

Under the Star-Spangled Banner

A Tale of the Spanish-American War

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Frontispiece:

The Bows of the MAINE were crushed into shapeless Wreckage

Chapter I

The Marchant Foundry.

The city of Birmingham was wrapped in a mantle of fog so dense that the inhabitants found it difficult to move about. The thick, soot-laden atmosphere covered everything, and only a few faintly glimmering lights showed that they really existed.

The clock in the church tower had just struck two, and yet the street lamps were ablaze.

The pedestrians moved with the utmost care. Trudging along the sappy pavements, their footsteps sounded hollow and unreal, and were heard long before they themselves put in an appearance.

One of the inhabitants, however, contrived to find his way with comparative ease, for he was such an old resident that his feet would not go astray, however absent-minded their owner happened to be. There was a certain air of authority about him; yet there was that about the stern, calm features that denoted a warm heart and a kindly disposition. But still, as if the fog was not in existence, he hurried on, turning from the main street to the lower part of the town.

Ordinarily he could never accomplish this walk without meeting many an acquaintance, for Mr. Thomas Marchant was a well-known man. He was one of the magnates of this busy town, a wealthy employer of labor, and it was to the work his foundries gave that many of the inhabitants owed their prosperity.

Mr. Marchant was troubled; for only a year ago he was one of the wealthiest men in the city. His foundries were working night and day, and even then could hardly keep pace with the orders.

"I've never known such a rush," he said to his manager when discussing the matter. "It gives me great satisfaction, for our men will benefit by the increased orders as well as ourselves."

That was a short year ago, and now there was a different tale to tell. True, the iron foundry was still in full swing, but cotton mills, which Mr. Marchant owned in addition, were losing money every day, and in those few months he had been ruined; and he knew that the world would know him and speak of him as a bankrupt, while his possessions would be seized upon by the creditors.

The Marchant iron-works were in full swing. As Mr. Marchant entered, a mass of sputtering iron was dragged by a powerful man, dressed in rough trousers and thin vest, and protected by an apron of leather. Another dark and perspiring figure came to his aid, and the weight was dropped onto a small trolley, on which it was run to the big steam hammer standing near at hand.

Mr. Marchant watched them a moment, and then walked to his office, in which a somewhat untidily dressed gentleman was sitting.

"Good-day, Mr. Tomkins," he said.

"Good-afternoon, sir," Mr. Tomkins, who was the manager of the foundry, responded. Then, in a doubtful manner, he said, "There have been some visitors to see you this morning, and I told them to come again. One was Steinkirk."

"Does Hal know? Has he been told?" Mr. Marchant asked abruptly.

"No one has liked to break the news to him yet, sir. We weren't certain, and we hoped that things would turn out all right. I suppose it's hopeless now, sir?"

"Absolutely!" Mr. Marchant replied. "I am irretrievably ruined. The mills are gone, and to obtain money when the times were bad, I had to mortgage these works. I have nothing left. But I have seen to one matter; if trouble has come upon me, there is no reason why it should swamp all whom I employ. The creditor will carry on the work, and you and all the others will remain as at present. Poor Hal! He is the one who will suffer, more even than his father. He is a beggar!" He sank his face into his hands and groaned.

"It's not so bad as that, sir," said Mr. Tomkins. "Hal's got plenty of spirit, and if there's no money, why, he'll put his shoulder to the wheel. You should see

how he works here. He's in the casting-shed, and to look at him any day you'd think he had his bread to earn."

"Which he has from this moment," Mr. Marchant exclaimed. "You do me good, Tomkins. When I was a lad I had nothing. I had literally to slave for years, and to deny myself many a long day. Then fortune came with a rush which almost overwhelmed me. It has gone almost more quickly, and I must learn to make the best of my troubles. As for Hal, I think you are right. Let us go across and see him."

They left the office and entered a shed in which a number of men were at work. In a corner one of them was ramming a plug of clay into the orifice of a furnace, and was replacing the lining of similar material which protected the trough down which the molten metal was destined to run. At the end of the trough was an enormous bucket, suspended from a crane, which traveled backwards and forwards overhead.

The remainder of the shed was occupied with castings, or rather, with molds in various stages of preparation. Here and there were artisans at work, and amongst them, kneeling on the sand which covered the floor, was a youth who might well be taken for the son of a foundry hand. He was between seventeen and eighteen years of age, and of more than medium height. Dressed in a pair of rough trousers and a flannel shirt, he was to the casual observer merely an ordinary employee. But there was a certain something about this young fellow that made him different from the others at work in the shed. There was a grace about his figure, while his features were more refined than those commonly met with amongst the working classes.

This was the son of the owner, and he was known to all at the foundry as Hal Marchant.

It was delicate work upon which he was engaged. With a special tool he was smoothing down the mold, carefully rounding off corners, building up a portion here which had broken down. Finally he sat up, and, surveying the work with an air of satisfaction, exclaimed:

"That's finished, and I think it'll do. Now I'll get the foreman to pass it, and then we'll see it cast. Hallo! The guv', as I live! Why, you made me jump. What do you think of that?"

"Very good, old boy," Mr. Marchant replied. "You are an adept at the trade. What says the foreman?"

"He knows what he's up to, he does," the latter remarked. "Another week or so of this work and he'll be fit to boss the shed."

"Ah, that's satisfactory," said Mr. Marchant. "But I've something to say to you, Hal, so come to the office."

He turned and walked from the shed, taking no notice of the friendly glances his workmen threw in his direction.

"What can be wrong with the guv'?" he asked, looking after Mr. Marchant, and then at the manager. "What is it, Tomkins? Tell me."

For a moment the manager of the works wavered, uncertain whether to tell the truth.

"After all, he's got to know, sooner or later," he murmured. "Something's wrong, Hal," he continued. "There's no use in beating about the bush any longer. My only surprise is that you haven't seen for yourself that things were completely upset. I suppose every workman here knows what is going on, and it seems strange that they haven't dropped you a hint. The fact is, the foundry is

broken, and the owner has lost every penny he possessed. He's ruined, and the works go to a creditor."

"Ruined! Part with the works! Why, we are full of orders, and by all accounts are in the most thriving condition!"

"Just so, Hal, that's the bitter pill about this matter. The cotton mills up Preston way have broken. For two years they have been working at a dead loss. Your father mortgaged the mills, hoping to tide over bad times. But instead of improving they became even worse. Then the foundry had to go to raise the money. The folks who advanced the money have claimed it, and your father is unable to pay; so the long and short of it is that he no longer owns these works; and, to put it bluntly, he has scarcely a sixpence left, and both he and you must work for a living."

Hal attempted to stutter out some answer, but a big lump rose in his throat, making him almost choke. And yet, had it been possible to read his thoughts at this trying time, there would have been found nothing selfish about them, for the question as to what was to become of himself had not crossed his mind. No; only the deepest sympathy with his father was felt, for they were the very best of friends.

"I can scarcely believe all you tell me," Hal said at length. "What will father do? It is a terrible blow for him."

"It's bad, and there's no denying that," Mr. Tomkins replied. "But come along and hear what the gov' has to say."

Hal followed the manager to the office and seated himself at the desk beside which his father had taken a place. They looked at each other in the most painful silence. Then Hal stretched out his hand and took his father's.

"I'm sorry, dad," he said. "I've heard all now, and only wish that I could help you."

"There is no help; nothing can mend what has happened," answered Mr. Marchant, in despondent tones. "I have lost everything, and now that you know, I only wish to discuss what is to happen to you. What will you do for a living? For myself, I shall probably remain to conduct the business for the new owner, and, of course, if you wish it, you may also stay."

"It is a difficult question to answer, dad," said Hal. "For the present, at any rate, I shall remain where I am, as if nothing had occurred. Perhaps later on, it will be better for me to go elsewhere."

"I think you are right. Stay where you are for a while, and later I will contrive to get a good post for you. There are reasons why I do not wish you to stay at the foundry longer than can be helped. Now I will go, for I have other matters to attend to."

"Good-by, dad. Don't be too downhearted," said Hal cheerfully. "Remember what you were when you were my age, and you will see that there is no reason why matters should not improve."

"Young men do not feel so acutely as the middle-aged," Mr. Marchant replied. "Nor do the latter set their faces against adversity as easily as they did in their earlier days."

He smiled half tearfully, and, waving his hand, went out into the dense fog.

"It's a bad business—a cruel affair altogether," said Mr. Tomkins, at length. "If the failure had been of his own doing, one might not have felt the same for him. But I know that he has been the most cautious and far-seeing of owners,

and his mills have been patterns of well-ordered establishments. But now it is all finished with."

"One moment," exclaimed Hal. "Why should I leave the foundry?"

"Ah, I thought you'd want to know," the manager answered. "The fact is we are now the servants of a hard-fisted fellow. The gentleman who advanced the money sold the mortgage, and the buyer has a very evil reputation. It is because of this that your father advises you to quit. Moses Steinkirk is the fellow who has bought us up, and I fear we shall all have an uncomfortable time of it. Now we'll go back to the casting-pit. That wheel's got to be finished."

Quitting the office, they struck across the yard and entered the shed, to find that the mold upon which Hal had been engaged was completed.

"All ready for the metal, sir," said the foreman.

"The top cover of Mr. Hal's wheel was slung on a few minutes ago, and it will be as good a job as we ever put out. What do yer say, sir?"

"I don't know that it will be as good as the castings usually turned out from here," Hal replied. "Still, I hope it will do us credit."

"That it will, sir. Joe finished it up when you and the guv' cleared off, and he said as it was the best he'd seen for many a day."

"Jack, boy, you can let her go," sang out the foreman at this moment.

"Right yer are," was the gruff answer. "Now then, all of yer, bring the bucket closer, and mind yer toes."

Grasping a long iron rod, he thrust it into the lump of clay which closed the orifice of the furnace, and which was by this baked almost as hard as stone. A second later a jet of white-hot fluid poured out with a gurgle, and, emitting showers of sparks, rushed in a broad stream into the bucket.

"She's full. Up with her, boys!" cried the foreman.

At once the big crane creaked, and hoisting up the bucket, swung it towards the mold. Meanwhile two of the men had grasped the handles, and drawing the bucket to the orifice, tipped it. The fiery stream disappeared into the depths of the mold. Then it began to well up in the opening, and a moment or two later the empty bucket was whisked away.

"That's finished, so far. Now, Tom, up yer get, and see that she cools as she ought to," cried Mason.

Tom, the man he had beckoned to, stepped onto the framework, and, taking a rod, commenced to ram it into the opening through which the metal had been poured.

"That's finished, and we may as well go," said Tomkins. "It will take five hours for that to cool. Come along, Hal. Good-night to you, Mason."

"Good-night, sir. Good-night, Mr. Hal."

The words came from all parts of the shed, and replying to them cheerfully, Hal repaired to the office with the manager.

Chapter II

„Face Troubles Like a Man.“

Seen in the glare of the furnace flames as he emerged from the foundry, Hal Marchant was a very different individual from the workman who had been so diligent in the casting-pit.

Then he had been much like his fellows—just a roughly clad artisan, covered with sand, and with hands and face streaked with soot and dirt. Now that he was ready to go into the town, however, he was a spruce and dapper young gentleman. He had the manners of his father, and though not a prig, nor less given to mirth than others of his age, he was a very respectable and creditable member of society.

But Hal was genuinely grieved about his father, and as he walked home, his thoughts were busy wondering what he would do, and how he could possibly extricate himself from his difficulties.

"Surely this man will allow father to work off the debt," he murmured. "I know for a matter of fact that we have numerous orders, and must be making money. Why, then, should he not be allowed to remain? It might take a few years to work off the amount, but it would be done."

But Hal did not know the world very well. If he had he would have realized that this was a business transaction, and that when the creditor had a power over the profits of the foundry, and particularly one with such a reputation, he was not likely to forego his claims.

"We must just make the best of a bad matter," Hal at length remarked. "I'll do my utmost to help, and all I make shall go to the funds to keep up the house."

He turned into the gates of the big mansion and, mounting the steps, opened the door with a latch-key. He paused on the threshold to listen, but there was not a sound in the house.

"Strange!" he murmured. "The guv' said he was returning at once, and these last few weeks one has usually known immediately whether he was at home by hearing his steps as he paced up and down the floor of his room. That was what first gave me an idea that something was wrong. But perhaps he is in, and has fallen asleep in his chair, as I have often known him to do."

Hal walked across the fine hall, and opening the door on the left, looked into an apartment which was evidently library and smoking room in one. He put his head through the doorway and inspected the apartment. But there was no sign of his father, and he was about to withdraw when a faint groan fell upon his ear. In an instant he darted in, and discovered a figure huddled in a chair in a dark portion of the room. It was Mr. Marchant.

Hal sprang to his side and looked eagerly in his face, but there was no sign of recognition, for the eyes were closed. He placed his hand on the wrist and felt for a pulse without success. Then the truth dawned upon him—slowly at first, and then with a whirl, and with all its cruel force.

"Dead!" he gasped. "Father dead!"

There was no doubt about it, and Hal had to face the matter. Once more he felt for a pulse, and then he went to the bell and pressed the button.

"Send for the doctor at once, please," he said when the servant arrived. "I am afraid that my father is dead."

"Dead, sir? Dead!" the girl exclaimed in a whisper.

"Yes, that is the case," Hal answered. "Send for Dr. Harding."

Five minutes later the doctor arrived. He pronounced life extinct. "A stroke," he said. "He died painlessly and swiftly. May we all do the same, for it is a

merciful ending. But tell me, Hal, was there cause? Was there any sudden shock that you know of?"

"Yes; there was a great one," Hal answered slowly. "Father was ruined. Tomorrow he would have been in the position of his manager, instead of the employer of hundreds of hands."

"Then he has had a merciful escape," said the doctor. "The blow was a heavy one, and the life to follow would have been extremely hard. And what of yourself, my boy?"

"I, too, have lost all my prospects," Hal answered steadily. "But I am hardly more than a boy. The world is before me, and I will make my way in it. This house will be sold, I suppose, and if all the debts cannot be met, someone will have to wait. It shall be my business to work, make money, and clear my father's name."

"A resolution to be proud of. Face troubles like a man, and half the battle is already won," exclaimed the doctor. "But I hope that when all is sold no debts will remain. Then you will be free to rise solely on your own account."

He pressed Hal's hand and left the house.

A week passed and found Hal in lodgings in the town, for Mr. Marchant's house had been sold, and, to Hal's relief, it was ascertained that not a penny was owing to any man.

"Now for myself," he said as he sat over the fire. "What to do is the question."

There was a knock at the door, and Mr. Tomkins put his head into the room. "Hallo!" he said. "Do you feel inclined for a chat?"

"Yes; come in. I'm wondering what to do with myself."

"And so am I," was the answer. "That is, I'm wondering what would be good for you. How about the foundry? Will you stick to it?"

"On no account," Hal replied. "I could not bear to go there now. In fact, I mean to leave Birmingham, for it would bring back these last few days every time I passed the old home. I must work, and pay my way, for at present I possess fifteen pounds and a few suits of clothes; that is all."

"I thought you'd not go back to the works," said Mr. Tomkins. "I've been there boy and man these twenty years, and I've risen to be manager. But I am leaving with my old master, for I cannot fancy the new. I'm lucky, too, for I've accepted the post of manager to another foundry in the north. Come along with me, and I'll see that you get something good."

Hal thanked him, and thought the matter over before answering.

"I scarcely know what to say," he said. "But I am determined to leave Birmingham. I couldn't stand it."

"It would be rough, I own," Mr. Tomkins said. "But what about coming north?"

"It is very good of you to suggest it, Tomkins," Hal answered, "but, before deciding, there is something that I should like to know about. Of course, I am not very well up in trade affairs, but I do happen to know that the Americans are very go-ahead in the matter of iron-works. They undertake bridge-building to a great extent, and I thought that it might be worth my while to cross the water. I certainly ought to get a job. They pay well out in America, Tomkins. What do you say to the plan?"

"Those Yanks are hard at work," he said. "They are go-ahead people, as you say, and there's no doubt that they can show us a thing or two in the way of bridges. Yes, anything to do with iron and engineering is booming across the

Atlantic, and there must be lots of openings for youngsters. There's something else besides. In good old England we're overcrowded, but in America there's a demand for chaps who know a little above the ordinary. I should say it would be a good thing, Hal, and if you decide upon it, the traveling there, and the new life, will rouse you a bit, and help you to forget present troubles."

"You think well of it," said Hal. "Then I shall go to America and try my luck. I may as well start as soon as possible, and I wish very particularly to do so, for while in this city I run the chance of meeting old friends. Besides, if I went to see any of them, they might think that I was looking for help, and I want to make a place for myself."

"And quite right too. Independence is the thing," the manager cried, patting him on the back. "Now, look here, youngster, are you willing to rough it from the very commencement? If so, I can help you get to America."

"Quite," Hal answered promptly.

"Then come along with me to the office of a shipping firm I know. They've carried many a time for the foundry, and I've only to drop the manager a hint that you are wanting to get across at the cheapest rate possible, and I'll be bound he'll arrange."

"I've no cousins or relatives of any sort," he said, "and I've come to the conclusion that this is the best thing I can do."

"That's good! I'm certain you are doing what is right," Mr. Tomkins answered.

They went into the street, and within a few minutes were at the shipping office.

"Good-day, Mr. Tomkins. What can we do for you this time?" asked the clerk.

"A good deal, if you care. Can we come in behind? I want to speak to you about my young friend here."

"To be sure," the clerk replied. "Step in. Now, what is it?" he asked. "I recognize your companion. He is the son of the late Mr. Marchant."

"Quite so; and he wishes to go abroad to America, to make his way in the world. Can you do anything for him in the way of a cheap passage?"

"He could go for nothing, or rather, could earn a pound and food besides the berth. But he'd have to rough it."

"I'm ready for that, any day; in fact, I'd like to start right away," Hal said, eagerly.

"Then I may as well tell you that there is a vacancy for a greaser aboard the MOHICAN. Will you take that? There! A passage, your grub, and a pound at the end of the trip."

"You can put my name down for it," said Hal. "I'll go on the MOHICAN; and I thank you for your kindness."

"Not at all; it's nothing after the freights we got from your father's foundry. Good-day, sir; good-day, Tomkins. Excuse me, but I'm very busy." The clerk nodded in a friendly way, and departed.

"I put that down as a good omen," said Tomkins as they emerged into the street. "You're in luck, Hal, for right from the commencement you get what you want. The rest will come just the same, let us hope. Now I'll leave you, as I have matters to attend to."

He shook Hal's hand and walked up the street.

Hal returned to his rooms, and hunted out his belongings. It was getting dark as he went into the street with a bundle over his shoulder. He entered a

shop which he had noticed on former occasions, wondering what class of people patronized it.

"How much for these?" he asked, opening his bundle, and displaying five suits which he had been in the habit of wearing in Birmingham.

"They're not much good to me," he said. "They're not the class o' togs I want. Six shillings the lot."

"Six shillings!" said Hal quietly. "They cost four times as many pounds, and that quite recently. Bid again."

"Six the figure. Not a penny more," exclaimed the man.

"I'll take four pounds for the lot," said Hal.

"You may, but not from me, young man. Good a'ternoon to yer."

"Good-day; I'll go elsewhere," said Hal quietly, and at once did up the fastenings of his bundle. Then he lifted it, and walked calmly out of the shop.

"Hold hard there!" cried the man, arresting him at the door. "Let's see the togs again." He inspected them closely; but it was merely a pretense, for anyone could see with half an eye that they were really good. "I'll make it three ten," he said.

"Very well, you can have them," Hal replied, glad to get so good a price.

Next day he was told that the MOHICAN would sail on Saturday.

"She's one of the intermediate boats," said the clerk. "Of course, she carries very few passengers—some thirty in all. You'd better be aboard on Friday, for she leaves the river early the following day. Good luck to you."

"And many thanks to you," Hal answered. "I'll do my best to fill the place you have obtained for me."

Hal took a cheap ticket to Liverpool, and trudged from the station to the dock in which the MOHICAN was lying.

Hal picked his way to the wide and slippery gangway, and began to cross it. A notice above an alleyway caught his eye. "Engineers only," it said.

He entered the alleyway, and walked along it till he came to a door on the left, where he knocked.

"Who's there? Come right in," someone cried in a sleepy voice.

Hal entered, and found a big man reclining full length on the settee. He was dressed in an old uniform, and had a handkerchief tied round his neck.

"Wall, what aer it?" he asked. "A feller can't no more get ter sleep upon this hulk than fly. Who aer yer?"

He sat up and surveyed Hal sleepily.

"I'm sorry I roused you. I'm the new hand—the greaser," said Hal.

"Oh, you're the greaser! Wall, yer aint the sort as ships aboard the MOHICAN every time. What aer it? Rows with the boss? High jinks at home? Broke; aint that it?"

"Not quite, but nearly," Hal answered with a smile. "I'm working my passage."

"So; then you've come to right ship ter do it. But you'd better get to your quarters; there, along the alleyway. So long, young 'un, and when yer want a bit of a help, come along to me. I'm Old Yank, the boss of the engine-room."

Closing the door, Hal went along the alleyway till he came to a large cabin, above which was painted "Greasers." No one was in, but one of the bunks had evidently not been appropriated.

"That will do for me," thought Hal. "I'll put my bundle here, and then have a look round."

Five minutes later he descended the ladder which led to the depths of the ship. Beneath him was a maze of machinery. Down below were one or two figures moving about. A wave of hot air ascended, while a loud whir, caused by the revolving armature of the dynamo, filled the engine-room.

Hal felt somewhat out of his element; but, congratulating himself on the fact that he had some right to be where he was, he hastened down the ladder, and dropped to the floor.

Chapter III

An Eventful Voyage.

Lost in bewilderment, Hal stared at the machinery, wondering at its size and complexity, and which were the main and which the auxiliary parts. Then someone addressed him:

"Fine engines, and as clean as waste will make them," remarked a little man, who was dressed in naval uniform. "What can I do for you? I'm the 'second.'"

Hal turned round to find himself face to face with the second engineer.

"They are, indeed, very fine, and I have never seen anything like them before," he said. "But perhaps you will think I have no business here, so I had better tell you I am the new hand. I have shipped as a greaser."

"Ah, then you're the fellow I was told to expect. Now, tell me what you know about engines. Mind you, if you are ignorant of your surroundings, you have picked a very dangerous job. I've seen more than one man maimed for life, simply because he did not know where to look out for accidents, and therefore could not avoid them. On the other hand, I've known a greaser who had been at the game for many years meet his end simply and solely on account of carelessness. But I'm going ahead. What experience have you had?"

"I am sorry to say that I have never been in the engine-room of a ship before," Hal replied; "but I've worked amongst the machines we had at the foundry, and have learned to grease them, and also how to effect small repairs. Then I have spent some time in the turning shops, and, latterly, have been in the casting-pits and in the drawing-office."

"That's a record to be proud of. But it will be different here, and you will have much to learn. Come along with me. I'll take you round. Whip off your coat, and get hold of a handful of that cotton waste. After this you'll never be without it, for it's always wanted down here, and fellows get so used to having it; in fact, prefer it to a handkerchief."

Mr. Stoner, as the second in command of the ship's engines was known, smiled in a friendly way, and patted Hal on the shoulder as if to show that he had already made up his mind to patronize him during the voyage to America, so as to make it as pleasant as possible.

"When do you sail?" asked Hal, returning from the corner in which he had placed his coat.

"Late to-night, or to-morrow morning, I should think. We are due on the other side in about nine days, and put out again a week later."

Leading the way, he passed to the back of the nearer of two enormous pillars, which supported the cylinders above the revolving parts of the machinery. Then

he pointed to the pistons, which drove the propeller shaft, and from these to the hundreds of other parts which it would be useless to attempt to describe.

"Chockful of bits that make the old girl go, isn't it?" said Mr. Stoner. "Now we'll get into the stoke-hole. The dirty part first, and afterwards the job you'll have to tackle. But it's as well for you to see all that we've got down here."

He passed into a lower part of the ship. A wave of heat fanned Hal's face as he followed, and he was conscious of stepping into a warmer atmosphere.

"Yes, it's warm," said the "second," "but nothing to what I've known it in the Suez Canal or in the Red Sea. That's where it is hot. Now for the coal bunkers," he said. "We've one here, and another amidships, which we usually keep in reserve. Look out for your head again, and follow closely."

After inspecting the bunkers, Mr. Stoner then led the way back to the engine-room, and began to show Hal round it.

"This'll be your particular job," he said, "and you will have to keep your ears open. I'll tell you all I can, and then hand you over to our 'fourth.' His name is Masters, and he's been with us only a few trips. He's our electrical expert, and is as mischievous as a monkey."

For half an hour longer the "second" devoted himself to Hal, and instructed him in his duties. Then, as someone came swarming down the ladder, he led him forward to the foot.

"Here's Masters," he said. "I'll hand you over at once. He'll tell you about the life, and will let you know your hours of duty, and when you grub. Good-by, and bear in mind what I have told you."

Hal thanked him, and was then introduced to the "fourth," a young fellow of his own age, but shorter and slighter than himself.

"There," said Mr. Stoner, "I've brought you a pal. He's not exactly green, and he's only a temporary hand. He's tramping it to the other side."

"Right; I know the sort. Out of work at home, and bitten with the Yanks," laughed the youth known as Masters. "By the way," he continued, "what's your name, and where do you come from?"

"As we are to be comrades," said Hal, "I'll tell you something about myself. But I must not forget that you are an officer, so that comrade is not quite the word I should have used."

"Officer!" Masters cried hotly. "Officer be hanged! You've got to remember nothing of the sort. I am an officer if you like, but we're not going to talk about it. We are aboard a vessel plying to America, and the Yanks don't take too much notice of officers. Everyone as good as his fellow, whether millionaire or pauper, is what they think. But I interrupted you."

"You asked me who I was," said Hal, "and I may as well tell you. Things have gone rather badly for me, and you will realize the truth when I tell you that, barely a week ago, I had a fair prospect of some day becoming the owner of a flourishing foundry. But there was a smash, and the shock killed my poor father. I had to do something for a living, and it occurred to me that I might manage to get employment over the water. A friend helped me to get this berth, and here I am, ready to be guided by you, and prepared to rough it to any extent."

"Which shows that you are starting with the right kind of spirit," exclaimed the "fourth." "This is no drawing room, I can assure you, and at times the work is very hard indeed. But you'll get used to it. But, I say, this isn't work. Come along with me."

Masters gathered up a handful of cotton waste and led the way amongst the engines. Hal followed, taking pains to listen to all that was told him. After all, he found that the duties of a greaser were not onerous, for the parts of the machinery requiring constant oiling were not numerous, and in most cases were automatically lubricated. Half an hour was sufficient for his lesson, and then he left the engine-room.

