feel sure that my time will not be wasted. I never before heard of a ship's boy who wished to be instructed in navigation, and I shall be glad to help such an exceptional lad."

The next day the *Furious*, having received all her stores, went out to Spithead. The midshipmen had been all fully engaged, and there were no lessons with the padre, but on the following day these were resumed, and presently one of the other boys came down with a message that Will was to go to the padre's cabin.

"I have arranged, lad," the chaplain said when he entered,"to give you a quarter of an hour a day to help you on with your navigation, and I take it that you, on your part, are ready to do the work. It seems to me almost out of the question that you can be advanced enough to enter upon such studies. That, however, I shall soon ascertain. Now open that book and let me see how you would work out the followingobservation," and he gave him the necessary data.

In five minutes Will handed him the result.

"Of course, sir, to obtain the exact answer I should require to know more than you have given me."

"That is quite right. To-morrow you shall go on deck with me, and I will show you how to use a quadrant and take the altitude of the sun, and from it how to calculate the longitude, which is somewhat more difficult than the latitude. I see you have a good knowledge of figures, and I am quite sure that at the end of a few days' work you will be able to take an observation that will be close enough for all practical purposes."

He then asked Will many questions as to his course of study, the books he had read, and the manner in which he had got up the book-work of navigation.

"But how did you manage about logarithms," he said. "I generally find them great stumbling-blocks in the way of my pupils."

"I don't really understand them now, sir. I can look down the columns and find the number I want, and see how it works out the result, but why it should do so I have not been able to understand. It seems quite different from other operations in figures."

"It is so," the chaplain said, "and let me tell you that not one navigator in fifty really grasps the principle. They'fudge', as it is termed, the answer, and if they get it right are quite content without troubling themselves in any way with the principle involved. If you want to be a good navigator you must grasp the principle, and work the answer out for yourself. When you can do this you will have a right to call yourself a navigator. If you come to me at twelve o'clock to-morrow I will show you how to work a quadrant. The theory is easy. You have but to take the

angle the sun makes with the horizon at its moment of highest ascen sion. In practice, however, this is far from easy, and you will be some time before you can hit upon the right moment. It requires patience and close observation, but if you have these qualities you will soon pick it up."

The sailors were the next day greatly astonished at seeing the chaplain take his place at the side of the ship and explain to Will the methods of taking an observation.

In the meantime Will was making rapid progress in the good graces of the crew. He was always ready to render assistance in running messages, in hauling on ropes, and generally making himself useful in all respects. His fight with Robert Jones had come off. Will had gained great confidence in himself when he found that he was able to climb the mast in the ordinary way, while Tom Stevens was able only to crawl up through the lubbers' hole. Goaded to madness by the chaff of the other boys, all of whom had ranged themselves under Will's banner, Jones threw down the challenge. Tom Stevens was most anxious that Will should not take it up except on the conditions stated, but Will proclaimed a profound contempt for the bully.

"I will try it myself, Tom. I can hardly fail to lick such a braggart as that. I don't believe he has any muscles to speak of in that big body of his, while I am as hard as nails. No doubt it will be a tough fight if he has a scrap of pluck in him, but I think I will win. Besides, if he does beat me, he will certainly get little credit for it, while I shall have learnt a lot that will be useful to

me in the next fight."

Accordingly, at the time appointed the two lads went down to the orlop deck, a good many of the sailors accompanying them. An ordinary fight between boys attracted little atten tion, but the disparity between the years of the combatants, and the liking entertained for Will, brought most of those who were off duty to witness it. The difference between the antagonists when they stripped was very marked. Robert Jones was fully three stone the heavier and four inches the taller, but he was flabby and altogether out of condition, while Will was as hard as nails, and as active on his feet as a kid.

"It is ten to one against the young un," one of the men said, "but if he holds on for the first five rounds I would back him at evens."

"So would I," another said, "but I doubt whether he can do so; the odds are too great against him."

"I will take four to one," another said. "Look at the young un's muscles down his back. You won't often see anything better among lads two years older than he is."

The fight began with a tremendous rush on the part of Jones. Will stood his ground doggedly, and struck his opponent fairly between the eyes, making him shake his head like an exasperated bull. Time after time Jones repeated the manœuvre, but only once or twice landed a blow, while he never escaped without a hard return. At length he began to feel the effects of his own efforts, and stood on the defensive, panting for breath. Now it was Will's

turn. He danced round and round his opponent with the activity of a goat, dodging in and delivering a heavy body-blow and then leaping out again before his opponent could get any return. The cheers of the sailors rose louder and louder, and Will heard them shouting: "Go in; finish him, lad!" But Will was too prudent to risk anything; he knew that the battle was in his hands unless he threw it away, and that Jones was well-nigh pumped out. At last, after dealing a heavy blow, he saw his antagonist stagger back, and in an instant sprang forward and struck him between the eyes with far greater force than he had before exerted. Jones fell like a log, and was altogether unable to come up to time. A burst of cheering rose from the crowd, and many and hearty were the congratulations Will received.

"What was going on this afternoon, Mr. Farrance?" asked the captain; "I heard a lot of cheering."

"I made enquiry about it, sir, and the boatswain told me that it was only a fight between two of the boys. Of course he had not been present."

"Ah! It is not often that a boys' fight excites such interest. Who were they?"

"They were Jones, the biggest of the boys, and by no means a satisfactory character, and young Gilmore."

"Why, Jones is big enough to eat him."

"Yes, sir, at any rate he ought to have been. He was a great bully when he first came on board, but the other tackled him as soon as they were together, and it seems he has to-day given

him as handsome a thrashing as could be wished for, and that without being seriously hurt himself. He has certainly established his supremacy among the boys of this ship."

"That boy is out of the common," the captain said. "A ship's boy newly joined taking up navigation, going about the masts like a monkey, and finally thrashing a fellow two years his senior must be considered as altogether exceptional. I shall certainly keep my eye upon him, and give him every opportunity I can for making his way."

Will received his honours quietly.

"There is nothing," he said, "in fighting a fellow who is altogether out of condition, and has a very small amount of pluck to make up for it. I was convinced when we first met that he had nothing behind his brag, though I certainly did not expect to beat him as easily as I did. Well, I hope we shall be good friends in future. I have no enmity against him, and there is no reason why we should not get on well together after this."