"Say, young feller," said Masters, who, on the strength of a few trips over to America, was much given to aping its ways and speech, "suppose we knock off now. You've had a tidy teaching, and by the time we're over you'll have had your fill of machinery. Let's get something inside, for the old ship sheers off precious soon, and then there won't be so much as a bite for us still we're out of the river. Come on, and I'll show you to your mess, and fix it for you with your mates. They are a rough set, but good fellows."

Climbing out of the engine-room and turning to the left till he came next to the room in which Hal had already deposited his belongings, then glancing into a cabin, ushered his companion in. It was a tiny place, and a fixed table in center of it seemed to fill it almost entirely. Round it sat some five or six men, dressed in blue cotton overalls, and for the most part with sleeves rolled to the elbow and grimy hands. They were the greasers, or rather, half of them.

"Here's a new pard," Masters sang out. "Look after him, men. He's tramping it."

"Walk in, and make yerself comfortable," one of the men answered. "Sit right down there, pard, and fall to at it."

Thus bidden, Hal entered and took a place at the table. There was a dish of smoking and extremely appetizing sausages before him, and within a minute the man who had welcomed him had forked one on to a plate, and had added a pile of potato to it.

"There yer are," said the first. "We're sailin' ter day, and coffee and tea aer the stuff we drink. It's a kind er rule on the line. Fall to, pard, and look lively, for the standby'll be soundin' afore long."

Hal took the advice given him, and after eating heartily felt like working again. For a few minutes he remained in the cabin chatting with the men, then rose from his seat, and was in the act of leaving, when a bell sounded far away, and he, as well as the other greasers, hurried to the engine-room.

"The signal's gone to 'stand by,'" said Masters, who stood on the plates below. "Keep your optic on that dial, and watch 'Old Yank' when he comes. Another thing, mind you touch your cap to him. He's boss down here, and knows it."

A few minutes later the first engineer made his appearance, and stood to look round at the engines and men, ere he went to inspect all more closely. Hal stood near him, and at once touched his cap.

"Helloo! that you?" cried the "first" in a friendly voice. "Hang me, but you've took to it like a duck. Cappin' the chief and all. Wall, come a few hours more, and we'll see the stuff you're made of."

He made a round of the engines, and then returned to the bottom of the long iron ladder, where he waited talking to the third officer, by name Mr. Broom. Suddenly the bell tinkled, and the hand on the dial placed on the wall pointed to "stand by."

Again the gong sounded, and, looking up, Hal saw that the hand now indicated half steam ahead. He saw the "chief" place his fingers on a big wheel and revolve it rapidly to the right. Then he moved a lever, and the big piston-

rods shot downward, the crank plunged forward, swished round in a circle, and sent the propeller shaft rolling round. The MOHICAN trembled all along her length, and Hal felt her move ever so slightly. After that he had little time for observation, for his services were required.

About three in the morning the MOHICAN cleared the bar, and slowed up to allow the pilot to leave. Then the gong sounded again, and the lever was pushed right over, giving full steam to the engines.

"There, she'll stick at that if we've ordinary luck," said Masters. "Your watch is up, Marchant, and I'd advise you to turn in and make the most of the off time, for you'll feel pretty boiled in four hours if you don't get a rest."

Hoisting his weary body up the long ladder, Hal made for the greasers' cabin, and, without troubling to undress, threw himself on the bunk. He was asleep almost immediately, in spite of the proximity of the engines.

Four days passed uneventfully, and meanwhile the MOHICAN had been steadily forging a course towards America. The weather had been fine, but for the past two days a fresh breeze had been blowing from the north, and now a fine sleet was accompanying it.

When Hal turned in at night, and lay down to make the most of the respite allowed him, the MOHICAN was wallowing in the seas, and our hero was anything but comfortable. But he resolutely forced himself to swallow his evening meal. And now he lay down on the hard bunk, and at last he fell into an uneasy doze, when there was a terrific crash, and the MOHICAN was thrown on to her side. Hal was hurled from his bunk, and was brought to a sudden stop by striking against the wooden wall, now in the position of the floor. Close beside him was the door, and he struggled to it, aided by the light given by the electric burners, which still did their work.

Then shrill cries and a loud thumping proceeded from the engine-room.

"There's trouble down there. She's on her beam ends," thought Hal, in a half-dazed way. "I suppose she's sinking."

Next moment his soliloquy was cut short by the sudden righting of the ship. There was a tremendous tearing crash as the weight of water on her decks wrenched the rails and bulwarks away; then she swung into her proper position, throwing Hal violently to the other side of the cabin. Instantly he sprang to his feet, and darted towards the engine-room. It was dangerous work descending, but Hal did not pause, and soon gaining the iron plates below, he saw a sight that made him pause in consternation.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed. "What a wreck!"

Close beside the door leading to the stoke-hole lay the "second," motionless. Just within the door stood one of the stokers clutching the ironwork, and looking upon the scene as if in a dream. Farther to the right lay two other figures, while in the center was the most ghastly sight of all. Up and down, thrusting with irresistible force, the piston-rod of the low-pressure cylinder worked, revolving the crank which still hung loosely to its bearings, and tossing six feet of broken propeller shaft from side to side.

Thump, thump, thump! Time and again the sharp end crashed upon the plates, tearing them like paper. Bang! The bearing gave way, and the shaft of steel plunged downward, threatening to crash through the bottom of the ship.

What was to be done? Cut off steam? Yes. But who would take the risk? for still that giant shaft swung like a flail, smashing the floor of the engine-room;

and all the while a huge jet of scalding steam shrieked from a severed pipe close by.

"It must be done," said Hal to himself, taking in the situation at once. "I'll do it."

He waited a moment while the ship rolled her rails under, when he let his fingers slip from the ladder, and darted to the lever which cut off the steam.

Bang! Crash! The shaft struck the plates just beside his foot, and, giving him a violent blow upon the shoulder, sent him flying to the other side of the engine-room.

"I won't be beaten!" Hal exclaimed recklessly. "It must be done, or the ship will go to the bottom."

Once more he approached the lever, and with a jerk threw it over to the notch above which was stamped the word "Off." A moment later Hal felt a stunning blow on the side of his head, and fell to the floor as helpless and as unconscious as the "second."

What happened afterwards he did not know, but when he came to, he found himself lying in a corner of the engine-room, with Masters leaning over him, while a short length of rope secured him to a bolt in the wall, and prevented him from rolling with the ship.

"Pull yourself together now," said the latter. "There, sit up, and say how you feel. All right? Then I'll get off. We're in an awful mess below here."

He went across the iron plates, clinging to anything that would give him a holding. Hal watched him dreamily at first, and then with awakening interest. Then he moved, and a violent pang shot through his shoulder.

"George!" he groaned, "I feel badly knocked about. That shaft has given me a nasty bang, for my head's aching as if it would burst, and I am sore all over."

He lay back again, but thinking his services might be of use soon, sat up again and struggled to his feet.

"There's work to be done," he said doggedly, "and I am going to take a share of it."

Chapter IV

A Call for Volunteers.

Hal stood up and looked about him, feeling still dazed. Shouts filled the engine-room, and figures were hurrying to and fro. Suddenly the voice of "Old Yank" rang out clear:

"Boys," he said hoarsely, "this here ship's done for right away ef we're not precious slippy. That 'ere shaft'll be breaking clean away with the next big roll, and will sweep the whole room. Bustle there, and let's get cables and anything that's handy to shear things up. Here, Masters, skip off, and see what's to be had."

The latter, who was behind the massive pillar that supported one end of the cylinders, started for the ladder.

"I'll help," cried Hal. "Hold on, Masters; I'll come with you."

"So; that aer the way—that aer the style of grit," answered the young engineer. "Come along then," he continued; "there's precious little time ter lose."

That shaft has cracked the base of the big pillar, and ef another of those rolls catches her, she'll carry away every cylinder in the place."

He ran up the ladder, and Hal followed, feeling at first so stiff and sore that he could scarcely move.

"We want cables badly," said Masters. "Look here, Marchant, I'll skip along for'ard while you go aft. Find the quartermaster, and get him to help you. If he's my way I'll send for you, and if not I'll return. Savvey? Then off, and mind your toes as you cross the decks, for I've heard that there has been a clean sweep."

Turning on his heel, he groped his way along the passage, clinging to the rail to keep himself upon his feet. Hal went in the opposite direction, until he reached the alleyway, which led to the well-deck. And here another sight was presented to him.

"A clean sweep, as Masters said," he murmured. "Derricks the only things remaining, and not a sign of bulwarks. Ah! it's going to be a nasty place to cross."

Of this there could be no doubt, for the waist of the ship had filled to overflowing as she lay on her beam ends, and on righting, the water had torn the rails away on either side, and hurled overboard everything that was not built into the frame of the ship, or securely bolted to it. Only the derrick engine remained in the center, and Hal looked across a level sweep of wet and sippy deck between himself and the poop. At that moment an enormous wave curled over the side, and fell with all its force upon the MOHICAN. She shivered at the blow, and then recovering, reared her bows high in the air, sending the water rushing across the waist and over the side. Now was the time, and Hal made the most of it. He darted from the alleyway and raced across the slippery deck. Bump! The MOHICAN buried her bows deep in the sea, and at once a fresh wave rose high in the air, to fall with a crash upon the deck.

It was a moment of peril, and Hal sprang towards the derrick engine, and, passing his arms through the spokes of the fly-wheel, clung there with might and main. Instantly he was buried in a foaming mass of water. His limbs were almost pulled from his body, so great was the drag, but just as his strength was exhausted, the ship lurched and tossed the water off. A minute later Hal gained the poop, and clambered upon it by means of the hydrant pipes, for the ladders had long since gone overboard.

"Now for the quartermaster," he gasped.

He crossed to the deck-house, and pulled open a door. It shut to upon him with a bang, and he was precipitated across the narrow cabin.

"Hallo! What's up?" cried a man who was seated on the floor in one corner, busily preparing some lashings. "One of the greasers! What is it, lad?"

"I want some lengths of cable for the engine-room," Hal answered. "The propeller shaft has broken, and the cylinders may carry away. Can you help me?"

"Help! Why, I'm full up with work already," the quartermaster replied, "but ef yer want cables there's plenty of ten-foot lengths under the floor, in the lockers. Now you can see to it yourself, though how on airth you're going ter get 'em across to the engines is more than I can guess."

Hal knelt at the opening in the floor, and laboriously dragged five lengths of cable out.

"That's about all you'll manage," said the quartermaster. "You'd better get along with them."

"That will keep them from slipping when she rolls," he said to himself. "And now to get them across. They're heavy. Ah, I have it; a piece of rope will settle the matter."

He dived into the locker again, and finding a long cord, he at once passed it through the last link of the cables. Then he ran across to the edge of the poop, and having dragged them after him, he prepared to cross again to the alleyway.

"It's got to be done," Hal muttered. "Here goes!"

He dropped to the waist, and at once commenced to run across. *Crash!* A monstrous wave bumped on board, and catching him midway across the deck, washed him dangerously near the side; but a roll of the ship sent it in another direction, and gathering pace as the MOHICAN suddenly shot her bows into the air, the mass of water carried Hal aft, and finally flung him down, breathless, at the entrance of the alleyway.

"By George, that was a near one!" said Masters, who was standing near. "You're always in the wars. First you get smashed up by the shaft, and now you nearly sail overboard. Look here, if I hadn't gripped hold of your collar that time, you'd be a hundred yards astern by this. Hallo! What's this?"

"That? Oh, that's the rope I made fast to the cables," exclaimed Hal, struggling to his feet, to find that he still retained the length of cord in his hand.

"Tell you what, Marchant," said Masters, "for a greaser, and a green 'un aboard a ship, you walk right off with the prize! It takes no small allowance of grit ter do that rope trick. Come along, now; the 'chief is waiting for the cables."

He shook Hal's hand heartily, then helped him to haul the cables to the engine-room.

"Good boys!" said the chief engineer, coming towards them. "Where did you get a hold of them?"

"He did it," answered Masters, pointing to Hal. "I can tell you, sir, that he has grit. He just clung to the rope after going across to the poop, and when I saw him he was within an inch of being over the side. He got caught by a sea, and got badly flung about. But still he hung on to the rope, and that's how it is that you see the cables here so soon."

"So; aer that so?" said the "chief." "Reckon you're a good 'un, young Marchant. I don't forget as it wur you as turned the steam off the old girl. Ef it wasn't fer that we'd all be down below by this. Wall, this aint the time fer gassing, but 'Old Yank' won't let it slip, and when the time comes round we'll let the right folks know. Now, you had better skip, and fetch a second heap. We shall want them, and more. Look extry slippy, boys, while we get these bits fixed."

Hal and Masters sprang to the ladder again, and prepared to cross the waist in search of more cables. There was little time to lose, for as they stood in the engine-room both had noticed a big crack in the massive pillar that supported the cylinders. The end of the propeller shaft had evidently struck it a tremendous blow, and had fractured it.

"It looks very nasty," said Masters, as they climbed to the alleyway; "and ef the old girl rolls like she did when the shaft went, why, it'll be a case of all up. We'd better hurry up."

They stood at the opening of the alleyway for a few moments then raced across the deck. This time Hal was more fortunate, for he, as well as his companion, escaped injury. They reached the poop in safety, and were soon

hauling out more cable. A rope was run through the end links as before, and they started to return.

"Now's the time, and mind you run for it," exclaimed Masters, lowering himself to the waist.

Darting across as rapidly as he could, Hal had gained the shelter he aimed at before Masters was halfway there, and he turned just in time to see his companion caught by a mighty wave which came aboard at that moment. It hoisted the poor fellow high in the air, tossing him from his feet. Then it swept him along and dashed him violently against the corner of the alleyway. Hal just managed to grasp his coat as the water receded, and dragged him into the shelter. But Masters was badly hurt, for there was a long red seam along the side of his head, and he was bleeding profusely.

Picking him up, Hal carried him to the cabin and laid him on one of the bunks.

"Now for the rope and the cables," he said.

Stepping into the alleyway, he was retracing his steps when the MOHICAN rose high in the air, trembled violently as a sea struck her, and at once rolled heavily on to her beam ends.

"Good gracious! that will finish it!" exclaimed Hal. "Ah, what was that?"

A loud crash reached his ears, coming from the open door of the engine-room. He ran to the entrance and swarmed down the ladder.

Once more he was to see a sight that seldom meets the eye. The chief engineer had feared the effect of another roll, and though this one had lasted for only a few seconds, and the MOHICAN was now back in a more or less upright position, yet the sudden movement, the weight of so much metal thrown violently to one side, had proved too great a strain upon the fractured pillar. It had given way, and had carried the cylinders with it, the whole was bringing up against one of the massive ribs of the ship. One sharp angle, projecting beyond this support, had struck the steel plates and ripped them open.

A fountain of water spouted in as Hal reached the engine-room, swamping the place. Turning his eyes to other parts, he saw that the disaster was even greater than it at first seemed, for lying upon the floor were three greasers, while the "chief" was huddled at the foot of the broken pillar. At this moment Mr. Broom emerged from the stoke-hole.

"What a calamity!" he cried. "We are doomed. Nothing can save the MOHICAN. The next roll will shake those cylinders free, and then they will go through the side to the bottom, and we must follow. We are under-manned as it is, and now so many of our hands have been injured that we are helpless. What is to be done?"

He clung to the rail which surrounded the crank-pit, and looked despairingly at Hal.

"They are the same on deck," the latter answered. "The quartermaster told me that four of the hands had been swept overboard, while others had been seriously injured. But, wait. You want helpers, sir? Why not call upon the passengers? There are about forty aboard."

"The very thing!" cried the third engineer. "The work we want done can be managed by anyone with courage and muscle. Cut off, Marchant, and see what you can do. I shall be surprised if the whole lot don't volunteer to a man."

Hal at once darted up the ladder again, and, reaching the alleyway, turned to the right, and entered the big dining saloon. It was filled with ladies and gentlemen, the former reclining on the settees which ran round the side, while the latter were gathered in a group in the center discussing the probable fate of the ship. Hal at once walked up to them and dropped into a seat, for it was difficult to keep on one's feet owing to the movement of the ship.

"What is it? Has something more terrible happened?" asked a tall gentleman, who occupied the center of the group. "I suppose we must prepare for the worst?"

"No; I think not," Hal answered. "Gentlemen, I am sorry to have to bring you bad news. The propeller shaft broke, and before steam could be cut off the main support of the engines was fractured, and now the ship is in the greatest danger; for the cylinders have crashed against the side, and have made a large rent in the plates. If the wreck is not secured and the hole made tight, we shall certainly founder. The last roll the ship made completed the break."

"Then it is bad news!" exclaimed one of the passengers. "What will become of us all?"

"Wait; let us hear what this young fellow has to tell us," said the first speaker. "Perhaps he has something to propose."

"I have," Hal replied. "All our engine-room hands are injured, and we want help. Will any of the passengers volunteer?"

"Yes, here is one," exclaimed the tall passenger. "Here is a strong arm and a ready will. Command me, and I will do all that I can."

"And I, and I," came from each of the others in quick succession.

"You see that all are ready," said the first speaker, whose name was Mr. Brindle. "Now, what can we do?"

Hal thought for a moment before answering. Then he turned to the passengers and said:

"It is likely to be a long job, and therefore I propose that you divide into two parties—the first to commence work at once, and the others to come down in two hours' time. The first party had better bring all the blankets and bedding they can. We shall want something with which to stop the rent."

He rose from his seat, and staggered out.

"Well," said Mr. Broom, as our hero swung himself on to the floor below, "what luck?"

"They have volunteered to a man."

"I thought they would," was the satisfied answer. "But how are we to employ them? Tell you what, Marchant, some of the passengers will have to set to trimming. We've been taking coal from the starboard bunker, and this side is full, so that it will all have to be put over to the other. Will you boss the gang? I'm the only officer left down here, and most of the greasers have been hurt. I'll look to the engines, and will shear them up, if you'll take the other job."

"I'll do my best," said Hal. "Ah, here they come."

At that moment fifteen passengers began to descend the long ladder, each carrying a roll of blankets under his arm.

"Hallo, what's this?" the engineer exclaimed. "Bedding! What's that for?"

"I thought you'd want something to plug the rent," said Hal. "Don't you think it might do?"

"Do! Of course it will! Young fellow, you've a head on those shoulders. You're a puzzle. Do! Here, pile it all over by the dynamo; and let me thank you now, gentlemen, for the manner in which you have come forward."

"Not a bit of it," answered Mr. Brindle. "We're here for our own sakes as well as yours; though I own that we should have volunteered in any case. Now, what are we to do?"

"Put yourselves in his hands," said Mr. Broom. "He's shown that he has a head; he's got no end of pluck, too. Take your orders from him, and you'll be doing your very best for all hands."

He waved to the volunteers, and at once went to a group of stokers and greasers near by. Hal turned to the stoke-hole without a word, and, passing through the tunnel between the boilers, entered the place set aside for coal. It was divided down the center by a bulkhead, which reached from the floor to the deck above for the greater length of the bunker, but was cut down to a height of four feet some six yards from the door.

"Now, gentlemen," said Hal, "all this coal wants to be moved to the other side so as to check the list. I propose that a few toss the stuff down from above, while the others pitch it over the bulkhead."

A minute later all were engaged, plying the implements as if they had been accustomed to them and to no others all their lives.

"We'll have a breather now," said Hal, an hour after he and his comrades had set to work. "Let us have a five minutes' interval, and then at it again, for you will do better if you have a short rest."

The trimming gang stood there breathing heavily, and making the utmost of the respite. Some sat down upon heaps of coal, while others leaned against the sides, and placing their hands upon their hips, supported them there, as if their weight was too much for them.

"Time's up, gentlemen. We'd better set to again," said Hal.

"My hat, sir, but you are a stern taskmaster," cried Mr. Brindle, giving vent to a hearty laugh. "Here are we poor fellows ready to drop, and you give us a bare five minutes. But the lad is right. Gentlemen, think of the lives depending upon us."

An hour later the second batch of volunteers descended, and replaced the first, but Hal and Mr. Brindle remained at work.

All day long the two parties took it in turns to labor in the coal-bunker, and when night came, Hal was able to dismiss his gang, and inform Mr. Broom that the task was finished.

"Good!" exclaimed the latter. "Your fellows have worked like bricks, and have well earned a sleep. You, too, had better get one. Cut along up to your bunk, and leave this to me. I'm used to long hours, and will keep watch below. The MOHICAN is steering now. That sea-anchor is overboard, and we're able to keep fairly clear of water. Now, off you go."

He waved to the ladder, and Hal at once took his advice. He was, indeed, worn out with his labors, for all day long he had shoveled coal, till the skin was worn off his hands. Accordingly, he did not argue with the "third," but, going to the ladder, climbed to the alleyway. He went to a locker, and finding the remains of a loaf, tore a portion off, and went, munching it, to his bunk. Less than five minutes later he was so sound asleep that he would have slept the clock round had not a violent thirst from the coal-dust he had inhaled caused him to leave his bed in search of something to drink.

Chapter V

No Rest for the Weary.

An uncouth object Hal looked as he left his bunk and sought something with which to quench his thirst.

He went to a filter which was kept near the stairway leading to the saloon. It was full, and he took a long and satisfying drink. That done, he returned to the alleyway, where he stopped and looked out.

"Good!" he exclaimed. "The sea is falling, and there is scarcely any wind. That gives the MOHICAN a better chance. But Mr. Broom will be wanting me."

He looked about, and seeing the nozzle of a hydrant at hand, gave it a turn by means of the key. Whipping his shirt off, he bent beneath the spouting water which gushed out, and thoroughly soused himself. "That's better," he said, catching a glimpse of himself in the glass. "I look more like a Christian again. Now for Masters."

He went to the engineer's cabin and knocked.

"Come in," someone cried.

Hal entered, to find the ship's doctor engaged in dressing Masters' wounds.

"Well, what now, my lad?" asked the doctor. "More casualties? If so, I shall be overwhelmed."

"It's nothing, sir," Hal answered. "I came to inquire after my friend. How is he? I left him here yesterday morning, with a big cut across his head, and haven't been able to come near him since."

"And we only discovered him a matter of half an hour ago. He has been lying here ever since. He has a crack across the top of his head that would kill the average nigger; but, thanks to an extraordinarily thick skull, he's none the worse."

Hal looked on for a few moments, then he left the cabin and climbed down to the engine-room. How changed the place was since the day he first descended! Then all was bustle, and after the ship had left port, the noise, the whir of machinery had been unending. That was barely twenty hours ago, and now all was still. The wreck of a portion of the fine engines was piled against the side, wound round with innumerable lengths of cable. Then, at the end of it all, a mass of blanket and bedding bulged into the room, looking peculiarly out of place. As Hal glanced at the rent which had been plugged during the night, a mass of water struck the ship on that side, and drove in the caulk, a flood of water flowing in immediately.

"That's scarcely safe," thought Hal. "I had better find the 'third,' and tell him about it."

But there was no need to do so, for at this moment Mr. Broom appeared from behind part of the machinery.

"There's more work for us," he said wearily. "I've had my eye on that rent all night, and the plug has gone at last. How are you, youngster?"

"Fit and well," Hal answered. "But you look worn out, sir. Why not turn in? Leave this job to me. I'll get the same hands as I had before, and we'll soon see to it."

"You can't work without something to keep you going," the "third" replied. "Besides, I don't know that I am willing to have the job done by someone else. The poor old chief is dead, and the 'second' was knocked out of time by the first smash, so I'm in sole charge. I want a sleep, I own, but I'm not done yet. You cut up now, and perhaps when you return I'll take a turn at the breakfast table."

"But I'm as fresh as a lark," exclaimed Hal, "whereas you are completely done up. Give me directions what to do, and then turn in and have a sleep. There will be heaps to get in order when you awake, and as you are the only engineer officer left on the active list, you ought to take care of yourself."

"You're right there, lad," the "third" replied, sitting down suddenly upon a step of the ladder, and turning a deathly gray, his pallor showing through the thick layer of grime which covered his face. "I'm done, and need a good rest to put me right. I'll tell you how we'll manage it. You slip up and get a bite and a cup of tea; then you can relieve me. You know what I want done. Plug this rent, and brace the wrecked machinery still more. Then, if another gale springs upon us, we shall feel secure."

"Very well, sir; I'll get my breakfast and relieve you," said Hal briskly. He hastened in search of breakfast. The mess-room was empty, and when Hal looked into the cabin occupied by the engineer officers, he found that it had been converted into a hospital, in which the wounded were being treated.

"Everything seems to be disorganized," he said. "I'll go to the pantry and see what the stewards can do."

He passed through the alleyway, and mounted the narrow stairs.

"Can I have some breakfast?" he asked of one of the stewards, who happened to be there.

"Breakfast! Of course you can," was the hearty answer. "You fellows down below have worked like bricks, and deserve something good."

"Did you ever see such a smash?" he proceeded, pointing to the shelves of the pantry. "Everything is upside down, and more than half the crockery has been shattered."

While speaking to Hal the steward had been plying a tin-opener, and at this moment turned out a big tongue on to a plate. He cut off a slice, and making a sandwich, handed it to Hal. Then a bowl of tea was put in his hand, and Hal was on the point of retiring when Mr. Brindle appeared.

"My young friend the greaser, I think," he exclaimed. "Ah, how are matters down below this morning? I assure you that I and my comrades were so fatigued by the healthy exercise you gave us, that we retired immediately the trimming was completed, and have slept like so many logs ever since. But, thank Heaven, all looks well to-day, and hope is high in everyone's heart."

"Yes, all is well," Hal responded; "but there is still work to be done."

"That sounds as though another call might be made for volunteers," said Mr. Brindle. "Come, now, is that not the case?"

"That is what I propose to do, Mr. Brindle. You see, the engine-room is practically deserted. But for a few stokers who keep steam in two of the boilers, and the third engineer, the place is quite empty. Mr. Broom is done up, and when I return will place me in charge, and go to his bunk. As soon as he has gone, I propose to replug the rent."

"Then you will most certainly want us," said Mr. Brindle. "Come in here, lad, and talk the matter over. No; you must not refuse. We are all equals and

comrades on this ship, and no one could object to your taking a meal in the saloon, particularly at this time. Now, come along in, and take your breakfast comfortably."

It was useless to attempt to refuse compliance with Mr. Brindle's request simply on the ground that he was only a greaser in the engine-room. In ordinary circumstances, the presence of such a person in the saloon would have led to a scene, and the fact would have been reported to the captain. But things were changed now. The MOHICAN was little better than a wreck, her crew diminished, and those who were left were incapable of carrying on the work. The call for volunteers had at once placed regular hands and passengers on a common footing. Many of them had heard Mr. Brindle speaking to Hal, and they at once supported his request.