"I don't know," said the sailor to whom he was speaking;"a decent fellow will make it up and think no more about it, but if I am not mistaken, Robert Jones will do you a bad turn if he gets the chance."

No one was more delighted at the result than Tom Stevens, who had cheered loudly and enthusiastically. Dimchurch was also exuberant at Will's success.

"I knew that you were a good un, but I never thought you could have tackled that fellow. I don't know what to make of you; as a

general thing, as far as I have seen, a fellow who takes to books is no good for anything else, but everything seems to agree with you. If I am not mistaken, you will be on the quarter-deck before many years have passed."

They were now running down channel, and the boys were astonished at the ease and smoothness with which the ship breasted the waves, and at the mass of snowy canvas that towered above her. As they sat one day at the bow watching the sheets of spray rise as the ship cut her way through the water, Tom said to his friend: "You are going up above me quick, Will. Anyone can see that. You are thought a lot of. I knew it would be so, and I said I should not grudge it you; in fact, the greater your success the better I shall be pleased. But I did not think that your learning would have made such a difference already. The first lieutenant often says a word to you as he passes, and the padre generally speaks to you when he goes along the deck. It is wonderful what a difference learning makes; not, mind you, that I should ever have gone in for it, even had I known how useful it is. I could never have taken it in, and I am sure the old woman could never have taught me. I suppose some fellows are born clever and others grow to it. And some never are clever at all. That was my way, I suppose. I just learned to spell words of two letters, which, of course, was of no use. A fellow can't do much with ba, be, by, and bo, and these are about all the words I remember. I used to think, when we first became chums, how foolish you were to be always reading and studying. Now I see what a pull you have got

by it. I expect it is partly because your father was a clever man, and, as most of the people thought, a gentleman, that you came to take to it. Well, if I had my time over again I would really try to learn something. I should never make much of it, but still, I suppose I should have got to read decently."

"Certainly you would, Tom; and when you once had got to read, so as to be able to enjoy it, you would have gone through all sorts of books and got lots of information from them. I am afraid, however, it is too late to worry over that. A man may be a good man and a good sailor without knowing how to read and write. I am sure you will do your share when it comes to that."

"I wonder when we shall fall in with a Frenchman?"

"There is no saying. You may be sure that every man on board is longing to do so. I hope she will be a bit bigger than we are, and I know the captain hopes so too. He is for ever watching every ship that comes in sight."

When running down the coast of Spain one day the look-out at the masthead shouted: "A sail!"

"What is she like?" the first lieutenant hailed.

"I can only see her top-gallant sails, sir, but she is certainly a square-rigged ship bound south, and her sails have a foreign cut."

The first lieutenant swung his telescope over his shoulder and mounted the rigging. When he came to the top-gallant crosstrees he sat down and gazed into the distance through his glass.

After making a careful examination of the ship he called to the captain, who was now on deck:

"She is, as Johnson says, sir, a square-rigged ship, and I agree with him as to the cut of her sails. She is certainly a Frenchman, and evidently a large frigate. She is running down the coast as we are, and I expect hopes to get through the Straits at night."

"Well, edge in towards her," the captain said. "Lower the top-gallant sails. If she hasn't already made us out, I shall be able to work in a good deal closer to her before she does so."

All hands were now on the *qui vive*, but it was not for some time that the stranger could be made out from the deck.

"You can get up our top-gallant sails again," the captain said. "She must have made us out by this time, and she certainly has gained upon us since we first saw her. There is no longer any possibility of concealment, so hoist royals as well as top-gallant sails."

The stranger made no addition to her sails. By this time those on board the *Furious* were able to judge of her size, and came to the conclusion that she was a battle-ship of small size, and ought to be more than a match for the *Furious*. The vessels gradually approached each other, until at last a shot was thrown across the bows of the Frenchman. She made no reply, but continued on her way as if unconscious of the presence of the English frigate. The crew of the *Furious* could now make out that she had fifty guns, whereas their own ship had thirty-four.

"Just comfortable odds," the captain said quietly when this was reported to him. "I have no doubt she carries heavier metal as well as more guns. Altogether she would be a satisfactory prize

to send into Portsmouth."

The men had not waited for orders, but had mustered to quarters on their own account. The guns were run in and loaded, and the boarding-pikes got ready. In five minutes orders were given to fire another shot. There was a cheer as white splinters were seen to fly from the Frenchman's side. Her helm was put up at once, and she swept round and fired a broadside into the *Furious*. Four or five shots took effect, some stays and ropes were cut, and two shot swept across her deck, killing three of the sailors and knocking down several of the others.

"Aim steadily, lads," the captain shouted; "don't throw away a shot. It is our turn now. All aim at her centre ports. Fire!"

The ship swayed from the recoil of the guns, and then she swung half-round and a broadside was poured into the Frenchman from the other side.

After this Will and Tom knew little more of what was going on, for they were kept busy running to and from the magazine with fresh cartridges. They were not tall enough to see over the bulwarks, and were only able to peep out occasionally from one of the port-holes. They presently heard from the shouts and exclamations of the men that everything was going well, and on looking out they saw that the enemy's foremast had been shot away, and in consequence she was unmanageable. The crew of the *Furious* had suffered heavily, but her main spars were intact, and the captain, manœuvring with great skill, was able to sail backwards and forwards across the enemy's stern and rake him

repeatedly fore and aft.

So the fight continued until at last the captain gave the order to lay the ship alongside the Frenchman and board. There was no more work for the powder-monkeys now, so Will and Tom seized boarding-pikes and joined in the rush on to the enemy's deck. The resistance, however, was short-lived; the enemy had suffered terribly from the raking fire of the *Furious*, and as the captain and many of the officers had fallen, the senior survivor soon ordered the flag to be lowered. A tremendous cheer broke from the British. They now learned that the ship they had captured was the *Proserpine*, which was on her way to enter the Mediterranean and effect a junction with the French fleet at Toulon.

The next day the crew worked hard to get up a jury foremast. When this was done a prize crew was put on board. The French prisoners were confined below, as they far out numbered their captors. Then, having repaired her own damages, the *Furious* proceeded on her way.

On arriving at Gibraltar the captain received orders to proceed to Malta, and to place himself under the order of the admiral there. For a time matters proceeded quietly, for the winds were light and baffling, and it took a fortnight to get to their destination. Here the ship was thoroughly examined, and the damage she had suffered more satisfactorily repaired than had been possible while she was at sea.