"You must come in, young sir," one of them cried. "Come along, or you will be offending everyone in the saloon."

Hal blushed, grasped the bowl of tea firmly, and tucking the roll of tongue and bread beneath one arm, made his way to a seat.

The passengers gathered round him and plied him with eager questions.

"Now, what is wanted?" asked one of them, with a laugh.

"The lives of all on board depend upon our exertions," Hal answered. "With good weather we need not fear, but if the gale blows up again, the MOHICAN may very easily go to the bottom. That rent has opened again, and must be closed. Will anyone help me do it?"

He looked round at the group of passengers, and was rewarded with an emphatic nod from each.

"We shall all be there," said Mr. Brindle. "And when the rent is patched, what follows?"

"The cylinder covers should be taken off and the piston-rods and cranks removed. I fancy I know enough about engines to instruct you, and if not, we must wait till to-morrow."

"Perhaps I could help you there," remarked Mr. Brindle. "On the plantations in Cuba a trained engineer is a rarity. As a consequence, one becomes something of an expert one's self. Many a time I have had to effect some minor repair, so that I have picked up some knowledge of machinery. Now, when shall we come?"

"As soon after breakfast as possible, and I would suggest that you bring more blankets."

"Very well, Marchant. We'll divide into two parties as before, and you can expect the first in a quarter of an hour."

Hal thanked him, and left the saloon. Then he went for'ard, and looked up the carpenter.

"We want some planks, a few hammers, and a saw down in the engine-room," he said. "Can you let us have them, Chipps?"

"You can take what you can find," was the answer. "There, the store is under the poop. Take a look round and help yourself."

Hal went into the space set apart for carpenter's stores, and dragged out two long planks. These he carried to the engine-room. Then he made other trips, bringing hammers, nails, a roll of canvas, a saw, and many useful things.

"Now for Mr. Broom," he said. "I'll get down and free the poor fellow, for he looked worn out with hard work and want of sleep."

Glad of the relief, Mr. Broom climbed the ladder, swaying from side to side, and looking as if he were incapable of controlling his limbs. But he was not the one to give in easily. He reached the top with an effort, went to the cabin, and, tumbling upon a bunk, fell into a deep slumber.

A few minutes later the first batch of passengers appeared, and a consultation was held.

"How are you going to do it, lad?" asked Mr. Brindle, looking at the rent in the vessel's side, and at the mass of blankets displaced by the sea. "It seems to me that something stronger is wanted—something behind the bedding, to force it into the opening and keep it in position."

"I thought of that," said Hal, "and I've got planks from the carpenter. I suggest that we cut lengths, which will go from end to end of the rent. Then back them with cross-pieces. If nailed together in that position, we shall have a fairly solid board, which can be pressed against the bedding and wedged in place."

"That's about as good a way as any," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "But I've one idea. Get your canvas soaked with tar, and stretch it over the blankets. When the edges are squeezed into the rent they will keep the water out. Undoubtedly our first job is to get the plugging done. Now, young sir, put us at it."

It was work which was urgently needed; and the passengers, looking very business-like in their shirt-sleeves, set to at it so heartily that the rent was safely filled by afternoon.

"Now we'll tackle the cylinders and cranks," said Hal. "It has to be done, and better now than later on."

The work was tackled willingly, and when the "third" descended to the engine-room he found the rent safely plugged, the wreck of the engines securely braced, and the cylinder covers and all movable parts taken away, and made fast elsewhere.

He stopped abruptly at the bottom of the ladder, and fell back a pace in astonishment.

"Why, what's this?" he cried, as though he could not believe his senses. "The hole plugged as tight as a barrel, the wreck stayed up with yards of cable, and all the movable parts unshipped and set aside. Here, what's been happening? Have we fallen in with another ship, and borrowed a crew of engine hands?"

"It means that we carried out your orders, sir," said Hal. "You were dead tired, and left the engine-room to me. Our friends, the passengers, came to our aid again, and this is their handiwork."

"Yes, that is so, and glad have we been to help," Mr. Brindle interposed. "But allow me to tell you, Mr. Broom, though we have carried out your orders, it was under the direction of this lad. It seems extraordinary that he, who never saw the machinery of a big ocean-going steamer until a week ago, should so soon be placed in a position of responsibility. Few would have been so level-headed. The lad has won our admiration, for he is as free from conceit as he is full of resolution. He will get on in the world."

"So he will," the "third" responded. "The lad's got grit, sir—the stuff that won't give way whatever the danger. Who stopped the engines, and nearly got knocked into so much pulp? Why, this kid. I'm not going to say one word about the other part, though we don't forget in a hurry that it was he who stuck like blazes to the trimming. And now he just goes and packs me off to my bunk, and

then coolly tidies the whole place up, and there isn't anything more to be done! Why, I might just as well have had my sleep out!"

"Ha, ha, ha! So you might," laughed Mr. Brindle. "But come along to the saloon. We are all in need of a meal."

"By George, we are!" Mr. Broom replied. "Come, Marchant; we'll defer the discussion of your good works till later. But when the time comes for you to seek for a job on the other side, you've one here who is your friend, and who will gladly help you."

"And here is another," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "But to dinner now."

Early next day passengers and crew ascended to the deck, for the time had come to commit to the deep the bodies of those who had been killed.

It was a sad group that stood upon the planks, hats reverently in hand, and peered into the sea, soon to become the grave of those unfortunate comrades stretched still and motionless at their feet. Swathed in blankets, with fire-bars to bear them down to their last resting-place, the chief engineer and two hands lay awaiting the last rites at the hands of their friends. Very earnestly, and as if he would emphasize every word, the captain read the burial service, while the ship's bell tolled mournfully. Then, at a sign from the quartermaster, the grating upon which the bodies lay was tipped by two of the hands, and the three forms slipped from beneath the pall, and disappeared forever.

Chapter VI

A Friend in Need.

It would be tedious to describe the manner in which the MOHICAN finally reached New York, for from the date of the accident to her machinery, and the successful plugging of the enormous rent in her side, all went well.

But what had once been a fine-looking vessel was now little better than a bare hulk, with smoke-stack and masts rising from a deck which was clear of everything save the broken remnants of fixtures which had defied the fury of the seas.

"There's one thing about her," said Mr. Broom to Hal, "she's been stripped clean, and looks dismantled, but she's right and tight still, and will well repay the overhauling which will be necessary before she can put to sea again. Wait till we get alongside the dock; there will be no end of excitement! And when it is known through what dangers we have come, we shall be the talk of New York; and won't the newspaper correspondents rush for us!"

And, indeed, this was the case. No sooner was the MOHICAN moored than thousands came down to look at her, and roamed all over her decks, marveling at the manner in which she had been buffeted, and at the pluck and skill which had brought her safely into port.

"I call it wonderful!" said the line manager, addressing the crew after their arrival. "Two weeks ago business called me across from England to New York, and I experienced the full fury of the same hurricane which wrought such destruction here. I know what your difficulties have been, and I am glad to be here to congratulate you all. It is difficult to thank you sufficiently, and it is almost impossible to single out any individual for special praise when all have

worked so well. Your captain, however, has done remarkably; he has shown such seamanship, skill, and courage, that I at once promote him to the command of one of our big passenger ships. Your second and third engineers have well earned promotion, and, by all accounts, so has one of their subordinates. I refer to the youth called Marchant. He, too, shall be rewarded. And now, as by bringing the MOHICAN safely to port you have saved the company a considerable loss, I am glad to be able to tell you that two thousand pounds will be divided proportionately amongst you."

The manager bowed and retired, leaving the crew to discuss the matter. Next morning Hal found that his share was ten pounds, and to this a further sum of ten was added for stopping the engines at the time of the accident.

"You're a rich man," said Mr. Brindle chaffingly. "At any rate, you have made more in one trip than you would have earned in three or four months. What do you propose to do with yourself, may I inquire?"

"Really I cannot say, Mr. Brindle; of course, I am awfully lucky! The twenty pounds, with what I had before, will enable me to live while I am looking for a job."

"And have you any decided preference?" asked Mr. Brindle. "I mean, must the employment be in America? I have a proposal to make, and you must consider it before you decide. I am a Cuban planter. I told you that I had some rough engineering knowledge. It has been acquired amongst the machinery on my plantations. I want an engineer, one who can act as master in my absence. Will you accept the post? The pay shall be good. You shall have a percentage on the profits, and where your department is concerned I will give you a free hand. But in addition to the engines, I shall want you to help me with the management of the plantation."

He sat on the rail of the ship, and looked curiously at Hal; for he had taken a fancy to our hero, and was impressed by his behavior on the ship.

"It is very good of you, Mr. Brindle," Hal exclaimed. "I never expected to be offered such an important post, and I accept with pleasure. Tell me when I am to sail, and where I am to go to."

"I am glad you fall in with the plan," Mr. Brindle answered. "To tell you the truth, I have been itching to get hold of you ever since you set us to work at that trimming. You showed a fine example. You see, appearance and manner is everything when dealing with blacks; and the natives of Cuba, who are anything from genuine negro to almost pure Spanish, recognize and look up to a European who knows how to treat them, and can show them what to do. Now, as to marching orders, I have business which will keep me in New York for a few days; after that we'll go to Florida, where I have another plantation. From there we will sail to Havana, and three days later we shall reach the hacienda, which goes by the name of 'Eldorado,' and is one of the most beautiful spots I have ever seen. But when can you leave the ship? I should be glad to take you with me this evening."

"I can get away whenever I wish," Hal answered, overwhelmed by the prospect before him. "But where do you stay? I am sorry to say that my clothes are rough, and scarcely fitted for polite society."

"That is a matter that is easily arranged, my lad. Now, pack your traps, and come along. Leave the clothes to me, for as my engineer you are given a free kit, just as they say to the soldier."

Mr. Brindle smiled pleasantly, and, turning away, hurried to his cabin to collect his baggage.

Left to himself, Hal went below, and soon had his few belongings packed in a bag. Then he went the round of his friends, and took farewell of them.

"Lucky beggar!" exclaimed Masters, whom Hal found propped up in his bunk, with his head enveloped in bandages. "You are a fortunate fellow, Marchant! But you deserve it all. I wish you were staying, for, after what has passed, I am sure we should have been capital friends, and had some splendid trips together. And now you say you are off to Cuba, and I suppose in a few weeks' time you will be lording it over hundreds of niggers. Well, old man, must you go? Good-by, and the best of luck."

"Thank you," Hal answered, with a laugh. "A rapid recovery to you. As to my looking a swell and doing the grand, why, that's all humbug. Ta, ta; and if ever you come to Cuba, look me up."

Whatever idea Hal may have had of his appearance in the future, the matter was soon settled when he and Mr. Brindle had left the ship.

"There, in you hop," said the latter, motioning him to enter the cab which had pulled up beside the wharf.

Then he mentioned the name of a fashionable hotel, to which they were driven. They obtained rooms, then emerged from the enormous building, which rose for many stories into the air, and entered one of the numerous electric cars that run through the streets of New York, and within ten minutes they were entering the doors of a big tailoring establishment known as Riarty's Store.

"I always get my clothes here," said Mr. Brindle. "It is not more expensive than obtaining them locally in Cuba, and as they have my measure for suits, boots, and hats, I can get anything by writing. Ah, good-day, Mr. Riarty."

He suddenly stepped towards a florid man, whose enormous proportions almost dwarfed his own.

"This young gentleman is my overseer, and requires suitable clothes for plantation life," he said. "You can take his measure, and I should like the things in four days. But he wants a ready-made suit for wearing in town, and an evening one as well. Can you do it?"

"To be sure I can," was the ready answer. "Step this way. One of the assistants shall attend to you."

Hal was astonished at the extent of the order. In the old days—which already seemed so very long ago, though only a few weeks had actually elapsed—he would have thought nothing of it. Then he was the son of a wealthy man, and had no need to stint himself; now it was totally different, and a gentleman, who was not much more than a stranger, though one with a kind heart, would pay whatever was called for.

"But you are ordering too much," expostulated Hal. "I shall never need all these clothes. Besides, think of the cost!"

"The cost, my dear young sir; that is my affair," Mr. Brindle laughed pleasantly. "I can assure you that if you only do your duty by me you will rapidly repay the outlay. As to there being too many things, you will want every suit I have ordered. I am an old hand, and know now exactly what will be useful."

Hal was silenced, but determined to do his utmost to repay the kindness of his benefactor. Fortunately, Mr. Riarty had a smartly cut plain suit which fitted

his youthful customer, and another of evening clothes which required but slight alteration.

"We'll take the first with us," said Mr. Brindle, "and Mr. Riarty can send the other to the hotel in time for dinner. Good-day, sir, and please do not disappoint me. Remember, in four days' time we require the bulk of the order. Come along now, my friend. By the way, I must have some shorter name for you. Marchant is far too long. How are you usually called? Hal? Ah, that is short, and sounds well. It fits your character, and is a good one."

Five days later they boarded the railway cars running south, and Hal had his eyes opened as to the possibilities of traveling in comfort. The saloons and dining-cars were decorated in sumptuous fashion; and when night came, the accommodation had nothing of the make-shift about it. Americans, he discovered, did not consider that discomfort went hand-in-hand with travel. Their railways were designed for speed, safety, and easy running, and their cars for rest and freedom from vibration. Mr. Brindle led the way into the smoking-room at the end of the cars, and pressed the button for the porter.

"We shall want two compartments through to Florida," he said. "See that it is a good one, and take our small traps there."

When the man had gone Mr. Brindle turned to Hal, and, pointing to a hand-bag, said:

"All save that may remain in the sleeping saloon, but the bag you see contains notes, gold, and valuable securities. Now, I am going to give you a job. Your duties will commence from this moment, for I place you in charge of the bag, and will beg of you never to allow it out of your sight."

"Then you may rely upon me to look after it, and wherever I go your bag shall come with me."

Hal was as good as his word. Hour after hour the train hurried on. Occasionally the cars would pull up at some wayside station to allow a change of locomotives, and then the passengers would descend and take a short walk to stretch their legs and take the stiffness out of them. On such an occasion Hal strolled along the platform, leaving Mr. Brindle reading in the car. It was a sultry morning, and, feeling hot and fatigued, he sat down on a bench, being joined first by one passenger and then by a second, the former entering into conversation with him.

"Busy scene, sir," he said with some foreign accent. "Traveling alone, sir?" continued the stranger. "I should say you're not. The gentleman with you is Señor—I mean, Mr. Brindle of Cuba?"

Hal felt annoyed at the catechism through which he was being put.

"Well," he answered curtly, "and what if he is?"

What reply the dark-bearded stranger was about to give was cut short by the sudden clanging of a bell, and by the cry from the conductor, "All aboard!"

Starting from the seat, Hal ran some dozen paces, when he remembered the bag intrusted to him, and which he had placed by his side. To his consternation it was not where he had left it on the bench; a moment later, however, he noticed with a thrill of surprise that the stranger had it, and was hastening with it along the platform.

"Hi, there! Stop!" cried Hal, running after him. "What do you mean by taking my bag?" he demanded indignantly, rushing up to the man, and grasping the handle.

"Señor's bag! Pardon, but this is my friend's," replied the dark, Spanish-looking stranger, feigning astonishment and some amount of anger.

"Your friend's! Nonsense! It's mine! Give it up!" Hal cried, and without more ado wrenched the bag away.

"Sir, how do you dare? Ah, but here is my friend himself. He will explain," the stranger replied hotly. "Then, señor, you shall answer."

"What is this? What is the trouble?" the second man, a short, swarthy-looking fellow, asked, joining them at this moment. "Come, the cars are about to start."

"The trouble!" his friend replied. "See; we hasten to board the train, and you forget your bag. I would rescue it for you when this fine gentleman wishes to prevent me."

"But the bag is not mine; it belongs to him," the second man replied blandly, indicating Hal with a wave of his hand.

At once the face of the first speaker changed. He smiled, showing an excellent set of teeth, and made a profuse apology.

"My dear señor, but you must pardon me," he said. "It was my error, and a grievous one indeed. A thousand pardons. Señor must have thought me a thief!"

Hal certainly did, but it was not quite wise to admit it, and as the cars were moving, he acknowledged by a curt nod the theatrical bow with which he was favored, and hurriedly exclaiming, "I am glad the matter is settled," turned on his heel and boarded the cars. But one thing struck his attention at the last moment and filled his mind with suspicion. In the hurry of replacing his hat the Spanish-looking stranger had displaced a coal-black beard, and disclosed for the fraction of a minute a clean-shaven chin. Next moment the beard was back in its place, and the two men had leaped on to the train.

"I don't like the look of those fellows," thought Hal, as he took his place beside Mr. Brindle. "It was a trick to steal the bag, and from what was said I feel sure that they know who we are, and what valuables I was in charge of. Do you happen to know either of those two men who were speaking to me on the platform?" he suddenly asked, leaning forward to address his companion.

"Do you mean those who joined the cars after you? No, I cannot say that I do; and yet something about the bearded one struck me as familiar. What about them? They seemed to me to be holding a heated conversation with you."

"They very nearly walked off with your bag," Hal answered. Then he described the facts of the case.

"Yes, it looks nasty," said Mr. Brindle at last. "It appears to me that those two are scoundrels. Strange, but one certainly seems to have a familiar face. Pshaw! It cannot be! But we must be on our guard in future."

Chapter VII

All But Killed.

Undoubtedly an attempt had been made to deprive Hal of his charge. Had Hal waited another minute before discovering the absence of his possession, the thieves would certainly have escaped with the valuables.

"Yes, they are rogues," said Mr. Brindle that evening, returning to the subject as he and Hal sat down to dinner, "and the more I think about it the more certain I feel that I am right. After dinner we will endeavor to ascertain who they are."

Accordingly, half an hour later, they rose from their seats, just as the train drew up at a platform, and walked from end to end of the long string of cars, failing, however, to see the two adventurers.

"They've gone; and, after all, it was to be expected," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "I suppose they slipped off a few minutes after boarding the train. There can have been no difficulty, as we crawled out of the station. Well, we shall not be troubled again; but let it be a lesson to you, Hal. Nowadays, one ought to be most careful when dealing with strangers."

Sauntering back, they took their seats once more, and looked at the people on the platform. At length the bell clanged, and to the familiar cry of "All aboard!" the cars were once more set in motion.

"Hallo! Those fellows were here all the time," said Hal, glancing at two figures on the platform. "Look, Mr. Brindle! There are the men who tried to steal the bag!"

"Ah, is that so, Hal?" exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "Precious scoundrels they look too, and the one with the beard strikes me again as being a man I have met before. Well, we need not trouble, for the train is off, and they are left behind. Now, lad, we'll have a good sleep, and to-morrow, when we leave our berths for breakfast, we shall be within an hour of Sable Bay."

Ten minutes later our hero was lying between the sheets, looking sleepily at the shaded electric light above him.

Meanwhile, what had become of the two men who had attempted to deprive Hal of the bag?

No sooner had the car passed in which Mr. Brindle and his young engineer were seated, than the swarthy-looking foreigners leaped on to the step of the following one, and hastily passing through the smoking-saloon, entered a small cupboard set apart for the porter.

"That was well managed, Señor Capitan," the darker of the two at once exclaimed, seating himself. "Ha, ha, did you not see them look at us? It is clear that they suspected our game, and no doubt their inspection of the cars was to discover us and have us ejected. We have played our cards well. While they fancy that we are miles behind them, we are in reality but a few yards away. No doubt this negro will entertain us till the time for action arrives, and then we will have the gold you say the bag contains, even though that stalwart young Englishman objects."

He spoke in Spanish, gesticulating and gabbling the words, and introducing a tone of marked disdain when alluding to the porter. There was little doubt that he was a half-caste, and owed some part of his existence to the negro race to which he had alluded with such contempt.

"When do we make the attempt, Señor Capitan?" he asked. "See, it is half-past eight now, and the majority of passengers are thinking of going to bed. Shall you try at midnight, or will you think it best to wait till the early hours of to-morrow?"

The man addressed did not answer for the moment, but, removing the beard from his chin, slowly rolled a cigarette. He was a small, active-looking man, of undoubted Spanish blood. At first sight he would have been called a handsome

fellow, but a glance at his eyes and mouth altered that impression. There was something not altogether pleasing about him.

"You are overhasty, and forget yourself, Pedro," he said at length. "One would have thought that it was all of your planning. Remember that it was I who decided how we would act; and do not forget that in undertaking to abstract this bag, I am risking far more than you."

"For which you will, no doubt, extract a proportionately large share of the booty," grumbled the one who had been called Pedro.

"Perhaps. And why not? Am I not the leader? and are you not the servant? But do not let us argue so, or we might quarrel, and that would be bad for one of us. Listen to me, and see that you do not interrupt. This English brat, who just awoke in time to upset the plan which I had devised so carefully, is still in charge of the precious bag for which we have traveled so far, and from which we hope to recoup ourselves. We know that he is about to retire for the night, for the porter has told us so. Very good. What of the others? They are weary, and will turn in early, so as to awake fresh and rested to-morrow. Our accomplice here, the negro whom you scowl at so heavily, will tell us when all in that car have retired. That will be our time. Any noise we may make will be unnoticed, owing to the fact that it is so early; while if this young fool of an Englishman shouts—well, perhaps the rattle of the train will drown everything!"

"Perhaps," Pedro growled. "And what if the sounds are heard?" he asked. "Supposing the Señor Englishman cries loudly for help?"

"Ah! then he must look to himself. We will deal gently with him till then; but if he refuses to be silent—In any case, you have the revolver and some inches of steel? Now we understand each other," said the Spaniard. "We will wait till all is clear, when we will enter the Señor Englishman's compartment and bind him. That done, this porter will signal for the cars to stop and will raise an alarm. Of course he will not know precisely what has happened, nor, if questions are asked will he have an idea of the appearance of the two mountebanks who have dared to commit robbery on the cars. Our friend, the Señor Brindle, will not dream of us; for did he not see us descend from the cars some miles back? By the time the passengers have collected their senses we shall be a mile behind, hidden in the forest, and it will be evil luck indeed if the bag which we covet is not with us. Then back to 'the ever-faithful island,' Cuba, the island of freedom, where a Spaniard who is poor may live in contentment, certain of being able to return to his native country with provision for the remainder of his life, and all plucked from the islanders. Yes, Pedro, we will return home and, later on, we will repeat the process of bleeding the Señor Brindle."

"Buenos, Señor Capitan! You are a veritable wonder!" Pedro cried excitedly, waving his cigarette in the air, and patting his comrade on the knee. "And now to pass the time. It is dull sitting here doing nothing but smoke and listen to the rattle of the train. Here, boy, bring glasses and a bottle."

Thus addressed, the porter produced a decanter of liquor and two tumblers, and for an hour or more the two conspirators refreshed themselves, and carried on an eager conversation in low tones, in the voluble, gesticulating manner common to their countrymen. At length the porter, who had departed and left them to themselves, returned to inform them that all was clear.

"Now for the money, Pedro!" the Spaniard exclaimed. "Wait, though; let us pay this good fellow for his services."

Taking a purse from his pocket, he placed four dollars in the porter's hand, and led the way into the smoking saloon. Two minutes later they were standing at the end of the car in which Hal was sleeping. They paused for a moment as if in fear, then they opened the door, and crept along the passage till they were outside the compartment he occupied.

"No, not there, Señor Capitan. The English boy has gone into the other bunk," Pedro whispered, pointing to the next compartment, in which Mr. Brindle lay. "See, I am sure of it, for here is his coat, hanging outside the door."

"Are you quite sure, Pedro?" the Spaniard asked doubtfully. "The porter said we should find him in the fifth from the forward end of the car, and this is certainly the one."

"That is as you say," was the reply. "But here are the young man's boots. It is clear the negro is mistaken."

For more than a minute the two crouched silently in the corridor, doubtful as to the compartment in which Hal slept, and in which lay the bag they hoped to capture. It was, indeed, a puzzle, and it was long before they could come to any solution. To enter the wrong compartment meant ruin to all their hopes. But more than that might come of it, for Mr. Brindle was a powerful man, and to be caught in his clutches would be no joke. It was not a pleasant thing to think about, and it troubled the Spaniard. He ground his teeth, and, muttering an oath, whispered in Pedro's ear:

"Keep the revolver," he said, "and give me the knife. Whatever happens, we must contrive to get away."

Convinced by the boots which Hal had placed too far to the right when leaving them in the corridor for the porter to attend to, they crept on a pace, and grasped the handle of the compartment in which Mr. Brindle was sleeping.

"Quick, the key!" whispered the Spaniard, trying the door, and finding it locked.

There was a grating sound and a faint click as the key was introduced, and the bolt thrown back. But slight though the noise was it reached Hal's ears, even amidst the rattle of the wheels, and startled him from his sleep. Ignorant as to what had disturbed him, he lay on his back, his eyes wide open. Another minute, and he would have turned over to sink into sleep once more, when something bumped heavily against the woodwork which separated his compartment from Mr. Brindle's.

"Don't move, or it will be the worse for you, Señor Englishman!" he heard a hoarse voice exclaim in threatening tones.

It took a few seconds for Hal to comprehend what was happening. "Don't move, or it will be the worse for you!" That meant that someone was in difficulties next door.

"By Jove, those rascals are making another attempt!" he exclaimed; and at once sprang from his bunk.

Flinging the door open, he rushed into the next compartment, to see kneeling on the floor, in the full glare of the electric light, which had been switched on by the Spaniard, Pedro, revolver in hand, the muzzle of which was pressed into Mr. Brindle's ear, while the other hand was placed over his mouth.

Hal had just time to notice that the other scoundrel was busily searching for the bag beneath the bunk, when both men turned and rushed at him, Pedro pressing the trigger of his revolver. There was a blinding flash, followed by a loud report, and Hal felt something strike him on the left shoulder with

stunning force. Next second the Spaniard's face, with the long, coal-black beard, suddenly appeared before him in the smoke, and he struck at it with all his might, sending the ruffian staggering back; but he recovered himself in a moment, and rushed towards the doorway, throwing Hal to the floor as he passed.

"How is that now, lad? How do you feel, old boy? Better? That's it; you're smiling. That's the way. Pull yourself together, and drink this off."

It was Mr. Brindle who was speaking, and, scarcely understanding what was said, but feeling dazed and queer, and much inclined to close his eyes and sleep, Hal swallowed the contents of the tumbler which was placed to his lips. But suddenly Mr. Brindle's well-known voice brought him to his senses.

"By Jove, what a fright you gave me!" he said. "How do you feel, Hal? Come, pull yourself together and look at me."