When the overhauling was completed she received orders to cruise off the coast of Africa. This was by no means pleasing to

the crew, who considered that they had small chance of falling in with anything of their own size on that station. They were told, however, that there had been serious complaints of piracy on the part of the Moors, and that they were specially to direct their attention to punishing the perpetrators of such acts.

One morning three strange craft were sighted lying close together. Unfortunately, however, it was a dead calm.

"They are Moors, certainly," the captain said to the first lieutenant after examining them with his glass. "What would I not give for a breath of wind now? But they are not going to escape us. Get all the boats hoisted out, and take command of the expedition yourself."

Immediately all was bustle on board the ship, and in a very short time every boat was lowered into the water. Will was looking on with longing eyes as the men took their places. The lieutenant noticed him.

"Clamber down into the bow of my boat," he said; "you deserve it."

In the highest state of delight Will seized a spare cutlass and made his way into the bow of the boat amid the jokes of the men. These, however, were stilled the moment the first lieutenant took his place in the stern.

The Moors had not been idle. As soon as they saw that the boats had been lowered they got out their sweeps and began to row at a pace which the lieutenant saw would tax the efforts of his oarsmen to the utmost. The Moors had fully three miles start,

and, although the men bent to their oars with the best will, they gained very slowly. The officers in the various boats encouraged them with their shouts, and the men pulled nobly. Five miles had been passed and but one mile gained. It was evident, however, that the efforts of the Moorish rowers were flagging, while the sailors were rowing almost as strongly as when they started. Three more miles and another mile had been gained. Then from the three vessels came a confused fire of cannon of all sizes.

Several men were hit, boats splintered, and oars smashed. The first lieutenant shouted orders for the boats to open out so that the enemy would no longer have a compact mass to aim at. At last, after another mile, the Moors evidently came to the conclusion that they could not escape by rowing, and at once drew in their oars, lowered their sails, and all formed in line. As soon as this manœuvre was completed heavy firing began again. Will, lying in the bow, looked out ahead, and, seeing the sea torn up with balls, wondered that any of the boats should escape unharmed.

The lieutenant shouted to the boats to divide into two parties, one, led by himself, to attack the vessel on the left of the line, and the other, under the second lieutenant, to deal with the ship on the right, for the middle boat would assuredly be captured if the other two were taken.

"Row quietly, men," he shouted; "you will want your breath if it comes to fighting. Keep on at a steady pace until within two hundred yards of them, and then make a dash."

This order was carried out by both parties, and when within

the given distance the men gave a cheer, and, bending their backs to the oars, sent the boats tearing through the water. The pirate craft were all crowded with men, who raised yells of rage and defiance. However, except that one boat was sunk by a shot that struck her full in the bow, Lieutenant Farrance's party reached their vessel.

The first to try to climb on board were all cut down or thrown backwards, but at length the men gained a footing on the deck, and, led by Mr. Farrance, fell upon the enemy with great spirit. Will was the last to climb up out of his boat, but he soon pushed his way forward until he was close behind the lieutenant. Several times the boarders were pushed back, but as often they rallied, and won their way along the deck again.

During one of these rushes Lieutenant Farrance's foot slipped in a pool of blood, and he fell to the deck. Two Moors sprang at him, but Will leapt forward, whirling his cutlass, and by luck rather than skill cut down one of them. The other attacked him and dealt him a severe blow on the arm, but before he could repeat it the lieutenant had regained his feet, and, springing forward, had run the Moor through the body.

Another five minutes' fighting and all resistance was at an end. Some of the Moors rushed below, others jumped over board and swam to their consort. As soon as resistance had ceased the lieutenant ordered the majority of the men to return to the boats, and, leaving a sufficient number to hold the captured vessel, proceeded to the attack of the middle craft.

The fight here was even more stubborn than before, for the men that fled from the ships that had already been taken had strongly reinforced the crew of this one. The British, however, were not to be denied. The boats of one division attacked on one side, those of the second on the other, and, after nearly a quarter of an hour's hard fighting, brought the enemy to their knees.

The pirates were all now battened down, the wounded seamen cared for by the doctor who had accompanied the expedition, and the bodies of the dead Moors thrown overboard. When this was done the successful expedition prepared to return to the *Furious*. They had lost twenty-eight killed, and nearly forty wounded.

"The loss has been very heavy," the first lieutenant said when the return was given to him; "and to do the fellows justice they fought desperately. Well, now we have to get back to the ship, which is a good ten miles away. She is still becalmed, and so are we, and unless the wind springs up we shall hardly reach her before nightfall. I don't like to ask the men for more exertions after a ten miles row at such a ripping pace; still, it must be done. Let two boats take each of the pirates in tow; they shall be relieved every hour."

The sailors, who were in high glee at their success, took their places in the boats cheerfully, but when night fell they were still more than four miles away from the frigate.

CHAPTER IV
PROMOTED

The lieutenant took a boat when it became dusk and rowed to the frigate, where he handed in his report of the fight.

"I will read that later, Mr. Farrance," the captain said."Meanwhile, tell me briefly what is the result? Of course I saw you returning with the three vessels in tow."

"We had a very sharp fight, sir, and I am sorry to say that the casualties are heavy, twenty-eight killed and nearly forty wounded more or less severely."

"That is a heavy list indeed, Mr. Farrance, very heavy, and we are the less able to bear it since we have some seventy men away on the French prize. The rascals must have fought desperately."

"They did, sir. I am bound to say that men could hardly have fought better. We had very hard work with the two outside ships, and as most of the fellows jumped overboard and swam to the other, we had an even stiffer fight there. In fact, if we had had only one of our division of boats available I am sure we should not have carried her."

"What are the casualties among the officers?"

"Midshipman Howard is killed, sir, and Lieutenant Ayling and Midshipman James very severely wounded. I myself had a very narrow escape. I slipped upon some blood, and two Moors

rushed at me and would have killed me had not that boy Gilmore thrown himself between us. He waved his cutlass about wildly, and, principally from good luck, I think, cut down one of them. On this the other attacked him, and I had time to get to my feet again. As soon as I was up I ran the Moor through, but not before he had given the boy a very ugly wound on the arm."

"That is a wonderful boy," the captain said with a smile."I think he is too good to remain where he is, and I must put him on the quarter-deck."

"I should feel greatly obliged if you would, sir, for there is no doubt that he saved my life. He is certainly as well up in his work as any of the midshipmen. The chaplain told me only yesterday that he had learnt to use the quadrant, and can take an observation quite as accurately as most of his pupils."

"Such a boy as that," said the captain, "ought to be given a chance of rising in his profession. He is quite at home aloft, and may be fairly called a sailor. He is certainly a favourite with the whole crew, and I think, if promoted, will give every satisfaction. Very well, Farrance, we may consider that as settled."

"Thank you very much, sir! I need hardly say that it will be a pleasure to me to fit him out."

The next morning there was a light breeze, and the three prizes, which had remained four miles from the frigate through the night, closed up to her. The wounded were transhipped, and a prize crew was told off to each of the captures, a considerable portion of the Moors being also transferred to the frigate and sent

down into the hold.

In the afternoon Will, to his surprise, received word that the captain wished to speak to him. His jacket had been cut off and his injured arm was in a sling, so he could only throw the garment over his shoulders before he hurried aft. When he reached the poop he found that the crew were mustered, and in much trepidation as to his appearance, and with a great feeling of wonder as to why he had been sent for, he made his way to where the captain was standing surrounded by a group of officers.

"Men," the captain said in a loud clear voice, "I am going to take a somewhat unusual step, and raise one of your comrades to the quarter-deck. Still more unusual is it that such an honour should fall to a ship's boy. In this case, however, I am sure you will all agree with me that the boy in question has distinguished himself not only by his activity and keenness aloft, but by the fact that he has, under great difficulties, educated himself, and in manner and education is perfectly fit to be a messmate of the midshipmen of this vessel. Moreover, in the fight yesterday he saved the life of Lieutenant Farrance when he had fallen and was attacked by two of the Moors. One of these the lad killed, and the other he engaged. This gave Lieutenant Farrance time to recover his feet, and he quickly disposed of the second Moor, not, however, before the rascal had inflicted a severe wound on the lad. Mr. William Gilmore, I have real pleasure in nominating you a midshipman on board His Majesty's ship *Furious*, and inviting you to join us on the quarter-deck."

The cheer that broke from the men showed that they heartily approved of the honour that had fallen upon their young comrade. As to Will himself, he was so surprised and overcome by this most unexpected distinction that he could scarcely speak. The captain stepped forward and shook him by the hand, an example followed by the other officers and midshipmen.

"You had better retire," the captain said, seeing that the lad was quite unable to speak, "and when you have recovered from your wound the ship's tailor will take your uniform in hand. Lieutenant Farrance has kindly expressed his intention of providing you with it."

Will, with the greatest difficulty, restrained his feelings till he reached the sick berth, and then he threw himself into a hammock and burst into tears. Presently Tom Stevens came in to see him.

"I am glad, Will," he said, "more glad than I can possibly express. It is splendid to think that you are really an officer."

"It is too much altogether, Tom. I had hoped that some day I might come to be a mate, or even a captain in a merchant ship, but to think that in less than two months after joining I could be on the quarter-deck was beyond my wildest dreams. Well I hope I sha'n't get puffed up, and I am sure, Tom, that I shall be as much your friend as ever."

"I don't doubt that, Will; you would not be yourself if it made any difference in you. Dimchurch asked me to tell you how much he too was pleased, but that he was not surprised at all, for he

felt sure that in less than a year you would be on the quarter-deck, as it would be ridiculous that anyone who could take an observation and be at the same time one of the smartest hands aloft should remain in the position of ship's boy. One of the elder sailors said that in all his experience he had never known but three or four cases of men being promoted from the deck except when old warrant officers were made mates and appointed to revenue cutters."

"Thank Dimchurch very heartily for me, Tom, and tell him that I hope we shall sail many years together, although it may be in different parts of the ship. Now I will lie quiet for a time, for my arm is throbbing dreadfully. The doctor tells me that although the wound is severe it can hardly be called serious, for with so good a constitution as I have it will heal quickly, and in a month I shall be able to use it as well as before."

The agitation and excitement, however, acted injuriously, and the next day Will was in a state of high fever, which did not abate for some days, and left him extremely weak.

"You have had a sharp bout of it, lad," the doctor said,"but you are safe now, and you will soon pick up strength again. It has had one good effect; it has kept you from fidgeting over your wound, and I have no doubt that, now the fever has left you, you will go on nicely."

In another three weeks Will was able to leave the sick bay, and on the morning he was discharged from the sick list he found by his hammock two suits of midshipman's uniform, a full dress and

a working suit, together with a pile of shirts and underclothing of all kinds, and two or three pairs of shoes. His other clothes had been taken away, so he dressed himself in the working suit, and with some little trepidation made his way to his new quarters. The midshipmen were just sitting down to breakfast, and, rising, they all shook hands with him and congratulated him heartily both on his promotion and his recovery.

"You are very good to welcome me so heartily," he said."I know that neither by birth nor station am I your equal."

"You are quite our equal, youngster," said one of the midshipmen,"whatever you may be by birth. Not one of us could have worked half so well as you have done; the chaplain tells us that you can take an observation as well as he can. I can assure you we are all heartily glad to have you with us. Sit down and make yourself at home. We have not much to offer you besides our rations; for we have been out for over a month, and our soft tack and all other luxuries were finished long ago, so we are reduced to ham and biscuit."

"It could not be better," Will said with a smile, "for I have got such an appetite that I could eat horse with satisfaction. I feel immensely indebted to you, Mr. Forster; for if you had not brought my request before the first lieutenant I should not have been able to make such progress with my books as I have done."

"The chaplain is a first-rate fellow – but, by the way, we have no misters here; we all call each other by our surname plain and simple. Even Peters, who has welcomed you in our name and who

is a full-fledged master's mate, does not claim to be addressed as mister, though he will probably do so before long, for the wound of Lieutenant Ayling, who, it is settled, will be invalided when we get to Malta, will give him his step. On that occasion we will solemnly drink his health, at his own expense of course."

"That is not the ordinary way," the mate laughed. "I know that you fellows will be game to shell out a bottle apiece – I don't think I can do it – not at least until I get three months of my new rate of pay."

So they laughed and chaffed, and Will felt grateful to them, for he saw that it was in no small degree due to the desire to set him at his ease.