"Eh, what? I'm all right! What's happening? Here, let me sit up!" exclaimed Hal, suddenly suiting the action to the word, and looking about him with wide-open eyes. "Why, what's this? I was asleep, and then—Those thieves! What is it, Mr. Brindle? I dreamed that they had made another attempt, and that I happened to hear them. It looked as though all was up with you, and I remember feeling in a terrible way. After that, everything seemed to stop, and I fell into a glorious dream."

"That is just about what has happened, my lad, and very fortunate it was for me that you awoke when you did; though for you, poor lad, it has meant trouble. Those Spanish scoundrels did make a second attempt, but, in their endeavor to get possession of the bag, they pitched upon the wrong compartment. I can tell you that it was a ticklish moment for me. As I lay there, not daring to move, I saw you come in. The only wonder to me is that the gentleman called Pedro did not have his revenge at once by shooting me. At any rate, he managed to put a bullet into your shoulder, and then he escaped from the car. The other rascal, whom you tackled so gamely, and who will have a splendid black eye for his pains, also got clear away, leaving some of his property behind him. Here it is."

He held up a mass of black hair, which had formerly covered the chin of the Spaniard.

"Now, Hal, you have the whole story," he continued. "You were wounded and fainted from loss of blood. A fellow passenger, who happens to be a doctor, has already examined and dressed the shoulder, and reports most favorably. A week will see you up and about, so he says, for the bullet was of very small caliber."

"What? A week in bed, Mr. Brindle!" exclaimed Hal, aghast. "Why, I am fit to get up now. See here, I feel quite myself again."

He struggled to his feet, but next moment he was glad to sit down again, and was forced, though much against his inclination, to confess that he was shaken. However, with his old dogged determination, he resolved not to give way, and not to submit to being put ignominiously to bed.

"I am a bit groggy," he admitted. "My legs don't seem quite to belong to me; but it's only a temporary matter. Thank you, I will have another sip."

The tumbler was raised to his lips, and he drank deeply, for the loss of blood had induced a violent thirst.

"There you see for yourself how fit you are," said Mr. Brindle. "And now, as the thieves have escaped, and your wound has been seen to, you will lie down and sleep till morning."

There was no gainsaying this direct order, for Mr. Brindle waited to see that Hal lay full length on the bunk. Then he left the section, and entered his own. As for Hal, though badly shaken, he suffered little pain. The injured shoulder felt numbed, but nothing more. After lying awake for half an hour, thinking over the little adventure through which he had passed, he, too, dozed off, and finally sank into a deep sleep, from which he was awakened by the opening of his door.

"Breakfast in half an hour," said Mr. Brindle, putting his head into the compartment. "How goes it with you this morning, old boy?"

"I feel quite myself," said Hal briskly, sitting up in his bunk. Then, to demonstrate the truth of his words, he stood up. "Yes," he continued, "I feel ever so much stronger than I did last night. I suppose the excitement and the shock had unnerved me, but now I am perfectly steady."

"That's good, Hal, and I am glad to see you making an effort. After all, there is no reason why a bullet wound in the shoulder should lay you up. Last night, as you say, the shock and suddenness of the injury had upset you, and no doubt you felt the rapid loss of blood. A few hours' sleep have made that good, so that you will quickly mend. I have no fear of the wound going wrong, for it was skillfully treated from the first. Now, let me lend a hand, and help to put your clothes on."

Half an hour later, with his left arm in a sling, and his empty sleeve pinned to the coat, arm in arm with Mr. Brindle, Hal entered the breakfast saloon, where they took their places at one of the many small tables. Numbers of other passengers were already there, and they looked at our hero with curiosity and admiration.

An hour later the engine steamed into a large station, and the passengers descended from the cars.

"Just look out for the youngsters, Hal," said Mr. Brindle. "They'll be coming to meet their dad."

"Youngsters? Your youngsters?" asked Hal, in surprise; for Mr. Brindle had never mentioned that he was married and had a family.

"Why, mine to be sure! There's Dora, the dearest blue-eyed girl that ever breathed; and Gerald, the biggest and most mischievous monkey that ever wore clothes. You'll know them at once. Ah, there they are, or I am mistaken."

"Hallo! There you are, dad!" cried the boy, a sturdy young fellow of some sixteen years. "Hi! Come along, Dora! Here he is, looking as fat and jolly as possible."

Breathless, and with hat tossed to the back of his head, the lad rushed at Mr. Brindle and embraced him, a graceful and pretty girl, looking charming and dainty in a white frock, following suit quickly.

"There, there, how glad I am to see you both again, my dears!" exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "Both of you looking as well as ever too. But I am forgetting my duties. Dora—Gerald—come here and let me introduce you a very great friend, who is to be my overseer. Steady now, shake hands gently, for he has been in the wars. Hal, my dear boy, let me present you to my dear children."

Each in turn shook Hal heartily by the hand, Dora looking sympathetically, and, at first, somewhat shyly at him; while Gerald, boy-like, took good stock of the new overseer, not fearing to look well into his face.

"What has happened to your arm, Mr. Marchant? What war have you been in? And are you very much hurt?" Dora asked these questions in rapid succession.

"Dora," said her father, "this young gentleman was shot by a ruffian who attempted to steal my bag. He has risked his life for me, and he is helpless. I place him in your charge. You have had some experience of nursing and will do your best. Now, let us get to the carriage."

Dora was a young lady about whom there was no nonsense. Here was a fellow-being who was obviously suffering; somehow he had come by his injury in protecting her father. That was enough for any daughter. For his sake she would look after Hal. So she marched our hero from the platform, chuckling secretly at the blush which had now changed his cheeks from dullest white to brilliant red. They stepped into the comfortable carriage, and at a crack of the whip, the team of mules set forward at a hand-gallop.

What thoughts were Hal's as he was driven to his new home? It seemed like a dream, for, a few weeks back, he was an orphan, with few friends. Then he had decided to start to America, where he would be entirely unknown. But what had happened? Friends seemed to have risen up on every side. Yes, it was good fortune. At least, that was what he thought as his eyes wandered from Mr. Brindle and Gerald to Dora. Never before had Hal taken notice of any girl.

And here he found himself unconsciously glancing at Dora, and listening eagerly to every word she said. It was sense too. Indeed, she discussed everyday matters with her father in a manner which opened Hal's eyes.

"She's clever," thought Hal, "and she's a pretty girl. How kind she was to me!"

And what of Dora? She, on her part, was taking stock of the overseer. Beneath her lashes she stole many a glance at him, always to meet his steady eyes, and turn away in confusion. But still, she was able to come to a conclusion. She saw a stalwart young man, who had yet an inch or more to grow. He had an open face, and eyes which never flinched or turned away.

"I like the new overseer," she said to herself. "He looks honest, brave, and kind. But how pale he is!"

Chapter VIII

The Loss of the MAINE.

Thanks to a healthy constitution, and to the fact that, though painful, his wound was really a simple one, Hal Marchant was very soon off the sick-list, and in the stage of convalescence.

From the railway station at which the train had set them down, he and Mr. Brindle, together with Dora and Gerald, were driven into the country, along dusty roads which were fenced in on every side by luxuriant vegetation of every description and hue. Sometimes a long, flat, and unsightly marsh came into view, and at the sound of the wheels thousands of wild-fowl rose, screaming,

into the air. But they soon began to ascend, though at a gentle slope, which the mules galloped up, still at the same steady pace.

Up and up the road mounted, curved suddenly to the left, and then quickly disappeared into a dense jungle of trees and growth, from which the delicious perfume of orange blossom was wafted.

"Here we are, and very thankful we ought to be, my lad," said Mr. Brindle, addressing Hal. "Look over there. Welcome to the 'Barn.' This is our winter residence, and here I guarantee that you will soon get back that color which you have lost."

He pointed with his cane to a fine bungalow which appeared at that moment at the end of an open glade, nestling beneath a wreath of foliage.

It was, indeed, a perfect place for an invalid. Perched high up on sandy soil, and surrounded by a forest of gorgeous orange trees, the house peeped over the top of the leaves at a scene beautiful beyond description. In the veranda, arm in sling, and with legs lazily stretched along the sides of a big cane chair, Hal could lie the whole day long, gazing across a sea of green shrubs and leaves—a sea which rustled musically, and was ever changing from brightest green to shimmering blue in the rays of the southern sun. And if he but lifted his eyes an inch or two, a rocky, irregular coast, and an ocean beyond, looking for all the world like a strip of brightly burnished steel, filled him with a sort of rapture, so that to lie there was no hardship, and the hours never dragged, but flew by almost too rapidly for his liking.

"You are an exceedingly good patient," said Dora one day, more than two weeks later, coming on to the veranda and taking a seat which stood vacant by his side; "but I suppose this obedience will not continue for long. The doctor who has been attending you says that your wound is merely a pin-prick—how he can be so very unfeeling I do not know! Still, he is convinced that it is now so far healed that it requires very little attention or dressing. That means, I suppose, that you will throw off my authority, and do your best to get into trouble again at the very first opportunity. What have you to say to that, sir?"

"Pin-prick! Quite so, Dora," Hal answered, with a smile. "The wound is, of course, quite a simple affair, and I am really fit for anything. As to more trouble, I can only say that, if it comes, I hope you will be there to nurse me again."

It was an unusual thing for Hal to indulge in pretty speeches, and it was as much as he could do to get the words out. His bashfulness made them stick in his throat, though he meant every syllable.

"I'm sure you've been awfully good to me, Dora," he said. "How can I repay you?"

"Oh, nonsense! Good, indeed! I have only done what any other girl would gladly have undertaken; and you forget, Hal, that you were wounded in helping my father. There, we are evens! We owe nothing to each other, though, if you ever have an opportunity, I am sure you will do your utmost for us."

"Hallo! What's this? Pretty speeches, and from my Dora, too! Who would have thought it!"

Mr. Brindle stepped on to the veranda just in time to overhear the end of the conversation between the young people, and burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"There, it is only my chaff," he added with a smile. "A little gratitude on either side is what one would have expected. But how are you, Hal? When do you think you could travel?"

"Now; as soon as you like, Mr. Brindle," exclaimed Hal, springing to his feet. "Take a look at me. I am as well as ever; and as for the arm, beyond a little stiffness, which will soon pass away, I have no trouble with it."

"Then, we'll clear for the ever-faithful island of Cuba, and for our gay little hacienda, Eldorado. Hal, you shall see a spot which compares favorably with this. I built this house in which we are living more than fifteen years ago, but the hacienda not for some time later. To my eyes the latter is perfect. It is a gentleman's country residence, and, with its grounds, is a beautiful oasis in a desert of impenetrable jungle and burnt-out plantations—not to mention swamps innumerable, for which the eastern end of the island is notorious. But you shall judge for yourself. To-morrow we will make our preparations, and on the following day the steamer will sail with us from Tampa for Havana."

Accordingly, all at the "Barn" were extremely busy, Hal even taking his arm from the sling to lend a hand on occasion. By the second morning their packing was completed, and, leaving the house in possession of a negro caretaker, the party was driven away in the mule cart to the harbor at Tampa. Three days later they sighted the coast of Cuba, the biggest and one of the oldest of Spanish colonies in the West which remained at that moment in the hands of Spain.

"It is at once the finest and the most unfortunate island in these seas," remarked Mr. Brindle to Hal and Gerald, as they gazed towards the distant shore. "For years—I cannot at the moment recollect how many—the bulk of the inhabitants have been in rebellion. Fighting has taken place almost incessantly between the Spanish rulers and the native population; and things have come to such a pass that ruin stares everyone in the face. Planters and their laborers have had hard times indeed, but I trust a brighter future is in store for us. America has intervened between insurgents and Spaniards, and it seems that her influence will avert further bloodshed, and peace and prosperity will then return to this smiling land. I am sure I hope it will be so. Personally I have not lost, though others have. But it is a long story, lads, and I will reserve it for another time. Take a look through my glasses, Hal, and tell me what you see."

Mr. Brindle suddenly handed his field-glasses to Hal, and pointed towards the harbor.

"I see a big passenger boat in there," the latter said, after taking a long and steady look. "She is lying against the quay, and close beside her are two ships, which look like men-of-war—one flying Spanish colors, and the other the Stars and Stripes of America."

"Good! I thought so," Mr. Brindle exclaimed. "That vessel sailing beneath the colors of Yankee land is the battleship MAINE, and she is here on a special visit, which it is hoped will cement a long friendship between the two countries. Now, I fancy we had better go below and prepare for dinner. The gong sounds in half an hour."

By half-past eight that night, the ever-memorable 15th of February, 1898, the ship upon which Hal and his friends were passengers had anchored in the harbor of Havana. On the upper deck, beneath the glare of the electric light, they made a group that was interesting and pleasing to the eye.

Stretched in hammock chairs, Mr. Brindle cigar in mouth, and all dressed in white, relieved in Dora's case by a sash of palest blue, they chatted in low voices, now and again lapsing into silence and listening to the sounds that came from other ships across the placid water and from the dimly lit streets of

the town. Some sailor lad aboard the MAINE was delighting his fellows with banjo and song, and our hero and his friends listened as if enchanted.

"Ah, honey, my honey"—the words came clear and strong; then they died down and became merged with the notes of the banjo, only to burst forth again as the audience took up the chorus, and sent it swelling across the harbor.

"How nice it sounds! How peaceful!" exclaimed Mr. Brindle, thoughtfully. "God grant that this visit from America to a Spanish port may settle every squabble. I am sure braver and more agreeable fellows could not have been sent; and if only the Dons are as friendly, all will be well. Listen! How those lads love that song! They would sing it by the hour if they were able. But there sounds the bugle, and away they go to their hammocks. I think, Dora dear, that it is time you and Gerald also went to your bunks. Remember, we have a long and tiring day before us to-morrow, and you will be in need of all your energies. Now, off with you! Hal and I will stay on deck a little longer, as I wish to speak to him."

The two young people looked somewhat disappointed, but strict obedience being amongst their virtues, they said "good-night" and retired.

"Now for a stroll, Hal," commenced Mr. Brindle. "I have much to say to you, and you have a great deal before you, for which a little advice given now will prepare you. Within three days we shall be at Eldorado, and new duties and new faces will confront you. I want you to have some knowledge of them beforehand, for it will be better if my overseer can come to the plantation ready for any emergency. You will thus make a better start, and will be held in higher estimation by the men. That is the secret of plantation work. Respect yourself, show that you are capable, fair, and strong, and the negro hands will be ready to obey you in every particular."

Mr. Brindle took Hal by the arm, and walked him up and down beneath the awning. At length, having communicated to him all the information he wished, he led the way aft, and the two leaned against the rails at the stern of the ship.

Havana, one of the oldest harbors in the West, lay wrapped in the black mantle of night, dotted here and there by the riding light of some small fishing schooner, bobbing gently to the swell which ran through the harbor channel. Closer at hand were other lights, flashing, tier above tier, from the state cabins of the CITY OF WASHINGTON—a leviathan which was filled to overflowing with passengers. She was a contrast to the MAINE, aboard which all those who had been so merry and lighthearted seemed now fast asleep. But for her riding lights, and the reflection from her gunroom, she was enveloped in darkness, into which a flicker from her smoke-stacks sometimes flew, to disappear in a moment. Not a sound came from her deck. All was still, and every soul beneath her armor-plates, save the few who kept the watch, lay wrapped in sleep—sleep, alas! to extend forever and ever, to hold them in its cold embrace till the end of everything.

What was that? Crash! A second or two's interval, and then a nerve-shaking boom, an appalling explosion, a rush of flame into the night, that lights up the surroundings for miles. And then? Ah, Heavens! shriek upon shriek, the clatter of scattered wreckage and rent iron upon quay and neighboring ships, and the hissing of flaming woodwork falling into the sea. A minute before there floated as fine a vessel as ever sailed from the shores of America, carrying, too, as gallant a crew as ever shipped under the famous star-spangled banner. Where were they now?

Clinging to the rail, stunned by the roar of the explosion, and dazed by the suddenness of it all, Hal and Mr. Brindle looked at a heap of flaring wreckage, and wondered what had happened. Then the explanation burst upon them with a shock and a rush which almost unmanned them.

"She has blown up! The MAINE has been smashed to pieces! How dreadful!" exclaimed Mr. Brindle, in a breath.

"Yes, something awful has happened," Hal answered. "Quick, sir; there may be men to be saved. Let us help; everyone will be required, and we may be of use. Come; I see them manning one of the boats."

Without waiting for further conversation, he sprang towards the gangway, followed closely by Mr. Brindle.

"That's it! More lads for the work. Slip along down that 'ere gangway, and get fixed up to your places," sang out a quartermaster, who stood on the deck close to the ladder leading to the boat below.

As cool as if nothing unusual had happened, he waited a few moments to collect more men, and then hurried down to the boat in which Hal and Mr. Brindle had taken their places.

"Get hold of them there oars," he cried hoarsely. "Some of yer aer new at the game, but yer can pull for what we want. There, shove her off, my lad, and out oars all of yer. Bust me! aer some of yer goin' ter take two weeks about it? Bustle yourselves! Aer yer ready? Then fetch hold of your time from me. Now—pull—again—once more, my hearties—pull—at it, lads—we are nearer—good boys—with a will;—pull ho—all together—ah, steady there all."

Never could an amateur crew have had a better coxswain. There was no confusion, and no desperate hurry. Instead, coached by the quartermaster, they sent the boat flying through the water, and before they could have expected it, were close beside the MAINE.

"She's down by the head," cried Mr. Brindle, who sat next to Hal. "Keep a look-out for any man in the water."

"Aye, she's down, and will go more too," the quartermaster shouted. "She's flaring like a torch, so I reckon we ought ter see any poor feller who happens ter be about in need of help."

Indeed, the bows of the MAINE were crushed into shapeless wreckage, which was burning fiercely, the flames lighting up the whole of the harbor. By this time, too, the death-like silence, which had fallen immediately after the first cries for help, was broken by a roar of frightened voices from the town. People rushed from their houses demanding what had happened. Bells clanged the alarm, and the fire-brigade turned out, ready for any emergency. And, meanwhile, every ship in the harbor sent her boats on an errand of mercy, and soon the sailors, who but a few short minutes before had been sleeping peacefully, were being lifted from the water. But not all were there to be helped; numbers of the poor fellows had sunk, others still slept—the everlasting sleep—beneath the shattered plates of the MAINE.

"Look, there is one sailor," cried Mr. Brindle suddenly, pointing to a figure struggling close beside the MAINE, and seeming to be almost enveloped in flame. "Quick, quartermaster; let us row in and rescue him."

"No; can't be done. It's hard ter say it, but it can't," was the curt answer, given with a sad shake of the head. "That 'ere chap don't scorch, because he's under water. We should, though. We'd be blistered and dried like so many herrings. It's hard, sir, but it's out o' the question."

"Not quite," muttered Hal. "Hold on to my oar, Mr. Brindle. I'm going for him."

Next moment there was a splash, and he was overboard, swimming towards the flaming wreck as strongly as though he had never suffered a wound on his shoulder. A few lusty strokes took him close to the man, who by this was spinning round and round in the water, wholly unconscious, and on the point of sinking. His hand shot in the air, his fingers clutching desperately, while his eyes seemed on the point of bursting from their sockets. A sudden flare from the burning woodwork lit up the ghastly scene, and showed the poor fellow's mouth wide open in the act of giving vent to a cry for help. But just then the water swirled about him, overflowing his face, and hiding all but the pair of hands, which still grasped despairingly at the air.

"I'll save him whatever happens," said Hal to himself, sinking for a moment to escape the fierce heat of the flames, which burst forth furiously from the deck and sides of the unfortunate MAINE. He swam beneath the water, and rising a minute later beside the man, grasped him by the shoulders, and easily turned him upon his back. From that moment all was plain sailing, for it was not for nothing that Hal had learned to swim. Floating beside the drowning sailor, he kicked out with his legs, and towed him towards the boat. Before he thought it possible they were alongside, and were being hauled on board.

"Good lad! You're one of the right sort!" sang out the quartermaster. "There, sit right down and get hold of your wind. Perhaps yer'll be wanting it again in a minute. Hillo! aint that another poor feller?"

He shielded his eyes from the glare by placing his hand to his forehead, and looked towards the MAINE once more. A piece of wreckage floated into the light, and on it was seen another poor sailor, clinging for his life.

"Ah, there he aer! Can't yer see him, boys? He's right under the ship, and she's scorching the life out of him."

"Yes, he's too close to the fire again; and if we row in there we should all be shriveled," remarked Hal, very quietly. "Here, I'm for it again, so keep a look-out for me, quartermaster."

Once more he slipped overboard, and, pursuing the same tactics, escaped the heat by diving beneath the water. When he reached the plank upon which the sailor was lying, it was to find him, like the other, unconscious, and almost dead from the combined results of heat and smoke. He did not trouble to take the man from the float, but pushed it towards the boat, and in due time had the satisfaction of seeing him lifted from the water with the aid of many willing hands. Then the boat pulled round the flaming wreck, and, finding no one else in the water, went beneath the stern, which was free of flames, and made fast to a rope.

"Now, right aboard, my hearties!" cried the quartermaster. "If there's chaps blown into the sea, there's safe ter be a tidy few knocked silly between the decks, and they'll want helping. Aer there any man aboard this boat as feels like coming up? It's ticklish business, for this craft has tons of powder in her magazines, and I reckon the fire'll soon find it out. Aer anyone following?"

He sprang at the rope ladder which dangled overboard, and swarmed up it, followed by everyone who had accompanied him in the boat, save, of course, those who had been rescued from the sea.

"What, aer the whole crew of yer coming?" exclaimed the quartermaster. "George, but yer aer the finest set of pards I ever come across! Every blessed soul of yer itchin' ter get blow sky-high!"

He waved to them, motioning to them to scatter in all directions, which they did at once, diving below, and penetrating as far forward as the heat would allow.

"There is danger of the magazines exploding right aft here," Hal heard someone exclaim in the calmest tones. "Say, men, who is for it? I want six of the boldest and best."

The voice, which was that of a young man, came from an officer standing beside him. At the words a number of dark figures sprang forward from a group occupied in lowering a boat, and Hal promptly pushed his way in amongst them.

"That's the way; and now for the buckets, boys," the officer who had spoken first exclaimed. "Fill 'em up, and follow down below. Quick's the word, for there isn't much time to lose."

Grasping the rope attached to a wooden bucket, one sturdy sailor flung it overboard, and soon filled a couple of others, which stood at his feet, while four more were taken to a sea-cock close at hand. Hal quickly possessed himself of one, and at once hurried below to the magazine.

"Hillo! and who's this?" the officer asked, stepping up to him and lifting a lantern to his face.

"I'm a volunteer from a ship alongside," Hal answered.

"And a Britisher?"

"Yes."

"Good! Put it right there." The lieutenant shook him heartily by the hand.

A moment later the men threw open the magazine, in spite of the terrible risk they ran, and flung the contents of their buckets upon the explosives. Then they raced to the deck again for a fresh supply of water, and did not cease from their arduous labors till all danger of another explosion was at an end.

Flinging his bucket away, Hal now made a tour of that part of the ship which was not in flames. Then, having helped to lift three injured men into the boat, he descended himself, and at the quartermaster's order they returned to their own ship. A few minutes later, Captain Sigsbee, the commander of the MAINE, stepped sadly from her deck, and was rowed away, the last living man to leave the terrible scene.

As for Hal, he slipped into a fresh suit of clothes, and for hours worked with the other passengers endeavoring to alleviate the sufferings of the poor fellows brought aboard the ship. Then, tired out with his labors, for he had taken a prominent and a large share in the work of rescue, he retired to the upper deck, with Mr. Brindle, Gerald, and Dora, and flung himself into a chair. But though utterly fatigued, he was too horrified by the ghastly tragedy he had witnessed, and too shaken by all that had happened in the past few hours, to be able to get to sleep. It was out of the question, so that instead of going straight to his bunk, he felt that he must stay in the open air, where he could rest, and at the same time talk over the occurrence with his friends.

"I've a weight here," he cried peevishly, striking himself on the chest. "The horror of it all distresses me. What a terrible calamity!"

"Aye, what a misfortune! What an inhuman deed!" replied Mr. Brindle, in a voice which faltered in spite of himself. "Think of it; try to realize the cruelty of it all. In the times of peace, in the cause of good-will, and in the earnest attempt to bring alleviation of suffering to a long-stricken people, the poor lads of my adopted country are cruelly blown to pieces, sent into eternity at the very door

of those who have invited them. They came with nothing but friendship in their hearts, expecting to meet with the same. The shock of the news will be felt from east to west, and from north to south, and everywhere will be received at first with incredulity, and later with loathing and scorn, for never was such a dastardly deed committed."

"Committed by whom? What do you mean?" asked Hal, in astonishment. "Do you really think that the explosion was arranged—that it was not a pure accident?"

"I do; unhappily, I do," answered Mr. Brindle sternly. "How could it have been otherwise? It is sad, far too sad for words, and I shall be mistaken if to-night's work does not prove the cause of a war between Spain and America."

"But why war, Mr. Brindle? Had matters come to such a pass that the destruction of the MAINE would set the countries at each other's throats?"

"Perhaps not that, Hal, for the aspect of affairs of late was distinctly brighter. Still, I think I am right in saying that the wrath of the American people will be so great when the news is known, that serious trouble will be inevitable. But come, let us to our bunks. To-morrow we will talk the matter over."

"To our bunks, dad! I could not possibly sleep!" exclaimed Dora.

"Nor I," chimed in Gerald.

"And I must confess that I am too troubled and too disturbed to sleep," said Mr. Brindle.

"Then why not fill the time in till morning dawns by telling us about this affair?" cried Hal. "We are all agreed that we cannot sleep; we have done our utmost for those who suffered during or after the explosion, and now we have nothing to do but to lounge here, and fume and fret till to-morrow. Be kind to us, Mr. Brindle. Stir your memory, and let us know the ins and outs of the whole story."

"Well, I will; and if I try your patience, bear with me a little," replied Mr. Brindle. "The quarrel is not of a day's making, nor does it turn upon one single point. Cuba is the cause of it all, and as we are here, perhaps no more fitting spot could be selected for a description of the rebellion and bloodshed which have caused trouble between Spain and America."

Chapter IX

„The Ever-faithful Island.“

Dressed in a clean suit of white, with wide-open waist-coat and expanse of glossy shirt, the whole set off by a black evening bow, Mr. Brindle stalked moodily up and down the deck for several minutes, his hands thrust into his pockets, and his chin resting upon his chest. He was evidently in deep thought, and Hal, with Dora and Gerald close at hand, watched him curiously, wondering when he would commence to speak.