"You will be in the starboard watch, Gilmore," the mate said when the meal was finished. "That was the one Ayling had. The third lieutenant, Bowden, who is now in charge, isn't half a bad fellow. Of course he is a little cocky – third lieutenants on their first commission generally are, but he is kind-hearted and likes to makes himself popular, and he will wink one eye when you take a nap under a gun, which is no mean virtue. The boatswain, who is in the same watch, is a much more formidable person, and busies himself quite unnecessarily. One cannot, however, have everything, and on the whole you will get on very comfortably. I am in the other watch, Rodwell and Forster are with you. They are well-meaning lads; I don't know that I can say anything more for them, but you will find out their faults soon enough yourself."

Will then went up on deck with the others. It seemed strange

to him to enter upon what he had hitherto regarded as a sort of sacred ground, and he stood shyly aside while the others fell into their duties of looking after the men and seeing that the work was being done. Presently the first lieutenant came on deck. Will went up to him and touched his hat.

"I cannot tell you, sir," he said, "how indebted I feel to you for your kindness in speaking for me to the captain, and especially in providing me with an outfit. I can assure you, sir, that as long as I live I shall remember your kindness."

"My lad, these things weigh but little against the saving of my life, and I can assure you that it was a great satisfaction to me to be able to make this slight return. I shall watch your career with the greatest interest, for I am convinced that it will be a brilliant one."

Owing to the fact that two officers had gone away in their first prize, and that three had been killed or disabled in the late fight, there was a shortage of officers on the *Furious*. Three had left in the Moorish prizes, and when, a week later, another Moorish vessel was captured without much fighting, the captain had no officers to spare above the rank of midshipmen.

"Mr. Forster," he said, "I have selected you to go in the prize. You can take one of the juniors with you; I cannot spare either of the seniors. Who would you like to take?"

"I would rather have Gilmore, sir. I feel that I can trust him thoroughly."

"I think you have made a good choice. I cannot spare you more

than thirty men. You will go straight to Malta, hand over your prize to the agent there, and either wait till we return, or come back again if there should be any means of doing so."

Will was delighted when he heard that he was to go with Forster. "Will you pick the crew?" he asked his friend.

"No, but I could arrange without difficulty for anyone you specially wished."

"I should like very much to have my friend Tom Stevens and the sailor named Dimchurch; they are both good hands in their way, and were very friendly with me before I got promoted."

"All right! there will no difficulty about that; we shall want a boy to act as our servant, and one able seaman is as good as another. I have noticed Dimchurch; he is a fine active hand, and I will appoint him boatswain."

Great was the pride of Will as the prize crew rowed from the *Furious* to the Moorish galley of which he was to be second in command, but he could not help bursting out laughing as he went down with Forster into the cabin.

"What are you laughing at?" Forster asked.

"I was having a bit of a laugh at the thought of the change that has come over my position. Not that I am conceited about it, but it all seems so strange that I should be here and second in command."

"No doubt it does," laughed Forster, "but you will soon get accustomed to it. It is almost as strange for me, for it is the first time that I have been in command. I have brought a chart on

board with me. Our course is north-north-east, and the distance is between two and three hundred miles. In any decent part of the world we should do it in a couple of days, but with these baffling winds we may take a week or more. Well, I don't much care how long we are; it will be a luxury to be one's own master for a bit."

The first step was to divide the crew into two watches.

"I am entitled not to keep a watch," Forster said, "but I shall certainly waive the privilege. We will take a watch each."

Tom Stevens was appointed cabin servant, and one of the men was made cook; nine of the others were told off to each watch.

"I wish she hadn't all those prisoners on board," Forster said. "They will be a constant source of anxiety. There are over fifty of them, and as hang-dog scoundrels as one would wish to see. We shall have to keep a sharp look-out on them, to make sure that they don't get a ghost of a chance of coming up on deck, for if they did they would not think twice about cutting our throats."

"I don't see how they could possibly get out," Will said.

"No; it generally does look like that, but they manage it sometimes for all that. These fellows know that when they get to Malta they will be set to work in the yards, and if there was an opportunity, however small, for them to break out, you may be sure that they would take it. These Moorish pirates are about as ruffianly scoundrels as are to be found, and if they don't put their prisoners to death they only spare them for what they will fetch as slaves."

After three days' sailing they had made but little way, for

it was only in the morning and the evening that there was any breeze. Will had just turned in for the middle watch, and had scarcely dropped to sleep, when he was suddenly awakened by a loud noise. He sprang out of bed, seized his dirk and a brace of pistols which were part of the equipment given him by the first lieutenant. As he ran up the companion he heard a coil of rope thrown against the door, so he leapt down again and ran with all speed to the men's quarters. They, too, were all on their feet, but the hatch had been battened down above them.

"This is a bad job, sir," Dimchurch said. "How they have got out I have no idea. I looked at the fastenings of the two hatches when I came down twenty minutes ago, and they looked to me all right. I am afraid they will cut all our comrades' throats."

"I fear so, Dimchurch. What do you think we had better do?"

"I don't know, sir; it will require a good deal of thinking out. I don't suppose they will meddle with us at present, but of course they will sooner or later."

"Well, Dimchurch, as a first step we will bring all the mess tables and other portable things forward here, and make a barricade with them. We will also obtain two or three barrels of water and a stock of food, so that when the time comes we may at any rate be able to make a stout resistance."

"That is a good idea, sir. We will set to work at once."

In a short time, with the aid of tubs of provisions, barrels of water, and bales of goods, a barricade was built across the bow of the vessel, forming a triangular enclosure of about fourteen feet

on each side. The arms were then collected and placed inside, and when this was done there was a general feeling of satisfaction that they could at least sell their lives dearly.

"Now, sir, what is the next step?" Dimchurch asked."You have only to give your orders and we are ready to carry them out."

"I have thought of nothing at present," Will said. "I fancy it will be better to allow them to make the first move, for even with the advantage of attacking them in the dark we could hardly hope to overcome four times our number."

"It would be a tough job certainly, sir; but if the worst comes to the worst, we might try it."

"It must come to quite the worst, Dimchurch, before we take such a step as that."

As evening approached, the Moors were heard descending the companion. There was a buzz of talk, and then they came rushing forward. When they reached the door between the fore and aft portions of the ship Will and his men opened fire upon them, and as they poured out they were shot down. Seven or eight fell, and then the others dashed forward. The seamen lined the barricade and made a strenuous resistance. Cutlass clashed against Moorish yatagan; the Moors were too crowded together to use their guns, and as they could gather no more closely in front than the sailors stood, they were unable to break through the barricade. At last, after many had fallen, the rest retired. Three or four of the sailors had received more or less severe wounds, but none were absolutely disabled. Tom Stevens had fought pluckily among the

rest, and Will was ready with his shouts of encouragement, and a cutlass he had taken for use instead of his dirk, wherever the pressure was most severe.

When the Moors had retired, Dimchurch and two others went outside the barricade and piled some heavy bales against the door, after first carrying out the dead Moors.

"They will hardly attack us that way again, sir," he said to Will; "it will be our turn next time."

"Yes, six of their number are killed, and probably several badly wounded, so we ought to have a good chance of success if we make a dash at them in the dark."

They waited until night had fallen. Then Will said:

"Do you think you can lift that hatchway, Dimchurch?"

"I will have a pretty hard try anyhow," the man said. "I will roll this tub under it; that will give me a chance of using my strength."

Although he was able to move it slightly, his utmost efforts failed to lift it more than an inch or two.

"They have piled too many ropes on it for me, sir; but I think that if some others will get on tubs and join me we shall be able to move the thing."

"Wait a minute, Dimchurch. Let each man make sure that his musket is loaded."

There was a short pause, during which all firelocks were carefully examined. When he saw that all were in good order, Will said:

"Now, lads, heave away."

Slowly the hatchway yielded, and with a great effort it was pushed up far enough for a man to crawl out. Pieces of wood were shoved in at each corner so as to hold the hatch open, and the men who had lifted it stood clear.

"Clamber out, Dimchurch, and have a look round. Are there many of them on deck?"

"Only about a dozen, as far as I can make out, sir. They are jabbering away among themselves disputing, I should say, as to the best way to get at us."

"I expect they intend to leave us alone and take us into Algiers. However, that does not matter. You two crawl out and lie down, then give me a hand and hoist me out. I think the others can all reach, except Tom; you had better hoist him up after me."

Each man, as he clambered out, lay down on the deck. When all were up, they crawled along aft to within a few yards of the Moors, then leapt to their feet and fired a volley. Five of the Moors fell, while the others, panic-stricken, ran below.

"Now, pile cables over the hatchway," Will shouted.

The sailors rushed to carry out the order. They were startled as they did so by a shout from above.

"Hillo, below there! Have you got possession of the ship?"

"Yes. Is that you, Forster?"

"Yes."

"Thank God for that!" Will shouted back, while the men gave a cheer. "Why don't you come down?"

"I am going to slide down the mast."

"What for? Why don't you come down by the rattlings?"

"I have cut the shrouds. When our last man fell I made a dash for them, and directly I got to the top I cut them, and half a dozen men who were climbing after me fell sprawling to the deck. Then I cut them on the other side. I thought then that they would at once shoot me, but there was a lively argument among them and shouts of laughter, and they evidently thought that it would be a great joke to leave me up here until I chose to slide down and be killed. Of course I heard their attack on you, and trembled for the result; but when the noise suddenly ceased I guessed that you had repulsed them. Well, here goes!" and half a minute later he slid down to the deck. "How do matters stand?" he asked, when he stood among them.

"We killed six and wounded eight or ten in the first attack upon us, and we have shot five more now. All the rest are battened down below."

"There they had better remain for the present. Well, Gilmore, I congratulate you on having recaptured the ship. It has been a bad affair, for we have lost nine men killed; but as far as you are concerned you have done splendidly. I am afraid I shall get a pretty bad wigging for allowing them to get out, though certainly the bolts of the hatchways were all right when we changed the watch. Of course I see now that I ought to have placed a man there as sentry. It is always so mighty easy to be wise after the event. I expect the rascals pretty nearly cut the wood away round the bolts, and after the watch was changed set to work and

completed the job. We shall not, however, be able to investigate that until we get to Malta."

"We have blocked up the door between the fore and the after parts of the ship," said Will; "but I think it would be as well to place a sentry at each hatch now, as they might turn the tables upon us again."

"Certainly. Are you badly wounded, Dimchurch?"

"I have got a slash across the cheek, sir, but nothing to speak of."

"Well, will you take post at the after-hatch for the present. Stevens, you may as well go down and guard the door. You will be able to tell us, at least, if they are up to any mischief. I should think, however, the fight is pretty well taken out of them, and that they will resign themselves to their fate now."

"This is a bad job for me," Forster said, as he and Will sat down together on a gun.

"I am awfully sorry, Forster, but I am afraid there is no getting out of it."

"No, that is out of the question."

"There is one thing, Forster. If you did not put a sentry over the hatchway, neither did I, so I am just as much to blame for the disaster as you are. If I had had a man there they could hardly have cut away the woodwork without his hearing. I certainly wish you to state in your report that you took the watch over from me just as I left it, and that no sentry had been placed there, as ought certainly to have been done when I came on watch at eight

o'clock."

"It is very kind of you, Gilmore, to wish to take the blame upon your own shoulders, but the responsibility is wholly mine. I ought to have reminded you to put a man there, there can be no question at all about that, but I never gave the matter a thought, and the blunder has cost us nine good seamen. I shall be lucky if I only escape with a tremendous wigging. I must bear it as well as I can."

While they were talking the sailors were busy splicing the shrouds. When this was done two of the men swarmed up the mast by means of the halliards. Then they hoisted up the shrouds, and fastened them round the mast, making all taut by means of the lanyards. The sails were still standing, flapping loosely in the light breeze, so the sheets were hauled in and the vessel again began to move through the water. Two days later they anchored in Valetta harbour.

"Here goes," Forster said, as he stepped into the boat with his report. "It all depends now on what sort of a man the admiral is, but I should not be surprised if he ordered me to take court-martial."

"Oh, I hope not!" Will exclaimed. "I do wish you would let me go with you to share the blame."

"It cannot be thought of," Forster said; "the commanding officer must make the report."

Two hours later Forster returned.

"It is all right, Gilmore," he said as the boat came

alongside."Of course I got a wigging. The admiral read the report and then looked at me as fierce as a tiger.

" 'How was it that no sentry was placed over the prisoners?'

" 'I have to admit, sir,' I said, 'that I entirely overlooked that. I am quite conscious that my conduct was indefensible, but I have certainly paid very heavily for it.'

" 'It was a smart trick taking to the shrouds,' the admiral said, 'though one would have thought they would have shot you at once after you had cut them.'