"It is hard to know exactly where to start," he said at last, coming to a stop in front of them, where he leaned against the ship's rail, and producing a cigar, bit off the end with a nervous snap. "It is difficult, I confess, to fulfill my promise. To begin with, I am shaken by the horrible calamity we have witnessed to-night. My grief is great and heartfelt for those poor fellows who have been so

ruthlessly slain, and loathing and contempt for the inhuman wretches who perpetrated the ghastly deed are so much in my thoughts that I find it difficult to fix my mind upon the subject before us, or grasp its details with sufficient clearness to narrate them to you in lucid form.

"Still, a promise is a promise, and I will therefore do my best to tell you why there is bad blood between Spain and America, and why I fear war in the immediate future.

"Just fancy, this, the most beautiful, and once the most prosperous, of Western isles, is still known in Spain as 'the ever-faithful island of Cuba!' And yet there is scarcely a single Spaniard who is not conversant with the true state of affairs, and is not very well aware that Cuba is in revolt, and has been so for close upon fifty years. Go to the country of the Dons and question her lower classes—I mean the poor people who exist by tilling the soil, or earn a livelihood in factories or workshops. I will answer for it that hundreds, aye, thousands even, curse this fair isle, curse the government that rules it so evilly, and the necessity that has called, and still calls, for their sons to go across the seas and die, in the depths of jungle and morass.

"Looking back as I do at this moment, I feel that all this suffering, all this misery and heart-ache, are Spain's just reward. The great man of Genoa, Christopher Columbus, who explored these Western seas in the fifteenth century, would have passed by the lovely shores of this gorgeous island and refused to annex it for his adopted king and queen, if he had foreseen the future.

"In those days a race of comely men and women, the Carib Indians, inhabited the land, and their descendants might be here to-day had not the lust for gold and riches led Spanish adventurers to disembark in the hopes of satisfying their greed. As might have been expected, trouble followed, and the better armed invaders hunted the Indians till they were exterminated. That unnecessary bloodshed has cost Spain dear. She occupied the island, and made it the headquarters of the African slave trade. Little by little other people and races were attracted here, till at the present moment the population amounts to about a million and a half. Of these a third are negroes, and the remainder anything you please to call them. You can pick from amongst the populace distinctive races, whose color ranges from negro black to almost pure white. Of the latter there are but few in the island, for even the proud old Castilian families which came here years ago, and thrived and made money by the sweat of these imported negroes, are now no longer Spanish. Scarcely one of their descendants but has some trace of African blood.

"Of white inhabitants there are few, I said, and these are only temporary residents. They come across the seas to Cuba with one object in view, namely, to make money and return home at the earliest possible date. They are mainly the military and officials, and it is from this greed of theirs, from the careless, thoughtless rule which has allowed matters to go anyhow, and from the gradual fall from bad to worse, that the present trouble arises. Greed and the craving to be rich beyond the dreams of avarice, obtained for Spain this lovely island, to the misfortune of thousands of harmless Caribs; and the same vice has cost her dear already in lives and treasure, and will demand much more, even the loss of the land itself.

"What can you expect? Put a puppet in command, far from observation, and over a race which in his pride he deems utterly inferior to himself, and he

becomes a jack in office and an oppressor. I do not say, mind you, Hal, that all rulers here have been unscrupulous; but many have, while others who have been honest in their dealings have failed to bring content to the people through sheer incompetence. You cannot satisfactorily rule a conquered people unless you study their prejudices. Give them some liberty, respect their customs if possible, and their religion, if not harmful and barbarous, and you will make them willing and contented subjects.

"But you have the facts; the Cubans have been misgoverned. They have been fleeced and ground down by their rulers, both civil and military, and, as a natural consequence, they have become rebellious.

"That was the position in 1850, when, following the example set by Mexico, Chili, and Peru, and other western colonies of Spain which had successfully revolted, the colored inhabitants of the island raised the standard of revolution. They attacked their white masters, and galled them by sudden and ugly rushes. When fighting in the forests and swamps which are to be found everywhere, they poured a scathing fire into bands of soldiers brought against them, and disappeared like ghosts, only to return and harass the foe at the next opportune moment.

"How long this particular revolt lasted it would be difficult to say, but no doubt it dragged on for many months, subsiding here only to burst forth elsewhere with redoubled fury. But end it did at length, and the island enjoyed peace for a time.

"Then once more the natives took up arms, and, while Spain strove to put down a rebellion at home, had things much their own way, for the mother country had her hands full. For ten long weary years that rebellion lasted, and many a conscript from the fair land stretching from Pyrenees to Mediterranean bit the dust in this far-away Spanish possession.

"It is, perhaps, a coincidence that America in those days came into conflict with Spain, so that war very nearly resulted, the cause of quarrel being then, as now, aggravated and brought to a climax by an act of peculiar cruelty. For in those days the condition of the poor natives aroused the sympathy of Americans, many of whom, moreover, had already settled in the island. Their pity took the form of substantial help, for they dispatched various filibustering expeditions to Cuba, and thus supplied the natives with arms and ammunition. Unhappily, a certain ship known as the VIRGINIUS was discovered attempting to land her cargo, and failed to make good her escape. Capture was inevitable, but before being taken by the Spanish gunboat, the Americans on board managed to get rid of all their warlike stores. It made no difference, however, for once landed at Santiago, little time was given for friends to intervene. All were condemned to death; and as a preliminary, a number of Cubans who formed part of the expedition were shot, their heads being severed from their bodies by the mob, and paraded round the town. Fourteen were executed on the following day, and others on the next, including the commander of the expedition and other Americans. Then the butchery was put a stop to by telegraphic orders.

"But the mischief was done, and I ask you to think how you would have felt had such a deed been perpetrated nowadays. I can assure you that America cried loudly for retaliation, and war was only narrowly averted.

"For ten years the insurrection flourished, subsiding in the winter to a mere nothing, for then the Spanish troops were able to take active measures to suppress it. In the summer, however, from May onwards, when the rainy

season commences, the insurgents had the best of the fighting. Themselves immune from fever, and acclimatized, they could live and fight in the 'manigua,' as the bush and swamp in the interior are named, while the Spaniards were helpless. Drenched by constant tropical downpours, and plodding along a narrow, irregular track which was thick with mud, they were fired upon by unseen foes from the trees and jungle on either hand. What use to charge into the thickness of the vegetation? It was sheer suicide, for they were at once separated and split into small parties upon which the Cubans fell with unspeakable fury, armed always with a deadly chopping weapon, the 'machete.'

"Cold steel did the grewsome work silently and mercilessly, sending many a poor lad of Castile to his end.

"Imagine the conditions for a moment, Hal, and you too, Gerald and Dora. You all know what a thick forest is like, for the 'Barn' in Florida is built in the midst of the jungle. Think what it must be to be weary with trudging along a path thick with mud; to be footsore, drenched to the skin, and hungry; and then to be wounded by some unseen hand. No wonder that the Spanish troops died in their hundreds, poor lads! Scarcely able to crawl themselves, was it wonderful that the transport of food and ammunition was difficult? It was impossible, and I can tell you that, though the cruel machete accounted for many, exposure, want, and disease killed thousands more.

"It was a wearisome rebellion, and it, too, died a natural death in 1878.

"And now to bring you and my tale to more modern times. Following peace came renewed prosperity, and with it myself, for it was then that I purchased a plantation. As I became acquainted with the ins and outs of the island life, I learned that the appearance of tranquillity was false after all. Discontent was manifest everywhere, and matters were beginning to wear an ugly look. Factions were openly at work stirring up the people; and of these, one clamored for a system of home government under Spanish guidance, while the other would have none of it, and openly advocated a free Cuba—Cuba for its native people, exempt from all interference.

"I need not tell you that the haughty, careless officials who had come from the home country formed another party, which sneered at all things native, and, mindful of the fat purses to be made from their several appointments, cried loudly for military rule, less consideration and less conciliation, and, as a change, a tighter grip of the hand which had already cost Spain so dear.

"It is wasting breath to recount what happened. Of course, discontent grew to active rebellion, till the island was once more swept by fire and sword. To describe every detail of this new insurrection would be wearisome, for it has dragged on ever since, and not once has there been anything in the way of a battle. Minor skirmishes have been the order of the day; in fact, it has simply been guerrilla warfare.

"On the Spanish side the main scheme has been to divide the island into three parts, and so separate the rebels. For this purpose two continuous lines of forts, called 'trochas,' have been constructed. They stretch from north to south, cutting Cuba into three long strips. You will see one as we drive from Santiago to our destination, but I may tell you that they are of enormous strength, that a double fence of barbed wire protects a road cut through the jungle, and that along the latter innumerable forts have been erected, while a railway stretches from end to end.

"But these trochas have proved almost useless. The enormous force at the disposal of the general is swamped in garrisoning them, while the mortality is very high. And the insurgents are more active than ever. Trains are blown up with dynamite, the trochas cut, and the men in the forts forever harassed.

"And now I come to the stage in the rebellion which is the real cause of trouble with America. Determined to conquer, the insurgents have adopted the custom of burning the villages, so as to force those who were wavering, or who were faint-hearted, to throw in their lot with them. In addition, they have taken to destroying plantations, thus depriving the working classes of the means of livelihood. This naturally led to much misery and hardship, but the condition was as nothing when compared with that produced by the Spanish general, Weyler, who now came on the scene. Finding that the peaceful laborer of to-day was the insurgent of yesterday, he ordered all living in the country to come into the towns, a concentration order excellent in its intentions, but heartlessly carried out. Thousands were congregated together and starved—literally and actually starved. There was no method in feeding them and looking to their well-being. The Spanish authorities had made utterly inadequate provision for them, and as a consequence they sickened and died in their thousands.

"And there you have the cause of trouble between Spain and America. My adopted brethren have warm hearts beneath a calm exterior, and their sympathy for the poor Cubans is deep. They resent this perpetual bloodshed occurring so close to their coast as a slur upon their humanity; and they demand, for the sake of all, that it be put a stop to. Correspondence has passed between the governments, and seeing that America means business, Spain has promised to amend, and do her utmost to end the sad condition of affairs. As an assurance of the truth of her words and the honesty of her intentions, she has dispatched a warship to New York, and the unfortunate Maine was here on a similar friendly errand.

"And she was blown up by a mine. There were two definite and distinct explosions: the first produced beneath the keel of the ship, and the second in her forward magazine. That is my opinion, and others share it. I am sorry even to think it possible, and I say now, that it is my firm belief that Spaniards in general are too honorable, too chivalrous to attempt such a dastardly deed. But there are black sheep in every flock, and some inhuman scoundrel has this night sent numbers of his fellow-men to an untimely end, and at the same time has, in all probability, plunged two countries into war, the ultimate consequences of which one cannot even dream of."

"But why should you think so, Mr. Brindle?" Hal asked eagerly. "I know that the blowing up of a steamer is an unusual occurrence, but still it has happened before to-night, and why not again? Accidents come when least expected."

"True, Hal; but in the chapter of mishaps likely to befall a war-vessel, explosion of the magazine is almost unknown, save in battle-time. What are the conditions now? We are at peace, and I who know the spirit of discipline in the American Navy can tell you that the same careful look-out and the same precautions are taken in everyday life as during a war scare. It is a strict rule of the service that the officer on watch shall inspect the ship at a certain hour at night, and report all lights dowsed, and magazines in a safe condition. It was done this very night, you may be sure; and see what follows! The men we have rescued say that they were awakened by a violent shock, and that a second and more powerful one threw them from their hammocks. We, too, noticed the

same, and I can swear to it that the first sent a column of water into the air, while the second shattered the forward portion of the *Maine* to fragments.

"I fear it must be the case," said Hal, after a few thoughtful minutes; "and I suppose that the next item of news will be that war is declared."

"Yes, almost without doubt; and it should be so, then all my plans will be altered. I must get through to Eldorado, to see that the plantation and hacienda are safe, and then I shall probably send Dora and Gerald back to Tampa. No, don't try to dissuade me," he cried, lifting a warning finger as they both began to expostulate. "I shall take time to come to a decision, and it must be considered as final."

"And now let me tell you of another matter which concerns you, Hal, more than the others. You bear the mark of a bullet on your shoulder, and shall learn what I have hitherto kept from you. The scoundrel whom you heard addressed as *Señor Capitan* is no less a person than Captain José d'Arousta, a gentleman of very evil reputation. I may inform you that he came to the island many years ago—quite twenty, I should imagine—when only a lad; that his father had a position under the government; and that the man of whom we are speaking first disgraced him by his riotous living, and then broke his heart by marrying a half-breed girl. Poor thing! she was too good by far for such a reckless fellow. She owned a plantation, and I need scarcely tell you that he quickly ran through her ready money, and then all that could be possibly raised upon the estate. What happened to her later I do not know, but he became captain of an irregular Spanish band near Santiago, and rumor reports that his cruelties made him hated by insurgents and friends alike. I know that he burnt down plantations wholesale, and that if one wished to escape, it was necessary to bribe him with large sums of money. I paid heavily at first for my immunity, and then, tired of his constant threats, I one day horsewhipped him before all the hands, and afterwards defied him; but I was careful at once to organize a band of armed men, to keep a watch over the plantation and house.

"Money seems to José d'Arousta a dire necessity, for that is the class of man he is. He even thought it worth his while to come to Tampa, knowing well that he would not easily relieve me of my valuables in the island. You foiled him, and I warn you solemnly, Hal, beware of the fellow. He possesses that love of vengeance and ferocity common to his race, and he will surely repay you when he has an opportunity. Therefore take care, and as the times are unsettled I advise you to arm yourself at once with a revolver. Carry it in a hip pocket, and use it if your life is threatened."

"I will," Hal answered quietly. "I am not afraid of the fellow, but he looked a nasty customer, and it is always best to be on the safe side. If he happens to knock up against me, he will be less inclined to quarrel when he sees that I am armed."

"Quite so, and I am glad you fall in with my views," said Mr. Brindle. "Gerald, too, while at the hacienda, had better carry a weapon, while I am sure that the three of us will be easily able to defend Dora from all harm."

"That we will!" Hal blurted out enthusiastically; and then, seeing Mr. Brindle smother a knowing smile, he became suddenly silent.

But Dora heard, and presently, when her father's head was turned, she flashed our hero a grateful glance from her eyes, which seemed to say, "Yes, I am sure you would do all that was possible"; a message which Hal must have appreciated, for he tingled strangely from head to foot.

"By George!" he murmured, as he lay back in his chair and conjured up the dark, forbidding features of José d'Arousta, "I would smash the beggar into little pieces if he even attempted to harm one of my friends." Then his lips tightened, and his fingers gripped the arm of the chair.

"Thinking of our acquaintance, the railway thief, I'll be bound," said Mr. Brindle suddenly, looking critically at Hal. "All the better, my boy. Take my warning to heart, and beware of the Spaniard as you would of the plague. He is a rogue, and is not to be trusted. If you should chance to meet him, and see him put his hand in his pocket, cover him with your revolver. And if Pedro, his accomplice, is with him, be doubly cautious; for here, in Cuba, they are capable of any atrocity, knowing well that, owing to the unsettled condition of the island, they can defy the law. Indeed, I more than suspect that they are the head of a gang of desperadoes who rob both insurgents and Spaniards, and care for one side as little as they do for the other. But, dear me! this has been a very long yarn, and I am tired. What do you all say to a short rest in our bunks? Dawn will break in a couple of hours."

He yawned loudly and rubbed his eyes, as if to drive the sleep out of them.

"Come," he continued, "we have done all that is possible for these poor fellows from the man-o'-war. Let us sleep and prepare for to-morrow."

Hal, Dora, and Gerald also were feeling tired and sleepy; therefore, rising from their seats, they took another look at the wrecked and half-submerged Maine, which was now burned at the fore part to the water's edge, while sheets of flame still belched upwards from the after-decks, and sent columns of dark smoke into the air. Then, with a sigh for the poor lads who had met their fate that night, they shook hands silently and descended to their cabins, where all four were soon wrapped in sleep.

Chapter X

A Sudden Attack.

When Hal and his friends appeared on deck on the morning following the disaster to the Maine, the city of Havana was in mourning. Shops, exchanges, and public offices were closed, while flags hung half-mast from the poles on all big buildings, and from the tops of the shipping in the harbor. Projecting from the water a hundred yards away was the half-submerged wreck, now blackened and unsightly, and covered with a pall of dense smoke.

Ashore the hospitals were crowded to overflowing, and surgeons were still busily at work, amputating mangled limbs, and doing their utmost for the sufferers; for more than half the ship's company had been either killed or sadly injured. Even then the news had reached America, and peaceful cities, opening their morning papers, read with a shock of the terrible calamity. Away in the country districts, farmers and cowboys learned the tidings some hours later. It was flashed east and west across the wires. The dire event was discussed in every drawing room, in hotels, restaurants, and cars. Men whispered the news to comrades as they descended in the cages to the deep levels of coal-mines, while others shouted it from the foot-plates of outgoing trains, as they steamed through the stations. And everywhere there was but one thought. Punishment

must be meted out to the nation which had caused the disaster. Oh, yes, it was a crime. Not a man but knew it, though the bare facts had hardly reached him. There had been foul play, and the villains who had been guilty of it must pay.

On the part of the government, arrangements were at once made for a Board of Inquiry to sit at Havana, and for the wreck to be examined by divers. The report, which could not possibly be issued for many a day to come, was awaited with feverish impatience, many of the hotter-blooded people of the States demanding instant war with Spain, and an examination and explanation afterwards.

In Havana, nothing could have been more marked than the sorrow of the Spanish. They grieved for the unfortunate seamen, but there was no treachery, they vowed; and those who saw them on that day were confident that if the explosion had been previously arranged, it was by some miscreant who acted for himself, and against the wishes of the people.

And in this position the two nations must be left while we follow our friends to the hacienda.

"The train departs at midday," said Mr. Brindle, when they were collected at breakfast. "We will disembark in an hour's time, and make a few purchases in the town. Then we will get on board the cars, and, with luck, shall be at the hacienda in three days' time."

Accordingly, they packed their baggage and embarked in the boat which Hal and Mr. Brindle had helped to man on the previous night. By noon they were comfortably in the train, the intervening hours having been employed in buying provisions, and in obtaining revolvers and ammunition for the three men of the party.

"We shall want them more than ever now," said Mr. Brindle, slipping his weapon into a hip pocket which had been specially contrived for the purpose. "As soon as we reach Eldorado, I will get one of the negro women to make similar receptacles for you two lads, for it is as well to keep these toys out of sight till the critical moment arrives."

Three days later they descended from the cars at a wayside station some miles from Santiago, and in a beautiful part of the island. Mounting mules, they left their baggage in charge of two of the plantation hands, and before long reached the hacienda, of which Mr. Brindle had not boasted when he declared that it was the most lovely in all Cuba. And now Hal's duties commenced in earnest.

"You are to be my right-hand man, remember that," exclaimed his kindly employer a day or so later. "You will live with us, of course, and will be considered as one of the family. Early in the morning I ride round the place, which is some miles in extent; and I shall expect you to accompany me. Then, during the day, you will be about the place, and will look in here and there. The cane is now ripe for cutting, and we shall have our hands full with it in a matter of two weeks. Then the tobacco crop is unusually promising, and we shall have to harvest it immediately after the cane. Now, as to workmen. The majority of my hands are negroes, whom I imported from the estate in Florida. They are reliable, honest men, who look to me as to a father. I treat them well, and they reward me by being obedient and working hard. They are re-enforced by a few local natives; but I have purposely employed very few of the latter, for they are discontented, idle fellows, and since the insurrection started, there is never any knowing when they may be off with their brethren. Ah, here is Black Peter, my

foreman, a faithful fellow, who has spent many years in my service. Pete, this is my overseer, and from to-day you will treat him as myself, and will take your orders from him."

The negro thus introduced was a white-haired man of over fifty. He looked Hal critically up and down, and then doffed his ragged cap.

"Sar, you my master from right away," he said simply. "What you say I do, and de orders follow Pete."

"That's good," Hal replied, smiling and stretching out his hand, an offer which the negro at once responded to by shaking it heartily.

"Now that you know each other, we will make a round," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "How has everything gone on in my absence, Pete?"

"Velly fine, massa. Crops him big and plenty, and boys working, oh, so hard! Dey say de weather fine, so do all we can. Come winter and de rain and we take him easy, and sleep and smoke till de heart am full."

"That's your way, is it?" answered Mr. Brindle, with a laugh. "Well, work now is the motto, for when the winter comes there is little to be done. One thing, though, tell all the men to keep their eyes open. You'll remember the Spaniard? He may come our way again, and if he does, it would be bad for us. Do you follow me, Pete?"

The negro nodded his head vigorously, and went off promising to warn the other hands. Mr. Brindle then took his overseer on a tour of the plantations, returning by way of the machinery sheds, which occupied a central position, and which were to be Hal's special care.

Each one of the laborers as they came up to him dropped the implement he was using, and, unslinging a rifle carried across his back, raised it to his shoulder in salute.

"That is a sign of the times," said Mr. Brindle. "I have been so often threatened, particularly by that amiable fellow José d'Arousta, that I have found it advisable to arm my negroes. They are all drilled and instructed in the use of their weapons, and I fancy would fight staunchly if it came to a struggle. Fortunately, however, we have been left severely alone, though we must never relax our vigilance, particularly now that war is imminent. But come along and see the sheds in which we dry the tobacco leaf. If all goes well I shall make a fortune this summer, for the ground has been fertile, and the crops are of excellent quality."

As the days passed, Hal found little cause to grumble at the position he had taken. In the house he was at once at home, and, indeed, was just like one of the family. In the plantations he found that the negroes respected him, and did what he told them willingly. Over the mulattoes, too, he seemed to have perfect command, and seldom had cause to find fault with them. Once, however, he discovered a burly, impudent fellow ill-treating a mule, and promptly dismissed him, Mr. Brindle heartily approving of the course he had taken. The man left uttering threats, saying that before long he would return with some of his comrades, and burn the hacienda down.

Meanwhile, little of the squabble between America and Spain was heard of.

Two months later, as Hal and Gerald were returning from a distant part of the plantation, they were startled by a figure suddenly emerging on to the track in front of them. The man darted from the trees which grew thickly on either side, and waved his arms wildly. It was evening, and the darkness was so great

beneath the leaves that it was not easy to see him; but Gerald called Hal's attention to him.

"Hist, massa! Am dat Massa Hal?" a voice called softly through the darkness.

"Yes. What is it? What is the matter?" Hal asked eagerly.

"Gently, boss; not speak so high. Me take Johnson, and come along to tell you dat massa and de missie am troubled."

"Mr. Brindle and Dora? Impossible!" exclaimed Hal. "Why, you must be dreaming, for we left them in the hacienda having tea not two hours ago."

"Yes, sar, and bad men watch de boss and young massa ride away. Den, as Jake work in field, he see first one and den twenty men ride across to house. He see Black Pete run to call de boys, and hear de rifle go crack, crack, crack! Pete, him lie over dere so quiet on his face, and two ob de boys wid him. Oders make run into trees and hide, so not get hit wid bullet."

"Yes; and then, what occurred?" asked Hal eagerly, springing at the same moment from his saddle. "What did these ruffians do next? Quick! The safety of the boss and his daughter depend upon my hearing at once."

"Dey laugh at Black Pete as he lie dere," continued the negro. "Den dey fire again into de trees, and ride on to de house. Jake him lie in bush and t'ink. Him say to himselb, 'De bad men am come to take all. Dey not find de young boss, and dey wait to shoot him when him come along. Me stop dat. Me go along right now and find de massa Hal, and tell him. Den, p'raps, all come right.' Me run dis way, and when me see you and de young massa riding along, me hop on to de path, and shout and wave de arm. Oh, sar, get back quick and kill dem all! Jake willing to help and do what him can."

The good fellow lifted his hands as if beseeching, and looked appealingly into Hal's face.

"You have done very well, Jake, and I shall remember," said Hal. "These men have evidently been here some time, and the trees on the plantation must have prevented us from hearing the firing. But, in any case, I don't suppose these ruffians, whoever they are, would care much who heard, for we are right away from civilized parts, and have no neighbors, while they are in force, and have driven the hands away. No doubt they feel perfectly secure, for the hacienda is so far from Santiago that they would have done all they wished and cleared away before we could get help. No; we can expect no one to intervene, and must act for ourselves."

"But how? What can we do?" asked Gerald in dismay.

"Do? That is a difficult question to answer on the spur of the moment, old boy. But this is certain, we must make a move, and that at once, for these fellows have already shown that they mean to stop at nothing. They have fired at, and apparently killed, some of the hands. There is no saying to what extent they might carry their bullying. We must stir up the men, and turn them out as soon as possible. Let me think a moment. Yes; there are thirty armed negroes. Some of them have probably never seen the gang who fired at their friends, for they will have been on the other side of the plantation, at work in the fields. But you may be sure that they will now be on the *qui vive*; for though we failed to hear the shots, the hands are too old, and have had too good a training to make any mistake. Their hearing is far more acute than ours, and everyone knows what wonders they are at tracking, and at following a trail in the dark. Of the thirty, three are killed or wounded. That leaves twenty-seven, and with such a number we ought to be able to accomplish something. Listen, Jake. Run off as

fast as you can, and tell the boys to collect at the crushing shed. How long will it take you to find all of them?"

"P'raps quarter hour, p'raps longer, sar," the negro answered quickly. "But Jake him know a little ting. Him make sounds dat all de boys know. Dey hear and follow wid de same, so's oder boys know. Me be in hurry, boss. You see how quick me hab dem all, ebery one."

He turned, and, without another word, dived into the forest, leaving Hal and Gerald listening to the crash of the underwood as he forced his way through.

"Of course, it is absolutely impossible to know what has happened, and equally difficult to determine what to do," said Hal thoughtfully. "But I think our best plan will be to creep towards the house, and see what these men are doing. Then we may learn how matters stand, and can arrange our plans accordingly. If they know the plantation, and all about it, they will certainly be on the look-out for us on our return. I fancy if we went forward without taking the precaution to remain silent and in hiding, we should be greeted with a bullet, for they evidently care little what murder they do. Walk softly, old fellow, and keep a careful watch ahead, and your ears wide open. I am not anxious to get shot again; and besides, I want to turn the tables on these marauding rascals, and teach them a lesson which they will not be likely to forget in a hurry."

He looked calmly at Gerald, and then, motioning him to follow, led the way along the track. Soon he came to a path which was almost invisible, for it was so little used that the jungle which grew closely around the hacienda had obliterated it, just as it would have overrun the tobacco fields and the clearings meant for the cultivation of cane, if constant and arduous labor with the machete did not keep it down and within strict bounds. But Hal knew the path, for he was now well acquainted with the ins and outs of the whole plantation. Pressing forward, and closely followed by Gerald and by the two mules, he pushed the creepers and vegetation to one side, and rapidly approached the neighborhood of the hacienda. Soon the trees opened, and judging that he was near the central clearing which surrounded Eldorado, he came to a halt, and turned to his young friend.

"You stay here and look after the mules, Gerald," he said, in a voice that showed no trace of excitement. "I'll do a little prospecting. Remember that your father's safety depends as much on your caution as on anything I may do."

"Right; you can trust me, old boy," answered Gerald, taking the reins and seating himself at the feet of the mules. "I'll stay here as quiet as a mouse, and will keep the animals beside me. They will be too busy eating these green leaves to care to proclaim their presence by whinnying to their friends."

"Then I'll get off," and suiting the action to the word, Hal started once more along the path. A hundred yards farther on it suddenly emerged into the clearing, close beside a large outhouse used as a stable for the many mules kept to work on the plantation. As Hal approached this building, he heard voices, and at once turned into the forest, and crept forward amongst the trees till he was close enough to hear all that was said. Thirty mules were tethered in the shed, and some men were feeding them. All were natives of the island save two, who seemed to be in charge. They chatted volubly with one another, and seemed to be highly pleased. But, though Hal strained his ears, he could make nothing of the conversation, for the men were speaking in Spanish. Lying close to the edge of the forest, he watched them for ten minutes or more, wondering

what to do. To attempt to reach the hacienda would have been foolhardy and quite impossible, for it was sixty yards away, and several armed men were marching up and down in the clearing, evidently having been told off as a guard.

"I shall have to wait till it is dark, that is all," he murmured. "To try to get over to the hacienda just now would be simply to give myself into the hands of these ruffians, and throw all chances of rescue away. Of course, if we can get hold of the hands, we could shoot every one of these fellows down, just like so many birds. But would that do any good to our friends—to—er—Dora? I wonder who they are? The fact that there are Spaniards with the gang makes it look as though they were not insurgents. And yet there are natives too. Perhaps they are servants; and I shall be greatly surprised if our old enemy, José d'Arousta, and his rascally accomplice, Pedro, do not turn out to be the ringleaders. I know that this is the kind of band they have been working with. Irregulars they are called. Scoundrels every one of them, I should say. Hallo! Who are these?"

At this moment two men, whip in hand, and with rifles slung across their shoulders, descended the stone steps from the balcony of the hacienda, and sauntered across the clearing. They stopped in front of the first of the Spanish sentries, and questioned him closely, allowing Hal at the same moment a clear view of their faces, for they stood in the glare of a fire of logs which burnt close at hand.

One was the rascally captain of irregulars who had made good his escape when attempting to steal the bag on board the train in Florida. Beside him, as might have been guessed, was Pedro, smoking the inevitable cigarette. Even then, as he conversed with the sentry, he was in the act of rolling another, his nimble fingers twisting the paper with a dexterity which showed how accustomed they were to the work. As Hal looked, the two men laughed loudly, as if enjoying an excellent joke, and walked towards the shed.

"As I thought," exclaimed Hal, in a low voice. "It is those two ruffians, and, I suppose plunder and revenge have brought them here. What are they saying, I wonder?"

José d'Arousta, now without a beard, and looking handsome and debonair in a planter's suit and high riding-boots, conversed volubly with Pedro, and was undoubtedly in the best of spirits. Then he turned and addressed the natives, giving them some orders in a sharp voice.

"It is just as well to let them know who is their master," he said, suddenly using English. "In these times, when Spain seems to have more and more trouble heaped upon her shoulders, these dogs get uppish and want careful handling. No doubt they wonder what we are doing here. Of course, they know that it is one of our usual expeditions; but do they suspect anything more? Up to this they have been only lukewarm adherents of their brethren in the island, and have not objected to a little burning here and there, for they are making money out of it. But if they were to suspect that you and I have our own private objects in view there would be trouble. Remember, Pedro, we are Spanish irregulars. Now, about this dog of an Englishman. What has been done to capture him?"

"If he escapes us he will be clever," answered his companion. "We know that he and the boy will return by a certain path. Thirty paces from the clearing two of our men are posted. They are natives, and are armed with the machete. The boy will be taken to the hacienda, and the other will stay. Yes, Señor Capitan,

your orders will be followed in that respect," he added significantly. "That foolish young man who upset our well-laid plans in Florida will disappear, for these black fellows are masters of the art."

"And what if the mice refuse to walk into your trap?" asked the other. "How do you know that they have not already taken the alarm, and made the best of their way to Santiago?"

"The better for one if they have, Señor Capitan; but it will not be the case. The young English fool will not desert his friends. See how he supported them in Florida, when he might easily have lain in his bunk and feigned sleep. But he must needs spring up, and come to the rescue, only to receive a bullet. He will act in the same manner this time, and he will suffer death. Madmen must be treated as madmen when they become dangerous to one's safety. But we shall soon know. We will give them a little time longer, and then, if the boy is not brought to the hacienda, I myself will go down this small pathway till it cuts into the larger one. There I will stay, and hide amongst the bushes. If in an hour I do not come to tell you that I have seen them, you may be sure that they have ridden for the town. That would be unfortunate, for we have a score to pay to the Englishman, and it would mean more trouble on another occasion. But, should they have escaped us, we need not fear surprise, for Santiago is far away, and it will be to-morrow morning before they could return with help."

"Not even then," said José d'Arousta, with a sneer. "To whom are they to apply for help? No one would listen to the beggarly Englishman, for are not they the same as Americans? At any rate, their sympathies are with these enemies of Spain. We will rest here, take all the money we can lay our hands on, and then return leisurely, conscious that we have done a piece of excellent work. If there should be trouble, we have hosts of friends to prove that we were in Santiago when the attack was made upon the hacienda. You may be sure that the matter would be dropped at once, for the commandant in Santiago has sufficient on his hands already without caring to be troubled about such a trumpety affair. Yes; I have no fears. We will take our ease, and depart with all the gold we can find."

"Leaving the hacienda in flames, señor?" the half-caste asked eagerly.

"No, certainly not. There you show yourself sadly wanting in thought, Pedro," José d'Arousta replied, with a grim smile. "Our friends defied us once before; they escaped us in Florida, and now we have them in our toils. But, remember, the crops are just gathered and stored, and very shortly money will be received in exchange. We will leave the hacienda for another time, Pedro. Do you follow me? We will take the very last dollar now by force, returning on a later occasion for a second haul. If we are not satisfied then, it will be easy to set a torch to the hacienda, which is the pride of Señor Brindle's heart."

"Ha, ha, ha! That is good, Señor Capitan. It is fine!" Pedro answered, with a snigger. "Of course, we will leave him for another day's sport."

They walked away towards the hacienda, leaving Hal boiling with wrath and indignation.

"Rob him now and come again, will they!" he muttered angrily. "We will see about that. The Brindles have been more than good to me, and I will do my utmost for them in return. At any rate, I will put a spoke in José d'Arousta's wheel this time. Now, how is it to be done? I'll slip back and talk it over with Gerald, for he is sharp, and may very well be able to help."

He crept into the darkness of the forest, and, emerging at length upon the path again, he crawled away from the clearing as rapidly as possible.

"Hallo! Is that you?" exclaimed Gerald, starting to his feet as Hal suddenly rose by his side, having given absolutely no evidence of his approach. "Bother you, old man, you made my heart jump into my mouth. 'Pon my word, you are a regular Red Indian, and I am sure that one of our hands could not have done better. But what have you learned?"

"A good deal, Gerald. Take a seat there on the ground and listen."

Hal seated himself beside his young companion, and rapidly told him all that had passed between José and Pedro.

"There, you know all," he said at last. "Just stir your brains and tell me what we are to do. We have a number of reckless men to deal with; that you can plainly perceive, for they do not hesitate to arrange for my murder. On our side we can count on twenty-seven negroes, who are faithful, and who will fight if well led, but who, negro-like, may run away if someone does not show them an example."

"Then why not surround the hacienda and open fire?" said Gerald, eagerly.

"And lose control of our men at once. No; that would not do," Hal answered quietly. "Besides, what would those villains do in such circumstances? I tell you, Gerald, they are brutal enough to kill their captives. Now, look here; our men will fight, if collected together so as to feel one another's support. I have a little plan to propose which I think will settle matters satisfactorily. We are in the minority, and our men are on foot. If we push this gang of ruffians they will fight hard, and we shall not gain our end, which is the rescue of your father and Dora, and of the money in the hacienda. I suggest that we make it impossible for them to take their mules. That will be a simple matter, for we have only to post the negroes beside the shed. Then we will cover the guards who are on watch in the clearing, and will order them to decamp. After that we will deal with the ringleader. Now, old boy, will you command the firing party?"

"Rather! Of course! But what about you, Hal? What will you be doing?" asked his companion.

"I am going to set the ball rolling, if possible," answered Hal calmly. "José d'Arousta's head man is bent upon searching for me. We will capture the gentleman, and make so free as to undress him. Then I will take his place, and while he fumes and rages, will march as bold as brass into the hacienda."

"What? You are joking, Hal!" exclaimed Gerald, aghast at the boldness of the idea. "You would be shot for a certainty. You cannot mean it."

"Oh, yes, I do," Hal replied quietly. "And I can assure you that the risk is far more imaginary than real. Think it over. It is getting dusk already, and, dressed exactly like Pedro, I walk into the hacienda. The other ruffian will almost certainly be alone, and I shall have the advantage of him, for I shall take him by surprise. Do you mean to tell me that I shall not be a match for such a man?"

Hal's eyes glinted strangely in the gloom, and, glancing at him, Gerald was surprised to find that his usually smiling face had assumed a most severe and determined look.

"By Jove, you will, of course," he blurted out, extending his hand to grasp Hal's and shake it. "A match for the fellow! Of course you will be! But it's risky—awfully risky, and I don't like the thought of your going alone."

"And I don't care to think what may be happening meanwhile," said Hal earnestly. "That brute will be insulting and ill-treating everyone. Bully is written

on his face as well as thief. Do you care to think that Dora may be insulted by such a man?" Hal jumped to his feet, and asked the question hotly.

"Good Heavens, no!" Gerald answered.

"Then don't try to dissuade me. If someone who is armed were not near at hand when shooting commenced, José d'Arousta might do something desperate; but with my revolver pointed at him he will be more cautious. Now, look here. You cut over to the crushing-shed and bring the negroes across. Take the mules with you in case their whinnying should be heard and give the alarm. I'll stay here and look out for Pedro. Now, hurry up, for I want some help to capture that fellow."

Promptly grasping the reins, Gerald hurried away, and returned some minutes later with the whole force of natives.

"Now, Jake," said Hal, selecting the negro who had first brought the alarm, "send twenty of the hands up this path to the clearing, and let them lie down amongst the trees in sight of the shed. If they hear anyone approaching, they are to slip aside and allow him to pass, signaling down here to let us know. Let me think. Yes; there is a marsh down in the hollow, so it shall be the croak of a frog. You understand? We are to be warned whenever anyone approaches; and, by the way, see that rifles are unloaded. Triggers get pulled too easily, and might give the alarm."

Jake hurriedly carried out the order, and disappeared down the pathway.

"I want two more to cut into the forest and stalk a couple of ruffians who are watching the other path," said Hal. "They must be careful how they approach, for the men I speak of are in hiding. When they discover the whereabouts of the sentries they must load and be ready for emergencies, and when they hear the others moving off, must shout at the two they are covering, and order them away. If the rascals show fight, they are to be dropped instantly.

"Now, you others," he continued, turning to the five who remained, "one of the leaders of the gang which has attacked the hacienda will come along this path. You will lie in wait for him, and capture him, for I want his clothes. If he is troublesome, you must silence him, for any sound now would ruin our plans.

"That is all arranged, and we will step on one side," he went on, moving away from the group, and drawing Gerald after him. "You see, it isn't that I don't like the job of tackling this beggar—I owe him one, and shall be glad to repay it; but the negroes will do it without a sound, whereas we might bungle it, and bring the whole crew down upon us. Ah, down on your knees! I heard the signal. Yes; there it is again."

They hastily concealed themselves, and, crouching low in the forest, heard first the hoarse croaking of a frog, and then the unmistakable sound of footsteps approaching.

Chapter XI

A Bold Course.

Out from the dense maze of bushes and trees came Pedro, the half-breed ally of José d'Arousta, picking his way gingerly along the narrow footpath, and evidently listening acutely for any sounds that might betray the position of an

enemy, and the unwary approach of the Englishman whom he hoped to kill. A moment before he had been shrouded in gloom, for the sun was already fast setting, and the roof of leaves overhead cast a deep shadow upon everything beneath. Suddenly, however, he came into clear view, and Hal and Gerald, who were crouching within five or six paces of him, saw him distinctly.

Click! An excited negro pulled back his trigger in readiness, and Pedro, hearing the sound, stood suddenly still, rooted to the spot, and listening with all his ears. For more than a minute a death-like silence reigned, while the half-caste peered into the forest, doubtful whether to advance or retire. Prudence told him to hasten back to his friends, for the young fellow he was in search of had already proved that he was capable of looking well after himself. But fierce longing for revenge, the feeling that this was an opportunity not to be missed—one, too, that would enable him to attain his end without much danger to himself, for he hoped for a complete surprise—egged him on, and helped him to conquer his fears. He hesitated, and then, with a muttered "What a dolt I am! it was only a twig snapping," he gave a stamp of impatience, and walked on.

Next instant a nimble form sprang, unheard and unseen, upon the path behind him, and, crouching like a tiger collecting its limbs for a spring, crept stealthily after him. Then, measuring the distance with a practiced eye, the negro launched himself through the air, landing upon Pedro's shoulders. A hand closed firmly over his mouth, and a moment later the ruffian who came to destroy the beautiful hacienda, and to exercise a private vengeance, was lying as helpless as a log, bound hand and foot, while a hard and extremely uncomfortable gag was fastened between his jaws by means of a handkerchief. Close beside him crouched a peculiarly sinister-looking negro, prepared to silence him should he attempt to give the alarm, and seeming, too, to hope for such an action, for he brandished his weapon in the prisoner's face in a manner that was sufficiently formidable to upset the equanimity of the boldest man.

"That was well done—very neatly managed, indeed," said Hal, issuing from his cover. "Now, Mr. Pedro, or whatever you are called, we are going to turn the tables if we can. Take off his clothes, my lads, and if he attempts to make a sound, or to get rid of his gag, you will know how to act."

But there was very little need for the caution, for Pedro a captive was a very different individual indeed from the half-caste who sat in the railway car away in Florida, plotting the theft of Mr. Brindle's bag. His yellow eyes blinked nervously, and as the negroes crowded round him, and hustled him with no gentle hands, he looked at Hal appealingly, as if asking for his help. His limbs trembled, and a thick perspiration broke out upon his forehead.

"Not at all, my fine fellow," exclaimed Hal, as if he had read his prisoner's thoughts. "You need not appeal to me, for I told you that I was about to turn the tables. Well, I have commenced with you, and the others have their turn to come. Remember that I bear a mark upon my shoulder which you were good enough to give me. Is it likely that I shall go out of my way now to save you any pain or inconvenience, especially when I know that you came this way with the express intention of killing me—murdering me in cold blood, I should have said? That's right, boys, strip his coat and breeches off. I fancy I shall manage to squeeze into them."

Tumbling their captive without ceremony, it was not long before the negro hands had dragged his fine clothes from him. Hal picked them up, and carefully

inspected them. Then he donned them calmly. Indeed, looking at him there as he struggled into the coat, one would have imagined that he was undertaking some very ordinary duty, one to which he was accustomed every day of his life. He paid particular attention to the set of the breeches, and seemed quite annoyed because the jacket of the half-caste would not button across his expansive chest.

"You see," he said, with something approaching a smile, "I want to be accurate. This fellow usually has his coat fastened, but I'm too big to allow of it. However, the resemblance will be good enough, particularly as it will be quite dark.

"Now, listen," he continued imperiously, turning to his prisoner. "I am now going to meet that scoundrel who works with you; but first I want you to answer a question, and be very careful how you do it. I have already warned you against raising an alarm. Tell me an untruth, and I will make it extremely warm for you, for pain is the only thing that appeals to men of your class. Now, my men, take the gag from his mouth and bring him to me."

Delighted to have in their hands one of the gang who had injured some of their comrades, the negroes rushed at the unhappy Pedro, and dragged him to his knees. Then they carried him to Hal, and tearing the gag from his mouth, placed him upon his feet, one of them standing close beside him and holding the cold muzzle of a rifle at his neck.

"Ah, señor, spare me! I will tell the truth," Pedro cried, his knees knocking together, and his eyes turning in terror to the negroes who held him. "Take these wolves away from me, and you shall hear all that you wish to know."

"Silence! Do you wish to let your friends hear you?" asked Hal sternly. "Silence, man, and answer in a whisper as you value your life. Now, who is in the hacienda beside your accomplice?"

"No one, señor, save a guard who stands at the door that opens from the top of the steps. El Capitan sits in the best room, drinking wine."

"If you were returning now, how would you act?"

"I should pass by the guard without a word, señor," Pedro answered, flinching as the barrel of the rifle touched his neck. "Ah, señor, I cannot reply while my life depends upon this man behind. Have the gun removed, I beg of you."

"In time, Pedro. You must really give us time," said Hal calmly. "Remember that I was to have felt the edge of cold steel myself, for your orders were that the machete was to be used to kill me. Listen to this. I am going into the hacienda to see this friend of yours, and you will be brought to the edge of the clearing. When you hear José d'Arousta's voice, repeat his commands in loud tones, and warn your comrades on guard and those who are looking to the mules, that if they approach the house or attempt to take the animals from the shed, they will be shot down without mercy. I need not tell you to obey me to the letter, for these good fellows will have charge of you. Now, bring him along, boys. The sun will be down in five minutes, and then it will be time to start."

Hal left his trembling captive in charge of the grinning negroes, and grasping Gerald by the arm, led him along the path. Five minutes later they were amongst the hands who were lying in the forest watching the shed and the guerilla sentries paraded up and down before the hacienda.

"All of you lie down here," said Hal. "Ah, there goes the sun, and very soon we shall have the moon up in its place."

He had scarcely finished speaking when the golden orb disappeared suddenly, and without the slightest warning, as is the case in the tropics, where night succeeds day with a rapidity that is astonishing. Then up floated the moon, while stars glistened dull and faint in the sky, rendered almost invisible by the bright silvery rays that now shot over the trees and deluged everything. At once all around became silent, and the clearing and house looked unreal and ghostly in the pale beams which were so different from those that had lit up the place only a few minutes before.

Glancing into the clearing, Hal saw the Spanish irregulars sauntering carelessly up and down, their hands thrust deep into their pockets, and a cigarette gleaming red beneath the teeth of each. Those who were not on duty had collected on the right beneath a group of palms, and were listlessly watching one of their number who saw to the contents of a kettle that was suspended over a big fire. They lay in all sorts of negligent attitudes, and seemed to have forgotten the hacienda and the leader who had brought them there.

"Now is the time," Hal murmured in Gerald's ear. "Look here, old boy, I am going to leave you in charge. You know as well as I do what is going to happen and how to act. Wait till you hear voices from the hacienda. I shall endeavor to make José d'Arousta order his men back to Santiago. They will have to go without arms and without mules. That is your part of the business, and you must see to it. I am going to look after the chief scoundrel, but you must have those negroes ready in case of accidents. Look over there. The rifles are piled in front of the fire, so that you can prevent the Spaniards from touching them. Do you understand?"

"Yes, quite," Gerald answered hesitatingly. "But, I say, old boy, it's a fearful risk that you are taking. Are you sure that it is wise?"

"Do you understand?" Hal asked, repeating his question and ignoring Gerald's. "Yes? Then take the utmost care, and when the time comes, make Pedro add his order to José's. There, you will manage beautifully. Good-by. If you hear a shot you may as well make a rush, for there will be trouble in the hacienda."

He nodded to Gerald, and waiting only to squeeze the hand which the lad enthusiastically thrust towards him, he rose to his feet, and stepped from the shrubs and trees on to the narrow path. A moment later he was in the clearing, walking slowly across it with a swaggering gait, such as he had seen Pedro adopting. And an extremely good substitute he made in appearance for that evil gentleman, though, as a matter of fact, he was some three inches taller. He was wearing riding-breeches, with high-cut riding boots, a wide-open coat and colored waist-cloth, such as is worn by many Spaniards. Upon his head was a broad-brimmed hat, with feather and tassel. The better to preserve his incognito he had tipped the brim well over his eyes, so as to throw a shadow upon his face. A fine manly young fellow he looked as he stalked into the moonlit clearing, and he showed a determined face beneath the shadow of his hat.

"By Jove, what a chap!" Gerald murmured eagerly, as he lay in the forest. "I ought to be there, but he knows as well as I do that I haven't the go in me to carry out such a cool piece of acting. Who would have thought it of Hal—the fellow who never quarrels, and seems to be liked by everyone? Good old Hal! But I ought to be taking all these risks for the sake of father and Dora. Why should he? Why?"

Apparently the question rather staggered Gerald, for he at once became silent, as he reclined upon the ground watching Hal's every movement. With the utmost nonchalance Hal walked towards the hacienda, ignoring the presence of the sentries and of their comrades who were feasting round the fire. Suddenly, however, someone called to him.

"Señor Pedro," he heard a voice cry, while a man hurried towards him.

To escape was impossible, and, therefore, Hal halted, and placed his hand easily on the butt of his revolver, which rested in his waistband. Next moment a swarthy Spaniard stood before him, and evidently described something which he had done. Hal listened carefully, and was able from his rough knowledge of the language to gather that he was being told that all was well, when he promptly made up his mind how to act.

"Pedro apes the pure Spaniard," he thought, "and, no doubt, as second in command, he treats these fellows with more or less contempt. It is the class of thing a man of his character would do. I'll say 'Good!' and turn away."

Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he turned abruptly upon his heel, and said, "Buenos!" Then he walked on towards the hacienda, while the man hurried towards his friends, having detected nothing unusual. Pedro was a rough, ill-conditioned fellow, he knew, so that the answer was all that he had expected. Still, it was galling to be treated like that, especially by one not of pure Spanish birth, and he did not fail to remark upon it.

"One would think that we were dogs," he said angrily. "Here have I been round the clearing to see that all is as it should be, and when I report the same to him, he turns upon me as though I had done him an injury. At least, it was as bad as that. Some day the half-breed cur will be sorry. He has murdered many, and perhaps someone will try to find room for the blade of a knife between his ribs. If so, I for one shall not weep. But hand me my supper. There is one consolation in the fact that he cannot cut me from my meals."

Thankful to have escaped discovery, which would have meant failure at the very commencement of his little plot, Hal swaggered to the steps, and stood there a moment to roll one of the many cigarettes with which the average Spaniard regales himself during the day. Taking care to keep his back to the sentry, who stood upon the balcony above, he struck a match and lit up, sending a cloud of smoke flying into the air.

"Now for it," he murmured gently. "I don't want a scene, and I wish to avoid bloodshed, but I mean to prevent this fellow D'Arousta from robbing Mr. Brindle. He is my employer, and it is only my duty to do all that I can."

He ran lightly up the steps, and would have passed the sentry without a word, but the man came forward, and held his rifle forward to bar the path, as if he had noticed something strange. But, more probably he was half asleep, or had been day-dreaming, for when Hal gave vent to an exclamation of impatience and anger, the Spaniard sprang back, and at once offered an apology. Hal took no notice of it, for to do so would have been to betray himself. Instead, he pushed on, and, pausing just for one moment to drag his hat still more over his eyes, entered the big room of the hacienda, which lay on the left.

A tall shaded lamp stood close to the wall, and some paces from it was a table at which José d'Arousta sat, with a flood of light illuminating his face. Opposite him, seated in a chair, to which his wrists and ankles were lashed, was Mr. Brindle, while standing close beside him was Dora, white and trembling, but for all that preserving an undaunted mien.

Hal took in the whole situation in an instant, and, clattering across the room without ceremony, dragged a seat to that end of the table farthest from the lamp, and sat down with the rays upon his back.

Puff! A cloud of tobacco smoke came from his lips and enveloped him.

"Ha, you are back, then, Pedro!" exclaimed José d'Arousta, turning to him. "What luck, my partner? Has it been good?"

At that moment Hal emitted another cloud of smoke, and at once commenced to choke violently. He dragged a big red handkerchief from the pocket of Pedro's coat, and held it to his face, nodding meanwhile as if to answer the question.

"Good! Better than ever! Things have gone well for us!" José exclaimed. "Here, señora, get me another glass of this wine. This is stuff which one does not find in Santiago, and it is well to make the most of one's opportunities. Besides, I would drink to the health of my friend, for he has just paid off a heavy score for me. Think what it is."

As if determined to do all in her power to conciliate the coward before her, Dora refilled his glass from a decanter that stood on the table, and then returned to her father's side. As for José, he lifted the wine to the light, and, having inspected it carefully, swallowed it with a gulp.

"Come," he said, with a sardonic smile, "you have not yet answered my question, señora. Surely it is not because you are too timid a donzella (maiden)? What score do you imagine the gallant Pedro has paid for me?"

"If I heard that he had murdered every hand upon the plantation I should not be surprised," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "He is villain enough for anything."

"Do you hear that, my Pedro?" José cried, with a gay, bantering laugh. "See what a high opinion the Señor Brindle has of you. My dear sir, please remember that you are speaking of my friend. He is an amiable fellow, I do assure you, and has a very tender heart. But, supposing that score referred to the overseer, the brat of an Englishman who thwarted me before? You will recollect the occasion of which I speak."

"Pshaw! he was too clever for you," answered Mr. Brindle, with a disdainful smile, "and I am sure he has outmatched you again."

"Sure! Are you, my friend? Then we will soon let you know," said José harshly. "But we will not discuss that matter now. The most important business is to settle the debt you owe me. Let me see, you said, I think, that the cash and what valuables you possess are in that safe in the corner of the room. I want the key. Where is it?"

"There it is, hanging on my watch-chain," Mr. Brindle said brokenly. "You are too strong for me, and I must submit. If I did not know well that you would shoot me like a dog, I would have defied you long ago, and left you to make these discoveries for yourself. But you have the upper hand. Wait till my turn comes; I will then hound you out of the island."

"Quite so; I believe you would if you could," answered the Spaniard, with a satirical smile. "But you have unfortunately failed to take stock of current events. For instance, war was declared between Spain and America yesterday. That very naturally throws Santiago into a turmoil, so that you might hunt the town and never find us. Again, you are an American, and once you leave your estate you are spying. Remember that, for I shall swear that it is the case, and you must know the reward you would meet with."