" 'That is what I expected, sir,' said I, 'but they seemed to think it was a very good joke, my being a prisoner up there, and preferred to wait till I was driven down by thirst.'

" 'I suppose your men sold their lives dearly?' he asked.

" 'Yes, sir,' I replied. 'Taken by surprise as they were they certainly accounted for more than one man each.'

" 'And doubtless you did the same, Mr. Forster?'

" 'Yes, sir, I cut down two of them, and I did not cease fighting until I saw that all was lost.'

" 'Then I suppose you thought that your duty to His Majesty was to take care of yourself,' he said slyly.

" 'I am afraid, sir,' I said, 'at that moment I thought more of my duty towards myself than of my duty to him.'

"He smiled grimly.

" 'I have no doubt that was so, Mr. Forster. Well, you committed a blunder, and I hope it will be a lesson to you in future.'

" 'It will indeed, sir,' I said.

"Then he started to question me about you.

" 'Your junior officer seems to have behaved very well,' he said.

" 'Extremely well, sir,' I said. 'I only wish I had done as well.'

" 'His plan of forming a barricade across the bow so that his little force were ample to defend it was excellent,' he said. 'Also the blocking up of the door of communication through the bulkhead was well thought of, and his final escape through the hatchway and sudden attack upon the enemy was well carried out. I will make a note of his name. I suppose he is not as old as yourself, as he is your junior?'

" 'No, sir, he is not yet sixteen, and he was only promoted from being a ship's boy to the quarter-deck three weeks ago.'

" 'Promoted from being a ship's boy?' the admiral said in surprise.

"Then I had to give a detailed account, not only of the fight that led to your promotion, but also of your life so far as I knew it.

"When I had finished, the admiral said:

" 'He must be a singular lad, this Gilmore, and is likely to prove an honour to the navy. Bring him up here at this hour to-morrow; I shall be glad to see him. There, now, you may go, and don't forget in future that when you are in charge of prisoners you must always place a guard over them.'

"So unknowingly you have done me a good turn, Gilmore, for I expect that if the admiral had not been so interested in you he

would not have let me off so easily. You must put on your best uniform for the first time and go up to-morrow."

"Well, I am afraid I should have felt very shaky if I had not heard your account of the admiral. From what you say it is evident he is a kindly man, and after all you have told him about me he can't have many questions to ask."

"Well, I feel a good deal easier in my mind, as you may guess," Forster said. "When I went ashore I felt like a bad boy who is in for a flogging. I dare say I shall get it a little hotter from the captain, but it will be just a wigging, and there will be no talk of courts-martial. By what we saw of the goods on board this craft before this rumpus took place I fancy the Moor had captured and plundered a well-laden merchantman. In that case the prize-money will be worth a good round sum, and as the admiral gets a picking out of it he will be still more inclined to look favourably on the matter. Here comes the boat to take off the prisoners. I have no doubt some of them will be hanged, especially as they will not be able to give any satisfactory explanation as to the fate of the merchantman. As soon as we have got rid of them we will overhaul a few of the bales and see what are their contents."

When the last of the prisoners were taken ashore Forster and Gilmore went below and examined the cargo. This proved to consist of valuable Eastern stuffs, broad-cloths, silks, and Turkish carpets.

"It could not be better," Forster said; "she must be worth a lot of money, and it will add to the nice little handful of prize-money

we shall get when we return home. They ought to give us a good round sum for the *Proserpine*; then there were the three Moorish vessels, though I don't think they were worth much, for their holds were nearly empty and I fancy they had only been cruising a short time. This fellow, however, is a rich prize; he certainly had very hard luck, falling in with us as he did. I fancy the ship they pillaged was a Frenchman or Italian, more likely the latter. I don't think there are many French merchantmen about, and it is most likely that the cargo was intended for Genoa, whence a good part of it might be sent to Paris. Well, it makes little difference to us what its destination was, its proceeds are certainly destined to enrich us instead of its original consignees."

The next morning Will put on his best uniform for the first time, and, landing with Forster, ascended the Nix Mangare stairs and called on the admiral.

"Well, Mr. Gilmore," the admiral said as he was shown in,"it gives me great pleasure to meet so promising a young officer. Will you kindly tell me such details of your early history as may seem fitting to you."

Will gave him a fairly detailed account of his history up to the time he joined the navy.

"Well, sir, you cannot be too grateful to that young lady, but at the same time there are few who would have availed themselves so well of her assistance. It is nothing short of astonishing that you should have progressed so far under her care that you were able, after a few lessons from the chaplain of your ship, to use a

quadrant. As a mark of my approbation I will present you with one. I will send it off to your ship to-morrow morning."

With many thanks Will took his leave, and returned with Forster to the prize.

On the following morning the quadrant arrived. That afternoon the prize was handed over to the prize-agents, and the crew transferred to the naval barracks, Forster and Gilmore receiving lodging money to live on shore. Hitherto, the only fortifications Will had seen were those of Portsmouth, so he was greatly interested in the castle with its heavy frowning stone batteries, the deep cut separating it from the rest of the island, and its towering rock. Then there was the church of St. John, paved with tombstones of the knights, and other places of interest. The costume and appearance of the inhabitants amused and pleased him, as did the shops with their laces, cameos, and lovely coral ornaments. Beyond the walls there were the gardens full of orange-trees, bright with their fruit, and the burying-place of the old monks, each body standing in a niche, dressed in his gown and cowl as in life.

Will wished that he could get his share of prize-money at once, and promised himself that his very first expenditure would be a suite of coral for the lady who had done so much for him. In no way, he thought, could he lay out money with such gratification to himself.

A fortnight later the *Furious* came into harbour bringing another prize with her. This had been taken without any trouble.

One morning, when day broke, she was seen only a quarter of a mile from the frigate. A gun was at once fired across her bows, and, seeing that escape was impossible, she hauled down her colours without resistance.

Forster and Gilmore, with the officers who had brought in the other prizes, all went on board at once and made their reports. As Forster had predicted, he was severely reprimanded for not having placed a sentry over the prisoners, but in consideration of the fact that he had already been spoken to by the admiral himself the captain was less severe on him than he would otherwise have been. Gilmore, on the other hand, was warmly commended.

"You managed extremely well," the captain said, "and showed that you fully deserved your promotion."