"War declared! Ah, I thought as much! But still, I repeat that I shall repay you for this day's work, José d'Arousta," said Mr. Brindle sternly. "Once before

you attempted to rob me, and failed. You are successful this time, but it is the last, for I will never rest till you are punished."

"Really you will put yourself to much unnecessary trouble," the Spaniard replied. "But we are wasting time. Let me see what the safe contains. I am far more interested in seeing to that than in listening to what a beggarly American has to say."

He started to his feet, and, striding up to Mr. Brindle, removed the key from his watch-chain. Then he opened the safe, and pulling out the drawers, emptied their contents upon the table.

"A very pretty haul, Pedro!" he exclaimed, thrusting his fingers greedily amongst the gold which lay piled up before him. "A good reward, indeed, and one worthy of our labors. Stow it in your pocket, my friend."

Hal, who up to this had preserved a strict silence, gave vent to a guttural laugh, and hastily transferred the gold and silver to his capacious pockets. The Spaniard watched him eagerly, his attention being so much occupied with the booty he was stealing that he did not give more than a passing thought to his supposed accomplice.

"Good! That is done; and now I fancy we can bid you adieu," he said at last, turning to Mr. Brindle. "Pedro, go to the door, and give our men the order to saddle up. Señor, forgive my rudeness in hurrying away, but duty calls, for your countrymen will be exchanging shots with us very soon, and it is well that I should be there to help read them the same lesson as you have been taught. Señora, your pardon. In the absence of our mutual friend, the handsome Señor Marchant, who, I fear, is dead, permit me to proclaim myself your very devoted servant."

He turned on his heel, after giving a flourishing bow, and stepped towards the door. At that moment his eye fell upon Hal, and he stopped abruptly; for, taking advantage of his satirical bobs, the latter had drawn his revolver, and now held it presented at the Spaniard's head, while at the same time, as if to mock José's manner, he leant one hand easily upon the table as if it were almost too much trouble to stand.

"By your leave, Señor Capitan," he said, with a short laugh. "You have given us a lesson in politeness, and I will follow suit. Hands up, at this instant!"

To say that José d'Arousta was surprised was to express the situation mildly. He staggered backwards, turned deathly pale, and then drove his hand into his pocket.

"Stop that!" said Hal, sternly, but in low tones, so that the sentry should not hear, holding his weapon within an inch of the Spaniard's head. "Hands up!"

José lifted his arms slowly and grudgingly, while he glared at Hal as if he would kill him.

"That is well. Now, I warn you that I will shoot if you show even the faintest suspicion of treachery. Dora, cut your father loose, if you please."

As if in a dream, for she was as yet unable to grasp the situation, Dora took a knife from the table, and released Mr. Brindle.

"Good," said Hal. "Now, Mr. Brindle, I will trouble you to lash this rogue in front of me."

"Delighted, I'm sure," exclaimed the latter; and at once set to work.

Taking the ropes which had bound his own limbs only a moment or two before, he wound them round the arms and feet of the Spanish brigand, and knotted them firmly.

"Now we will go on with the play," said Hal calmly. "Much depends upon you, José d'Arousta. If you give the alarm now, you and your comrades will suffer. First and foremost, you will run the danger of receiving a bullet from my revolver, and then the negro hands, who lie close outside, will fire upon your men. Pedro, too, whose clothes I was forced to borrow, will come in for very rough handling, for he is not a favorite with our good fellows. Now, you can prevent all this by doing as I tell you."

"What is it? What do you want?" the Spaniard asked crossly.

"Go to the window and order all your ruffians to return to Santiago. Tell them on no account to go for their mules, for they will be shot if they attempt it, and we are anxious to avoid bloodshed where they are concerned."

"And after that?"

"We will settle with you and your rascally accomplice."

Hal looked the man in the face and spoke sternly. For an instant José glowered at him, but realizing that he was beaten, he lowered his eyes, and muttered angrily beneath his breath.

"You've had your orders, so come along," said Mr. Brindle, grasping him by the shoulders and hustling him unceremoniously to the window. "Now, repeat them aloud, and be careful how you do it, for I have a strong hand, and will pinch your neck till the life is out of you."

Caught in a cleverly laid trap, there was nothing for José d'Arousta to do but obey. In a crestfallen voice, therefore, he called loudly to his comrades, begging them to leave the clearing and the neighborhood of the hacienda, and return to Santiago at once.

"Tell them that if they attempt to take their rifles or advance towards the house, you will be shot," said Hal, rising to his feet to get a clear view through the window.

And now his plan to compel Pedro to add his voice to the Spaniard's proved useful, for at first the remainder of the band were incredulous. They could not believe their ears, and sat round the fire gesticulating and asking questions of one another. Then the sentry descended the hacienda steps, and, unmindful of the warning, walked towards the piled-up arms. There was a crack from the fringe of trees, a flash suddenly lit up the shadows, and he fell backwards with his hands wildly clutching the air.

"That will show them that business is meant," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "It is just as well, too, for when a band of cut-throats attack a peaceful hacienda, they must be taught that punishment will follow. But, evidently, they have had enough."

And this was the case. Hearing their leader calling from the house, and his second in command from the forest, and detecting a ring of entreaty in the voices, the remainder of the rascally band hurried away from the hacienda, and, once amidst the trees, took to their heels in the direction of Santiago.

"There they go," said Mr. Brindle, throwing the latticed shutters wide open, and listening to the crash of men breaking their way through the jungle. "Now we will deal with the others. Hal, you know what is happening. Give your orders. I must confess that I am perfectly bewildered."

"It's all very simple," answered Hal, relaxing into a smile now that the danger was past. "Gerald and I were warned that you were in trouble. Then I happened to hear this man's accomplice declare his intention of entering the forest in search of myself. I was to be put out of the way. Happily I was able to turn the

tables. Pedro was captured without a sound, and I dressed up in his clothes, and came here in search of the other fellow. I knew that if I could master him I could get rid of the others, for all the hands are lying in the forest at the edge of the clearing, and you saw for yourself how quickly they checked an attempt to reach the arms. Now I will tell them what to do, and then you can take matters into your own hands."

Hal went to the window and called loudly.

"Half of you follow those brigands to the edge of the plantation, and see them well away," he cried. "Jake Johnson, you and four others can bring your prisoner in here; the remainder had better stay in the clearing and keep a good look-out."

A moment later the bushes which lined the clearing opened, and Gerald and the negro hands appeared, the former accompanying Jake Johnson and the men in charge of the captive Pedro. They trudged across the open space, looking weird and white in the pale moonbeams; then their feet were heard as they ascended the steps outside, and within a minute the two rascally Spaniards, who had dared to attack the hacienda, stood side by side, bound hand and foot, and awaiting sentence.

Hal looked at them searchingly, smiling at Pedro's appearance, for he was now clad in a tattered blanket in place of the fine clothes he had previously worn, and cut a very sorry figure; for this half-breed was not quite the man that he would have had his fellows believe. With all in his favor, and no fear for his own personal comfort and safety, he was a martinet, an insufferably proud man, who would stop at very little to support his position. Now, however, when any fate might be in store for him, and when his conscience told him that he deserved the severest punishment, he showed the stuff of which he was made. His knees trembled and shook so that he could scarcely stand upright, his face was of an ashen pallor, and big beads of perspiration trickled down his forehead.

A very different being was his leader. Rogue though he was, and coward enough to insult a lady when he had her in his power, he was yet a brave man, with a brave man's detestation for one who could not look adversity in the face. He stood there, his usually sallow face now flushed red with excitement, his head thrown back, and an air of reckless defiance about him.

"You hound!" he hissed, turning upon his quaking accomplice. "Why do you tremble? What do you fear? Have you not been the means of killing men? Then why should you grumble when your own fate reaches you? Señor, do me the favor of removing this fellow," he continued, turning to Hal. "He is my servant, I tell you, and he has no right to stand by my side."

"Servant or friend makes little difference to me, José d'Arousta," Hal answered coldly. "He has been good enough to act as your comrade in this deed of roguery, and therefore is good enough to take his sentence with you. Now, Mr. Brindle, these two men came here unbidden and made a most unwarranted attack upon you. I leave you to settle with them, and will merely mention that three of the negro hands have been either killed or wounded by their following. Deal with them as you think they deserve."

Chapter XII

A Risky Undertaking.

Called upon to pass judgment on the two Spanish irregulars who had attacked the peaceful hacienda in search of plunder and revenge, it was long before Mr. Brindle opened his lips or endeavored to speak. He drew a chair before them, and, having seated himself with the utmost deliberation, extracted a long cheroot from a case of woven grass, which he always carried in his pocket. Turning it round and round in his fingers, as if to satisfy himself that it was one of good flavor, he bit off one end, and striking a match, lit the other very carefully. Even then he did not address the prisoners.

"Pull that lamp a little closer, Hal, old boy," he said. "That's it. Now lift the shade, that I may get a better look at these two—these two rascals."

Hal did as he was asked, throwing a flood of light upon José d'Arousta and his accomplice.

"Señor, you are kind to us," said the former, in the calmest of calm voices, and with more than a suspicion of irony in his tones. "A strong light never did the gay d'Arousta harm. On the contrary, he has been told that it improves him."

He laughed, and, jerking his wide-brimmed hat backward, turned still more to the light, showing a handsome face, which would have been quite taking but for the color and vindictive flash of the eyes, and for the involuntary twitch of his lips, which even he, calm though he had forced himself to appear, could not entirely control.

"It is a pity, a thousand pities, José d'Arousta, that all your deeds cannot bear the light," said Mr. Brindle quietly. "I know them well, and you are aware of it. Rogue, sir, is written on your face—rogue, vagabond, and thief. What have you to say for yourself?"

"To say, señor? Merely that ill fortune has befallen me. But for this dolt here I should have succeeded, so that I have little more to say than that I regret my failure greatly, and think myself a fool that I did not burn the hacienda about your ears. But this young Englishman was too clever for me. It is the second time, and the last, I can assure you, señor, for José d'Arousta never forgets nor forgives, and never neglects to repay his debts in full."

"Exactly so," Mr. Brindle replied dryly. "It is the last time. Now, listen to me. A state of war has commenced in the island, and everything is disorganized. If I send you into Santiago, you will be set at liberty again, for your services will be required. Therefore I must take matters into my own hands, for men who make an unwarranted attack, and who kill my servants in cold blood, must take the consequences."

"Señor, you are scarcely wise," José replied, with unruffled calmness. "You mean, I understand, that you will shoot us. Ah, well! do so, and what will happen? In these lawless times my countrymen will retaliate, for the news is certain to reach their ears. That will be awkward, señor. On the other hand, you might set us at liberty, and profit yourself, for we will engage to leave you unmolested from this day onwards."

"You will engage? But what is the value of a promise from you?" asked Mr. Brindle, with a disdainful shrug of his shoulders.

"That you must decide for yourself," the Spaniard answered calmly.

Once more there was silence, Mr. Brindle sinking his face into his hands, as if in deep thought; while the captives stood in front of him, José apparently unconcerned, but for all that narrowly watching; and Pedro, with eyes that were full of fear, and knees that knocked together in sheer terror.

"Does anyone know which of my servants were hurt?" asked Mr. Brindle suddenly. "Were any killed, or wounded so badly that they will die?"

"I can answer that question, father," said Gerald, stepping forward. "Black Pete is hit badly, though not mortally, and will certainly recover: while the others have only trifling wounds."

"Then so much the better. I am glad that a death on my plantation and amongst my hands cannot be placed at the door of these men. Listen, you two," he went on, sternly, looking José and Pedro in the face. "Do you solemnly swear to leave me and mine alone in the future, and will you promise never to molest my overseer? You have threatened all of us, and we all know the nature of such men as you are. Revenge unfortunately holds a high place with you, and you will do much to accomplish an end. Put that aside. Forget that we exist, and declare to me on your solemn word that you will never come near us; for otherwise I shall take the law into my own hands, and hang you both to the trees in front of the hacienda."

"We will give you the promise on our honor, señor," said José. "See, I look you in the face, and I swear to observe this bond between us. Señor must know that a Spaniard never breaks his oath."

"Hum, I have had too little to do with men of your country to be able to vouch for the truth of that," Mr. Brindle answered dryly; "but I have heard of the saying that there is honor among thieves. Perhaps this is your case. However, lest you should forget this vow of yours, and come this way again to trouble me, I will give you a warning. From this day the man who approaches the hacienda with the intention of committing violence will be shot at sight. At sight, José d'Arousta; remember that. Now you may go, but carry my words with you, I pray. Outside in the clearing lies one of your gang, killed through your action. Break your plighted oath, and I will bring you to the same end, and this ruffian, too, your accomplice. Now, be off, and never let me see your faces again."

He gave an impatient stamp, and turned to Hal.

"Set them free," he said. "Let us be rid of them."

Taking a knife from his pocket, Hal advanced to the prisoners, and cut their lashings, keeping a close watch upon them the while, for it was well to suspect treachery from such men. Perhaps from Pedro there was little fear of foul play, for he had not the heart to attempt it; but from the other anything might be expected, for not for a single moment had his wonderful sang-froid deserted him. Even now, great though the relief must have been, he did not allow his feelings to betray him, or show that he had just emerged from an ordeal sufficiently trying to any man, and which might have ended in an order for his instant execution.

"The señor is wise," he said, with a disdainful laugh. "He has realized that it is risky and foolish to harm a Spaniard in these troublous days. Ah, well! the times will change, let us hope; and meanwhile, who can say what will happen? Now we will depart, as we have your permission, señor. Señora, buenas noches (good night). I would fain have stayed to pass a pleasant evening. Adios, señores (farewell, gentlemen). Had I the power, I would drink to our next meeting."

He swept his cap from his head, and bowed to the floor. Then, with one look at Dora and a meaning flash from his eyes in Hal's direction, he tramped out of the room with a swagger, and went down the steps, followed closely by Pedro.

"I am thankful he is gone," exclaimed Mr. Brindle. "The air seems clearer already."

"Yes; I too am glad to see the last of him for this time," said Hal. "But we shall have to deal with him again, and that very soon. Listen. What is that?"

They rose to their feet, and went to the window to look across the clearing. It was bathed in brilliant moonlight, which showed every object distinctly, illuminating the group of negroes who stood outside discussing the affairs of the past few hours in high-pitched voices, the piled-up rifles, and the dead Spaniard who lay prone in the center, with arms stretched out before him just as he had fallen. There, too, were José and his accomplice, entering the fringe of trees. As they did so, the former turned, and, seeing the faces in the window, and the figures of the watchers showing darkly against the light, he stood there and shook his fist in their direction.

"Hi! you in the room yonder!" he cried. "Listen to José d'Arousta's parting words. Remember this, Señor Brindle, that all is fair in love and war, and a vow pledged to the enemy is not binding. I give you solemn warning that I will visit this hacienda again, if it is only to meet and chat with the adorable señora. Señor Marchant, you know what to expect. I owe you a great debt, and will repay it."

He shook his fist ominously, and, plunging into the trees, was lost to view.

"And I will take his warning to heart," said Hal quietly, turning to his friends. "He says that he will repay, and I declare that if I meet him again I will shoot him like a dog on the slightest suspicion of treachery. He deserves anything, for he has broken his word and his honor."

"You will be fully justified in doing as you say, old boy," said Mr. Brindle. "But let us hope that he will never come our way again. War is said to have been declared, and, no doubt, Spain will go to the wall. Then America will look to our interests, and this unfortunate island will enter upon a new era of prosperity. Such an act of violence as has been attempted this night will then be out of the question. Now, let us go to supper; but, Hal, my dear lad, first we must shake you by the hand. I am not going to sing your praises, but I must tell you how well you have done, and what you have saved me. The money in your pockets represents a year's savings and hard work, and the total return of the plantation."

And now, while the small family at the beautiful hacienda of Eldorado discuss the evening meal, let us turn to America and to Spain, and ascertain what had been happening in the meantime, and why it was that, contrary to his previously expressed decision, Mr. Brindle had not sent Gerald and Dora back to Florida.

To say that the terrible tidings from Havana, detailing how the MAINE and her unfortunate crew were blown into the air, produced a storm of passion in the United States is to tell only the meager truth. For years Cuba and the insurrection there had rankled in the hearts of all in this big country. Many a time had private sympathizers given men and money to aid the cause of the insurgents, and more than once had representations been made to Spain in order to persuade her to end the condition of misery which clouded the island, and ruined the Americans there.

The story of the VIRGINIUS, though now many years old, was still fresh in the memory of the American nation, and the wretched condition of the unfortunate natives herded together in the concentration camps, and other evils, did not tend to let the sore close. No love was felt for the Spaniard, but only hatred and contempt. Matters, however, seemed to be mending, and a gallant ship, with a fine crew of officers and men, above whom floated the Stars and Stripes, was paying a friendly visit to Cuba. What wonder, then, that the news of its destruction filled Americans with anger! Treachery was suspected at once, and a searching investigation insisted on. Divers were dispatched to the wreck, who reported that a mine had been fired beneath the keel. They were not absolutely certain, but everything pointed to the truth of what they said, for the bottom plates of the MAINE, as well as the keel, were driven upwards at an angle, while the mud which formed the bed of the harbor beneath her was excavated to the depth of many feet—all going to prove that the explosions were the result of external force.

But, even now, war was not certain, though the nation clamored for it. Nothing definite could be decided upon until Congress met; and meanwhile, America commenced warlike preparations, while Spain, following her example, beat up recruits and war vessels for the struggle which was now imminent. In addition, she began to bestir herself to alleviate the sufferings of the people in the concentration camps in Cuba, and at this, the eleventh hour, did her utmost to conciliate the people of the States. But the attempt was made too late. Former Spanish promises had resulted in no improvement in the condition of the island. America, remembering this, called upon Spain to withdraw from Cuba and leave it to the natives.

A decided refusal was given, and on April the 26th a state of war commenced between the two nations, Spain at once assembling her fleet in home waters, and making all preparations in Cuba to resist the Americans; while, at the same time, she held the insurgents in check. This was José d'Arousta's opportunity; and we have seen how, accompanied by Pedro and his irregulars, he rode into the country and attacked Mr. Brindle's house.

Matters, indeed, looked anything but bright for those left in the island; and as the family sat at supper, Mr. Brindle discussed the situation earnestly with Hal.

"You see we are placed in a very uncomfortable position," he said thoughtfully. "Living out here in the country, we must look to ourselves alone to defend the place. I do not suppose that the Spaniards will trouble us unless they suspect us of trying to aid America; but when the island is infested with such scoundrels as José and his friends, our lives and property will never be safe. What is to prevent that rascal from returning as he threatened? He failed to succeed this time by the merest chance—a chance, my lad, which you made good use of, though I do not forget that some allowance of pluck was required to bring your plan to a favorable issue. He failed, but on the next occasion he will not be taken in so easily. It really is a troublesome matter to decide upon. Am I to stay here, or shall I leave until the war is over? That is the question which I continue to ask myself. Supposing I get away from the island as soon as possible, the estate will be overrun, and I shall return to find it a blackened wilderness from end to end, and the hacienda, of which I am so proud, a heap of ashes. If I stay, as I am inclined to do, the place may be burnt over our heads at any moment, and our lives may be seriously threatened. Now, Hal, you have

proved so thoughtful and cute before; let me know what you think about the matter? How would you act in the circumstances?"

"It is more or less of a puzzle," said Hal slowly, "but I think you will do well to stay. When your wounded negroes have recovered, you will have thirty-three rifles with which to defend the place—that is, of course, counting ourselves."

"I beg your pardon—thirty-four!" exclaimed Dora sharply. "You have forgotten to include me, sir."

"Quite right! Quite as it should be! Ha, ha, Hal! You have caught it this time, and let it be a warning to you in future. The girl is a regular Amazon. She can shoot and ride with the best of us."

Mr. Brindle shouted the words across the table, and chuckled to see Hal flush red. As for Dora, her pretty lips parted in a smile.

"I'm sure I hadn't thought of it like that," said Hal apologetically. "But let us put it at thirty-four. Now, I should advise that all the mulattoes be dismissed. You do not require them any longer, for the winter is at hand; and, besides, what help have they been on this occasion? None at all. We have not seen a single one since the row began, and in all probability they were with the gang of brigands. Then I should at once take steps to replace them from the plantation in Florida. You could spare them, I should think; and if not, it would not be difficult to hire more labor over there. The next and most important question to think of is how to defend the hacienda and plantation. In the first place, I should cut back the forest so as to obtain a wider clearing round the house. By doing this you will at the same time be providing material with which to build fortifications. To my mind, a sand-bag barricade on the roof would be the most useful defense, and I should run up a watch-tower above it. When the hacienda is seen to, I should erect small forts at intervals round the edge of the clearing, digging a ditch behind them. Our men could lie in them, and fire on the enemies approaching from the direction of Santiago, or from the other side; while, should anyone manage to evade them, he must still cross the clearing to get at the house, and would still be exposed to the rifles lying in the ditch."

"Hum! then you think that more men are necessary, Hal?" said Mr. Brindle.

"I do most certainly, and will fetch them for you if you wish. As far as I can see, you have only one thing to think about. You are an American by choice, and if your country were in real danger, no doubt you would volunteer your services. But this is not a struggle for supremacy between two nations, and you will, therefore need only to care for your property. If you make your preparations at once there is no reason why you should fear José d'Arousta or any of his kidney. If you fail to take all precautions, you will certainly meet with serious trouble, for that man will not forget his threat, and he will return here some day and wreck the place, besides doing injury to yourself."

Mr. Brindle did not answer for some minutes. Resting his head on his hand, he stared thoughtfully out of the window, seeming to have fixed his attention upon the long, dark shadows cast by the trees across the clearing.

"I believe your advice is good," he said at length, "and I will set about the matter to-morrow morning. We will make out a plan of the surroundings of the hacienda, putting in all paths and approaches. Then we will sketch in the positions most likely to be suitable for defenses. I fancy by using a little care we shall be able to design them to cross their fire, or rather, to allow the defenders to do so, without danger of hitting one another. As to extra hands, if you will do me the service, I will send a note by you to my overseer at Tampa, leaving it to

you to make the arrangements for the transfer of ten men here. But I expect it will be a more difficult undertaking than you imagine. No doubt you will slip from the island without discovery, but it will be another affair to return, for the coast-line will be carefully watched. That, again, is a question which you alone can settle; and as it will certainly have a spice of danger about it, I am sure you will manage beautifully, for when have you failed to pull yourself and others out of a difficulty? Still, you must consider the probable risk, and tell me whether you are prepared to take it."

"I have done so, and I repeat my offer," Hal replied, without hesitation. "So long as the dangers and difficulties are not insurmountable, I shall enjoy the fun, for it will make the journey quite interesting."

"Then it is arranged; and as you may fall into trouble, Gerald shall go with you to help you out. He speaks Spanish and Cuban like a native, and may very well be of use."

"By Jove, that is ripping, father!" exclaimed Gerald delightedly. "When will we start, old boy?"

"The sooner the better, I should say. To-morrow will not be too early."

"Then all shall be ready for you by daylight," said Mr. Brindle. "Now, Hal, if you will come outside we will go round the place, and discuss the measures to be taken for defense."

On the following morning the sun had scarcely climbed out of the sea when Hal and Gerald were about, booted and spurred, and ready for the road. Each carried his revolver and a flask, while two thick rugs were rolled into bundles, ready to be strapped to the saddles one in front of each rider. A few minutes later Dora appeared, looking extremely pretty and picturesque, but with a scarcely discernible cloud about her usually smiling face.

"There," she said, with a toss of her head, "here are two parcels of food for you. Boys are always hungry, and no doubt you will be glad of something to eat upon the road."

"That we shall," Hal answered heartily. "Now, Gerald, up you get."

The mules were led forward at this moment, and the two sprang into their saddles, Hal gaining his seat with an easy vault which was by no means as simple to execute as it appeared. But he was a strong and active young fellow, and made little of such a feat. A minute later he had secured his stirrups, and had the reins in his hand.

"Good-by, and good luck to you!" cried Mr. Brindle, appearing with a letter in his hand. "Here is the note for the overseer, Hal; I ask him to send me ten extra hands. If need be he will advance you more money, though I believe I have given you sufficient to cover all expenses. One thing more. Remember that while in Cuba you are in the enemy's country, and that the less you come into contact with Spaniards the better. Now, adieu, and let us hope for a speedy return."

"Good-by, and take care of yourselves," cried Dora earnestly, coming forward to shake them by the hand. "Hal, I give Gerald into your care. Bring him and yourself back safely, and I will thank you."

"I will, never fear," answered Hal. Then he lifted his reins, and taking his hat from his head, turned from the hacienda. "Come along, Gerald," he cried, and next second was cantering across the clearing.

A minute later both were swallowed up in the forest, leaving Mr. Brindle and Dora standing on the balcony, arm in arm, looking longingly after them.

"I do hope that they will come to no harm," said Dora, as if to herself.

"Harm! And so do I. But why should they?" answered her father reassuringly. "One of them has a head on his shoulders and a heart beneath his jacket which will take him through anything. There, come in, Dora, and let us have some breakfast. Afterwards we will go round the plantation, for during the overseer's unavoidable absence you will have to act in his stead."

Hal and his companion with hearts as light and happy as the morning, and filled to overflowing with high spirits, cantered along, side by side, in the direction of Santiago. Nothing disturbed their feeling of security, and they chatted gayly, going once more over the exciting events of the previous day. At length they emerged from the forest, and Santiago lay exposed to full view, some five miles away.

"One gets a splendid look-out from this level," remarked Hal. "The town is laid out like a map beneath us; and just look at the shipping! That harbor with its narrow entrance, is like a bottle, and the fleets of Spain might lie in there and never be seen, and never fear attack from hostile ships. Hallo! what are those outside?"

He shaded his eyes, and looked at two dots floating on the water just off the harbor mouth. A moment later they showed up clearly, even at that distance, and it was easy to distinguish that they were two long, low torpedo boats, which were steaming parallel to the shore, with a trail of blue smoke blowing out behind them.

"Spanish sleuthhounds," said Hal. "Gerald, we shall have some trouble in getting away, for those boats are patrolling the harbor mouth, and, no doubt, have strict orders to stop any craft attempting to enter or leave. But we'll manage it somehow."

"Why not get aboard some merchant vessel?" asked Gerald.

"At any other time, that might do," Hal replied thoughtfully; "but now I fancy that all ships will be compelled to lay up in the harbor. Besides, the American fleet will be blockading Cuba, and to attempt to leave just now would be to run the danger of capture. Still, I've no doubt that some neutral vessels are down there, and they will be allowed to sail, for there is a clause in international law that makes it possible. We must look out for one, and I propose that we ride a little closer, and leave our mules where they can be cared for. As soon as it gets dark we will make for the town, and enter boldly. We shall be like hundreds of others, for all the people hereabouts are dressed in these plantation clothes. I'll keep my tongue quiet, while you can do all the questioning. What do you say to that, old boy?"