CHAPTER V
A PIRATE HOLD

The *Furious* was at once placed in the hands of the dockyard people, who set to work immediately to repair damages, while large quantities of provisions were brought off from the stores on shore.

"They are not generally as sharp as this," Forster said; "I should say there must be something in the wind."

Such was the general opinion on board the ship, for double gangs of workers were put on, and in three days she was reported to be again ready for sea. The captain came on board half an hour later and spoke to the first lieutenant, and orders were at once issued to get up the anchors and set sail. Her head was pointed west as she left the harbour, and the general opinion was that she was bound for Gibraltar. It leaked out, however, in the afternoon that she was sailing under sealed orders, and as that would hardly be the case if she were bound for Gibraltar, there were innumerable discussions among the sailors as to her destination. Could she be meant to cruise along the west coast of France, or to return to England and join a fleet being got ready there for some important operation?

"What do you say, Bill?" one of the men asked an old sailor, who had sat quietly, taking no part in the discussion.

"Well, if you asks me," he said, "I should say we are bound for the West Indies."

"The West Indies, Bill! What makes you think that?"

"Well, I thinks that, because it seems to me as that is where we are most wanted. The French have got a stronger fleet than we have out there."

"Well, they have got as strong a fleet at Toulon, and quite as strong a one at Brest."

"Yes, that may be so, but I think we are pretty safe to lick them at either of these places if they will come out and fight us fair, whereas in the West Indies they are a good bit stronger. There are so many ports and islands that, as we are, so to speak, a good deal scattered, they might at any moment come upon us in double our strength."

"Have you ever been there before, Bill?"

"Ay, two or three times. In some respects it could not be better; you can buy fruit, and 'bacca and rum for next to nothing, when your officers give you a chance. Lor', the games them niggers are up to to circumvent them would make you laugh! When you land, an old black woman will come up with a basket full of cocoa-nuts. Your officer steps up to her and examines them, and they look as right as can be. Perhaps he breaks one and it is full of milk; very good. So you go up to buy, and the officer looks on. The woman hands you two or three, and when she gives you the last one she winks her eye. She don't say anything, but you drop a sixpence into her hand among the coppers you have

to pay for the others, and when she has quite sold out the officer orders you into the boat to lie off till he comes back. And when he returns he is quite astonished to find that most of the crew are three sheets in the wind.

"Then they will bring you sugar-canes half as thick as your wrist, looking as innocent as may be; both ends are sealed up with bits of the pith, and when you open one end you find that all the joints have been bored through, and the cane is full of rum. But mind, lads, you are fools if you touch it; it is new and strong and rank, and a bottle of it would knock you silly. And that is not the worst of it, for fever catches hold of you, and fever out there ain't no joke. You eats a good dinner at twelve o'clock, and you are buried in the palisades at six; that's called yellow jack. It is a country where you can enjoy yourselves reasonable with fruit, and perhaps a small sup of rum, but where you must beware of drinking; if you do that you are all right. The islands are beautiful, downright beautiful; there ain't many places which I troubles myself to look at, but the West Indies are like gardens with feathery sorts of trees, and mountains, and everything that you can want in nature."

"It is very hot, isn't it, Bill?"

"It ain't, so to speak, cool in summer-time. In winter it is just right, but in summer you would like to lie naked all day and have cold water poured over you. Still, one gets accustomed to it in time. Then, you see, there is always excitement of some kind. There are pirates and Frenchmen, and there are Spaniards, whom

I regard as a cross between the other two. They hide about among the islands and pop out when you least expect them. You always have to keep your eyes in your head and your cutlass handy when you go ashore. The worst of them are what they call mulattoes; they are a whity-brown sort of chaps, neither one thing nor the other, and a nice cut-throat lot they are. A sailor who drinks too much and loses his boat is as like as not to be murdered by some of them before morning. I hate them chaps like poison. There are scores of small craft manned by them which prey upon the negroes, who are an honest, merry lot, and not bad sailors either in their way. Sometimes four or five of these pirate craft will go together, and many of them are a good size and carry a lot of guns. They make some island their head-quarters. Any niggers there may be on it they turn into slaves. There are thousands of these islands, so at least I should say, scattered about, some of them mere sand-spots, others a goodish size.

"Well, I hope it is the West Indies. There is plenty of amusement and plenty of fighting to be done there, and I should like to know what a sailor can want more."

There was a hum of approval; the picture was certainly tempting.

After a six days' run with a favourable wind they passed through the Straits without touching at Gibraltar, and held west for twenty-four hours. Then the sealed orders were opened, and it was soon known throughout the ship that it was indeed the West Indies for which they were bound. The ship's course was

at once changed. Teneriffe was passed, and they stopped for a day to take in fresh water and vegetables at St. Vincent. Then her head was turned more westward, and three weeks later the *Furious* anchored at Port Royal. The captain went on shore at once to visit the admiral, and returned with the news that the *Furious* was to cruise off the coast of Cuba. The exact position of the French fleet was unknown, but when last heard of was in the neighbourhood of that island.

"I must keep a sharp look-out for them," the captain said,"and bring back news of their whereabouts if I do catch sight of them; that is, of course, if we don't catch a tartar, for not only do the French ships carry heavier guns than we do, but they sail faster. We are as speedy, however, as any of our class, and will, I hope, be able to show them a clean pair of heels. In addition to this, I am told that three piratical craft, which have their rendezvous on some island off the south coast of Cuba, have been committing great depredations. A number of merchantmen have been missed; so I am to keep a sharp look-out for them and to clip their wings if I can."

"What size are they?" asked the first lieutenant.

"One is said to be a cutter carrying eight guns and a long-tom, the other two are schooners, each carrying six guns on a broadside; it is not known whether they have a long-tom, but the probability is that they have."

"They would be rather formidable opponents then if we caught them together, as they carry as many guns as we do, and those

long-toms are vastly more powerful than anything we have. I think it is a pity that they don't furnish all ships on this station with a long twenty-four; it would be worth nearly all our broadsides."

"That is so, Mr. Farrance, but somehow the people at home cannot get out of their regular groove, and fill up the ships with eight and ten-pounders, while, as you say, one long twenty-four would be worth a dozen of them. If we do catch one of these pirates I shall confiscate their long guns to our own use."

"It would be a capital plan, sir. Well, I am glad we shall have something to look for besides the French fleet, which may be a hundred miles away."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.