"That it will be the best way out of the difficulty, and, as we have still some hours to wait before the sun goes down, I vote for some grub. I'm as hungry as a hunter and as empty as a drum. An early start on a light breakfast makes one simply ravenous."

"Just the thing! I'm like you, and awfully peckish," answered Hal cheerily. "Here, what's this? The very spot for a camp and a short siesta. There is no fear of interruption, and a sleep during the heat of the day will do us good. We had precious little yesterday, and, for all we know, may have none at all to-night. Whoa! Stand, boy. There, now you can see for yourself. I dare say you are as ready for a feed and a rest as I am."

They dismounted, and removing the bits from the mouths of their mules, and loosening the girths, allowed the animals to graze. Then they sat down upon a fallen tree, and discussed the contents of the packets which the thoughtful

Dora had provided. At six o'clock it was time to start, and, saddling up, they went forward at a smart canter.

"Do you see that hut over there?" said Gerald, pointing to a tumble-down erection of palm leaves and stakes which suddenly came into view some hundreds of yards in front of them. "That will be the very place to leave our mules, for a trusty native, whom I have known for years will willingly look after them till we return, even though weeks may pass."

Shaking their reins, they galloped up to the tiny hut, and called loudly for the owner.

"We are going into the town," said Gerald in Spanish, when the native appeared. "We shall be absent a week or more, and we want you to look after the mules. Can you do it for us? We will pay you well."

The man, who was old and crippled, and dressed in rags, willingly assented.

"For a week or more!" he cried, in a squeaky voice, shaking his head the while. "My advice to you, my masters, is to leave the town alone; for if you are rash enough to go there, it will be a month at least before you return—perhaps, even, I may never see you again. But I doubt whether you will be able to enter, for all the gates are closed, and the approaches guarded."

But there are other ways in, are there not?" asked Gerald.

"Yes; you might be able to slip in by the side streets," the native agreed hesitatingly; "but take the advice of one old enough to give it, and leave the place alone altogether."

He shook his head again, and hobbled away with the mules, leaving Gerald to interpret what had passed between them.

"Perhaps it would be the wiser course not to enter Santiago," said Hal; "but we have no choice in the matter, for we want to get away from the island, and that is the only manner in which we can arrange it. Come along, Gerald. We'll decide how we are to act as we go towards the town."

Five minutes later they were walking towards the rows of lights which now twinkled from the houses in Santiago. On arriving close beside the first, they halted at a drinking-fountain, which splashed musically, inviting the thirsty traveler to stop and satisfy his wants.

"We want to get in there undetected," said Hal; "and, what is more, we're going to have a good shot at it. The question is, How are we to set about the matter? Now, my idea is to face the thing boldly, and act as if we had as much right to enter as the general himself. If we are seen skulking, suspicion will be aroused, and we shall probably have a few bullets flying about our ears. War has only just been declared, and no doubt the people are very much excited. They will be expecting something to happen, but not from this side. The Americans will come from over the sea, and therefore it is from the coast-line that danger and attack will be apprehended. What is there suspicious about us? Simply nothing! I never saw a more innocent-looking couple; and as for being different in appearance from the ordinary citizens, I am sure we should pass all but the closest scrutiny. Come along! We'll strike for the main entrance."

Gerald jumped to his feet and followed willingly, for he had already had experience of the soundness of Hal's judgment, and trusted him implicitly.

A few minutes later the road which they were traversing narrowed, and, passing through a thick grove of orange trees, ran between two rows of houses.

At the end of the street a barricade was erected, and a sentry, who stood behind it in the shadow, challenged them loudly.

"Halt!" he cried harshly. "Who goes there?"

"Friends," answered Gerald, in his finest Spanish.

"Then advance, and show yourselves."

Hal and his comrade promptly stepped forward in obedience to the order, for it was too late to turn back now, even if they had wished; and, moreover, the sight of the sentry as he stood out from the shadow of the barricade, with rifle pointed in their direction, was sufficient to show them that even to hesitate would mean a report, and the whistle and shriek of a bullet in their direction.

Accordingly they moved forward till close beside him, when they stopped as the bayonet was dropped to the level of their chests.

"Here are two who wish to enter. Bring a light, one of you," the sentry cried.

"A lantern? Wait, and I will come with one," a second voice answered; and steps were heard as another of the Spanish soldiers approached.

He carried an unlighted lantern in his hand, and, when close beside the lads, placed it upon the top of the barricade, while he fumbled in his pocket for a match. At length he produced a solitary one, and, lifting his foot, struck it sharply across the sole. But the flash was instantly extinguished by a puff of wind that came whistling through the trees at that moment.

"Ah, caramba!" he exclaimed, with an angry stamp of his foot. "It is the very last that I have, and to get another I must go back to the guard-room. Have you a box about you, comrade?"

The sentry placed his rifle between his knees, and searched in every pocket, but without success.

"I cannot help you," he said crossly. "Get back and fetch a light. I am tired of waiting."

"I cannot be bothered," the other replied. "Who are these fellows?"

"We are friends," Gerald promptly responded.

"Then pass them in, comrade," said the one who had declined to fetch a light. "They are brothers-in-arms most certainly."

Gerald pulled Hal by the sleeve, and, without waiting for more, the two hurried through the barricade and on into the street. Fifty paces away the road was dimly lighted by a lamp hanging from a pole. They were just passing beneath it, and were in the act of congratulating themselves on their success, when a company of soldiers marched up, and the officer in charge, happening to catch sight of the two youths, called loudly to them to approach and declare who they were.

Chapter XIII

In Danger and Distress.

"Who are you two over there? What are you doing out in the streets at this time of night. Come nearer and let me see you," cried the officer, who had just marched in with a detachment of troops as Hal and Gerald entered the town and were moving away from the barricade. "Come, I say, or we will make it uncomfortable for you, my fine fellows."

"By Jove! What are we to do?" asked Gerald, in a low and anxious voice. "He orders us to come near so that he may inspect us."

"The deuce he does! Then we must make the best of a bad matter and go, for it cannot be helped," Hal answered quickly. "If we attempt to bolt now they would simple riddle us with bullets. Let us brazen the matter out, and should our luck fail us, just keep your eye on me, old boy, and when you see me move make a bolt for the houses."

"Right. Come along; he's in a hurry."

Indeed, the Spaniard was accustomed to be obeyed on the instant, and noticing at once that the two suspicious characters who had caught his eye hesitated, and stood talking in low voices, he reiterated his order in a loud and commanding tone.

"Now, who are you?" he demanded fiercely, when they had approached. "Turn your faces to the light that I may see you. Fellows of your sort love the darkness, it seems to me, and slink along in the shadows."

"We are two of the people of Santiago who work in the stores," Gerald replied quietly. "We have been a short way out into the country to see a friend."

"Indeed, and who may he be?" was the haughty answer. "I do not like the ring of your words, my fine fellow. Ha! What is this? You are both too fair for men of our race. Here, sentry, bring along a lantern. There is no seeing with this smoky affair that hangs to the pole. Wait, though. My men, march these two birds beneath the lamp yonder. Then we shall be able to make sure of them."

Hal listened to the conversation with his eye fixed upon the Spaniard's face, and though he did not understand what passed between him and Gerald, yet the tones of suspicion and the commanding, bullying voice told him that all was not well.

"What is the trouble?" he whispered in Gerald's ear as they stood facing the officer.

"We are to be marched beneath the lamp," replied his friend rapidly. "He suspects us, and is certain to discover that we are not Spaniards."

"Then we'll settle the matter for him by making a bolt," Hal answered quietly. "There is a house directly opposite, and the door is ajar. Now, are you ready, old boy? Then, rush for it."

At that moment the Spaniard approached still closer, and, grasping Hal by the arm, called upon his men to close up and surround the strangers. Our hero did not hesitate. Stepping back a pace, he drove his fist with all his force in the officer's face, and sent him sprawling to the ground. Then he dashed forward, and, gripping the nearest soldier by the waist, flung him against his comrades with a jar that scattered them, and threw them into confusion. Next moment he was rushing towards the house, and though the Spaniards raised their rifles, and pulled the triggers recklessly, nothing happened, for they had not expected trouble when they marched down to the barricade, and had, therefore, neglected to place cartridges in the breeches. The omission probably saved Hal's life, for, though taken by surprise, and staggered by the force with which their comrade had been flung against them, the soldiers would have picked him off with the greatest ease had their weapons been loaded, for the range was not more than twenty yards, and a moving figure is an easy target at such a distance. However, fortune was favoring Hal, for he escaped injury, though for a moment it was very doubtful whether it was possible. A few seconds later he had darted into the house, and had flung the door to with a bang.

"Quick! We must get out of this at once," he cried, catching Gerald by the sleeve. "To the back door for your life!"

Hastening through the rooms, they searched for an exit at the back, but failed to find one. Then they turned their attention to the windows, and, forcing one of them open, leapt out without hesitation. There was a narrow yard behind the house, which was inclosed by a high wall, but the two lads made nothing of it. With a spring they grasped the top, and hoisted themselves up. Then they dropped to the ground on the farther side, and took to their heels, stumbling blindly across gardens and bamboo fences, till at last they emerged once more upon the road.

"This will do for us," gasped Hal. "Listen! Those fellows are at work on the house, and isn't the officer angry! By George! I am not surprised, for I gave him a tremendous crack."

They stood still for a moment, crouching close beneath a hedge, and distinctly heard a crash as the door, which they had bolted behind them, was broken in. Then the voice of the Spaniard was heard shouting angry orders to his men.

"He is telling them to search every corner," said Gerald, with a laugh. "A pity he did not send them round to the back."

"Perhaps," agreed Hal. "But I can tell you, old man, that it was lucky for us. I don't know what these beggars would do if they captured us; but we must recollect that, though we may not have any part in this quarrel between the two nations, yet we are enemies to them, and those who belong to the nationality of their opponents, and who attempt to enter Santiago without a pass, are nothing more nor less than spies in the eyes of the garrison."

"For whom death is the reward," interposed Gerald serenely. "Yes, old chap, you need not tell me about it. I am well aware of the ugly position into which we have fallen."

"Then let us move on at once," said Hal. "As soon as they find that the house is deserted, and that the birds have flown, there will be a tremendous outcry, and a hot search will be made. I propose that we make straight away for the wharves alongside which the shipping is to be found."

Accordingly, they took to their heels, and ran down the road. Then they turned into another, and were hurrying along it, when they heard a whistle behind them. It was shrill and piercing, and was at once taken up and repeated on either side of them and in front. Then, to their astonishment and dismay, a bright spot suddenly rose up and flashed from the edge of the harbor, and a broad electric beam swept rapidly and silently on its way towards them.

"The searchlight!" exclaimed Hal. "Down into the shade at once, or we shall be discovered. These fellows are proving far more wide awake than I had imagined them to be. I should say that they have telephones from all the outlying stations and barricades, which enable them to communicate with the people in charge of the light."

And, indeed, this was the case. Balked in his endeavor to trace the two suspicious characters who had disappeared into the house after violently assaulting him, the Spanish officer had at once rushed to the barricade, and had sent messages along the wires to other parts. Then, too, the outlying pickets had been warned by the blowing of whistles, which was evidently a previously arranged signal in case of trouble occurring. Before even the searchlight had burst into the night or commenced to revolve, Hal and Gerald

were entirely surrounded by a cordon of vigilant men, few of whom knew exactly what was happening, though all could guess that someone was near at hand whom it was desirable to capture. And the electric light would help them. Meanwhile, they would stay in some dark spot, and follow the rays, hoping to catch sight of the fugitives as they darted from side to side in the endeavor to escape them. A dark figure crouching beneath a tree or hedge would satisfy them, and on the instant, up would fly the rifle to the shoulder, there would be just a second's pause to correct the aim, and then—bang!—the hapless fellow would spring into the air with hands outstretched, to fall next second doubled into an inert heap. Oh, yes! it was simple, and an extremely diverting sport to those who had themselves no danger to fear.

As for Hal and Gerald, their desperate position filled them with consternation, for as they ran hither and thither in the vain endeavor to fly from the sweeping beams, the snap of twigs and the rustle of leaves brushed on one side were followed by the sharp crack of rifles fired at random in that direction. Perhaps there was no great danger to them in that; but still, the bullets flew unpleasantly near, and sent them running again, hunting them like hares from point to point. Suddenly, as they crossed an open space, the searchlight fell full upon them, and instantly the surrounding darkness was lit up by the flash of many rifles. Ping! ping! ping! The shots rang out with startling loudness, and the bullets hummed and pelted through the air overhead.

"Halt there, and surrender!" a voice cried from the trees. "If you move a step farther away I will shoot you."

"We are caught, and must make the best of it," said Hal to Gerald, with a groan. "Tell them that we give in, old fellow."

Holding his hands above his head, Gerald did as he was asked. Then they stood still in a patch of brilliant light, which was made all the more glaring by the contrast of thick darkness all around. A few minutes later some Spanish soldiers advanced towards them, rifle in hand, and, forming a ring round the lads, marched them away, their path lit up all the while by the electric light which followed every movement. Passing down the street, they at length came to a large building, into which the prisoners were at once taken.

"Sit down there, and do not stir a finger, or you will be shot," said the sergeant who was in charge of the party, indicating a rough bench with a curt nod of his head. "I will go inside and ask his excellency the colonel to interview you. By the time he is ready, those who warned us from the barricade will have arrived to give their evidence; and then, my friends, it will be a case of a rope, a friendly branch, and plenty of air to dance on."

He glanced at his captives, favoring them with a malicious grin as he outlined their probable end. Then he went to a door close at hand, and, having knocked upon it, entered, and closed it behind him.

"I suppose he has gone to explain matters," said Hal coolly. "Keep up your pecker, Gerald. The case looks precious bad, but we'll pull through, depend upon it."

"Right. I hope we may. But things look ugly. That pleasant gentleman who has just done talking to me is good enough to tell me that we shall soon be hanged. If it comes to that, Hal, why, we must face it out, and die as those at the hacienda would have us do."

He looked into his companion's face and smiled bravely, for Gerald was determined to show his friend that he, too, possessed a fund of pluck which would carry him through an unpleasant difficulty.

"We will, old boy," Hal answered cheerily; "but let us hope that it will not come to that. Hallo! Who's this?"

At this moment an officer, who was dressed in the usual Spanish uniform, emerged from the inner room, and was walking hurriedly across to the door, being bent evidently upon the performance of some special duty, when his eye fell upon Hal and Gerald. Almost instantly a startled cry escaped him, and he sprang backwards in astonishment.

"What! You!" he exclaimed, in tones of surprise, surveying them with an air of delight. "You two from the hacienda! Idiots! You have played into my hands. Men, close round your prisoners, and take the best care of them, for I can vouch for it that they are Americans. They are spies, and have come here to find out our secrets."

He strode towards them, and grasping Hal's hat, tore it from his head. Then he laughed sardonically in his face, and, with a triumphant glance at the two prisoners, turned upon his heel, and re-entered the room from which he had emerged a minute before.

"What bad luck! What hard lines!" exclaimed Hal, with something approaching a groan. "That fellow José d'Arousta again!"

It was, indeed, an unfortunate meeting, and one fraught with the greatest peril for Hal and his friend. They were prisoners, and practically under a charge of spying upon the enemy; but for all that, a minute or more before, the aspect of affairs had not been altogether hopeless. How changed it was now! The very man of all others in Santiago whom it was most desirable that they should not meet had run up against them, had recognized them, and now, burning to avenge a private grievance, had promptly denounced them as spies. No wonder that Hal shuddered. Across his mind flitted the recollection of Mr. Brindle's tale of the VIRGINIUS, and of the fate meted out to her hapless crew—captured at night, condemned, and promptly shot at dawn. That was the sequence of events; and what was to prevent a similar fate from befalling them?

"The letter! Of course, the letter which Mr. Brindle gave me," exclaimed Hal, aloud, as if Gerald had been following the train of thoughts which had been running through his mind.

"Why that letter?" asked the latter, looking at him in astonishment. "What are you talking about, old fellow?"

"I was wondering what we could do to prove our identity, and the innocent intention we had in coming here. José d'Arousta, you may be sure, will not let such a golden opportunity of revenge slip by without making the utmost use of it. He will proclaim us as spies, and if you will only take the trouble to look at matters as they appear to others, you will admit that that is the most natural conclusion for any Spaniard to arrive at. War is declared, and, indeed, exists, between Spain and America; and no doubt the whole of the island of Cuba, including the towns, is under martial law. You are the son of a naturalized American, and I his overseer. We are discovered at night in Santiago, and when called upon to surrender, we fly from the soldiers. Naturally, we shall be put down as spies who have come to see what defensive arrangements have been made, so as to be able to communicate them to our friends. But the letter which your father gave me will exonerate us. It states in clear terms that we are

endeavoring to leave for Tampa, and tells for what purpose. Do you see, old boy? We put a spoke in D'Arousta's wheel which I fancy will upset the whole apple-cart, so far as he is concerned."

"Splendid! I am relieved to hear it," cried Gerald. "I'll be honest, and tell you that I was beginning to feel in a blue funk; but now, of course, it will be all right, and we have nothing to fear."

"Ye-e-s, perhaps," Hal answered doubtfully. "But someone will have to pay for that officer's broken nose. I hit him heavily, I can assure you, and fairly laid him out. Hush! The door is opening."

At this moment José d'Arousta pushed his head into the outer room, and signaled to the sergeant.

"Bring in the prisoners," he said in triumphant tones, "and see that you surround them, for these foreigners are capable of playing the maddest tricks, and might throw themselves upon his excellency if you were to relax your watchfulness."

Shouldering their rifles, two of the soldiers grasped Hal and Gerald by the arm; then the others took up their positions in front and behind, and, at an order from the sergeant, the party marched into the room. It was a large, bare compartment, dimly lighted by a single oil lamp standing upon a table in the center. The atmosphere was thick with the fumes of burning oil and stale tobacco smoke, and even a widely opened window failed to clear it and make it more pleasant for those who were there.

Seated behind the table was a middle-aged officer, with stern but not unkindly features. A clerk in military attire stood at the desk beside him, and was taking down a letter at his dictation.

"These are the prisoners, then—the very first we have taken, I understand," said the officer, suddenly looking up and closely scrutinizing Hal and Gerald. "Who are they? Why have they been taken? Where is the evidence?"

"Captain Volaga is the chief witness against these spies," answered José d'Arousta, stepping forward from the shadow, "and I am the next, your excellency. They are known to me as Americans. But it would be better, perhaps, if my brother-in-arms told his tale first."

"Americans! Ah, they look it! Then we will employ their language. We who have lived in these parts soon pick up English, and, if we use it, all will be able to understand. Come, what are their names, and where do they hail from?"

The colonel turned to the lads, and asked them the question in tones which betrayed little accent.

At this moment the door of the room opened, and the officer whom Hal had struck entered with his face bound up, and scarcely more than his eyes showing.

"Who is this?" demanded the colonel.

"I am Captain Volaga, excellency," was the answer, in a voice which trembled with suppressed rage. "I have come to give my evidence against these men."

"Then step forward, and tell me first of all whether you identify them."

"Yes, excellency, they are the same," the officer replied, looking at the two prisoners with no friendly eyes, "and this young ruffian is the one who struck me and injured one of my men. I will tell you how it happened, Señor. The dolt at the barricade passed them through without question; but I was sharper. Seeing them stealing beneath a lamp, and being suspicious of them, I called to the rogues, and ordered them to come to me so that I might find out who they

were. Then, without provocation, this one"—and he pointed at Hal with the end of his sword, favoring him at the same time with an angry glare—"struck me violently in the face, and followed up the attack by hurling one of my men against his comrades. Both then ran from us into a house standing near at hand, and when we searched it they were gone."

"Indeed! I trust that you are not greatly hurt, Señor Capitan," the colonel answered. "But, surely, your men were armed? How, then, did these prisoners escape? One is only a boy, and the other cannot be twenty yet. It is strange to hear that an officer and several of his Majesty's soldiers were insufficient to capture them."

It was, indeed, a peculiar tale, real though it was, and it scarcely redounded to the credit of the officer. He had no answer to give to his chief's questions, but stood there, a look of bitter hatred upon his face.

"Well, now for your story, Señor José d'Arousta," said the colonel. "What do you know of these lads?"

"They come from the hacienda Eldorado, and are Americans, and therefore spies, your excellency. Search them, and I am sure that you will find that they are armed."

He turned to the men who were holding the prisoners, and gave them an order. Instantly they ran their hands over them, and produced the revolvers which both lads carried.

"You see," continue José, with a sneer, "they meant to look after their own safety. Spying is a dangerous game to play!"

"And now, what have you to say?" asked the colonel courteously, turning to Hal. "A very serious charge is made against you. First of all, you are Americans, it seems. Then you are discovered slinking into the town, and when called upon to surrender and give an account of yourselves, you attack an officer, and contrive to escape from him in spite of his escort of armed men. You are captured finally, and are found to be carrying arms. An explanation is needed."

"And I shall be glad to give it," said Hal quietly. "We come, as this man beside me has stated, from the hacienda Eldorado; but we are not spies. The war is nothing to us, but our safety, and that of our friends, is another matter. Only yesterday, your excellency, we were attacked by a band of cut-throats, who nearly relieved us of all we possessed. Our mission now is to go to Tampa, and return with negroes from Mr. Brindle's other estate, who will help to defend the hacienda. We entered this town for one reason, and only one, namely, to get a passage on a steamer sailing to Tampa."

"The hacienda attacked!" exclaimed the colonel doubtfully; while the face of Captain Volaga showed a smile of insolent incredulity.

"Yes, señor," Hal answered calmly. "Attacked late in the afternoon, and under the leadership of this man." He pointed to José d'Arousta, and looked him sternly in the face.

"Ha, ha, ha! He will accuse me of being an American spy next, Señor Colonel!" cried José. "You can see that he is fabricating a tale. It is a splendid cock-and-bull story from end to end."

"So it would appear," the colonel replied. "Accuse one of my officers of brigandage! It is monstrous—ridiculous! Young sir, you do your cause no good by speaking in this wild manner. Confess at once that you and the boy are spying, for it may very well make your sentence lighter in the end."

He looked at Hal sternly and yet kindly, for in his heart the colonel was an easy-going fellow, and given to mercy if it were possible.

"Come," he said again, in a persuasive voice; "I have sons of your age who play pranks at times, though never one so dangerous and foolhardy as this. Declare to me that you came to the town out of curiosity, and to see what preparations we were making for the Americans."

"Your excellency, we cannot do as you ask," Hal answered firmly. "What I have stated is absolutely true, and if only you will favor me by reading the letter which I have in my pocket, you will be assured of it."

"Give it to me. One of you take it from his coat," said the colonel shortly.

The order was obeyed by José, and the letter handed to the colonel. Instantly he tore the envelope open, and scanned the contents.

"Yes, it is as you stated," he said. "I am more inclined to believe you."

"Pshaw! And you will allow two dangerous spies to escape because they are of the same age as your sons!" exclaimed José d'Arousta. "It is madness! It is folly!"

He had been standing close beside the table, following the interview between Hal and the colonel with the greatest attention; and now, seeing that it had turned in favor of the prisoners, he started forward, and interposed in a way which soon brought him a reprimand.

"Señor, you forget yourself, and in whose presence you stand!" the colonel cried angrily, turning upon him. "Have a care, Señor Capitan, for I am your superior, and should you see fit to address me again in such an unbecoming manner, I will place you under arrest. Perhaps it might meet your deserts," he added significantly, "for there are tales told in Santiago of the doings of José d'Arousta and his irregulars. I have even heard it said that they are brigands. Have a care, I tell you, for I might even go so far as to look into this strange accusation as to an attack upon Eldorado."

José had met his match. He turned pale at the colonel's words, and retired from the table looking downcast. But his assurance quickly returned.

"Excellency," he exclaimed, "your pardon if I was too outspoken; but I wish our country all that is well, and therefore I say again that these two men are known to me. They are spies. Everything points to it, señor. If not, then why should they attempt to escape, particularly when one of them carries a letter, the contents of which will clear them? Depend upon it, that note was there for a set purpose, and to be used only as a last resource. Think of their revolvers, too. Pah! Were I in your place I should give them till dawn, when they should face a corporal's picket, and meet the fate of all who take to the calling of a spy."

He ended an impassioned speech with a glare of hatred at Hal, and then stood closely scrutinizing the colonel's features, to see, if possible, what effect he had made, turning, however, every other moment to look again at Hal, with eyes which even now were beginning to light up with triumph.

As for our hero and his friend, they stood there amongst the soldiers, watching every movement and expression, and wondering vaguely what would be the end of the interview.

"I fear very much that you are right, Señor José," said the colonel at length. "The evidence is too strong, and shows without a shadow of doubt that the prisoners entered Santiago for one purpose only. It is sad that we should commence the war with an execution; but it cannot be avoided. We must

protect ourselves, for if we were to allow these two lads to leave unpunished, others would be encouraged. For spying, death is the penalty. But I will not take the responsibility upon my own shoulders for an act which in my heart I consider to be harsh and unjust. Men should be treated as men; but to apply the same penalties to irresponsible, impetuous lads is cruel in the extreme. Captain Volaga, you will escort the prisoners to the cells in Morro Castle, and arrange for their refreshment. See also that blankets are given them, for the nights are getting cold. Here is a note to the officer in command. Deliver it to him personally. I will now cable to Havana and ask for instructions, but I fear that I can give no hope. Spies, whether men or boys, must meet the same fate."

He rose from his seat, and, with a wave of the hand, signified that the interview was over.

The soldiers at once closed round Hal and Gerald, and, at the officer's order, marched out of the room. Then they halted outside, while José d'Arousta and the injured captain conversed in low tones. Evidently some satisfactory arrangement was come to, for they nodded and smiled in the most pleasant manner, and when parting treated each other to an elaborate salute. Then José approached the prisoners, and, halting in front of them, addressed them in low tones which could not be overheard.

"Señores, who could have guessed that in such a short space of time the tables would turn so completely!" he said, with a triumphant smile. "But yesterday I was a prisoner in your hands, under a threat of death; and now you are in a similar condition, with this one difference: I escaped to avenge the insult, while you will live only till to-morrow's sun is up. Think of it! Dream of it! When the dawn comes, and you are led out into the cold, your end will await you. Consideration will be shown, I promise you, for some minutes shall be granted for quiet reflection. And then, Señor Marchant, if you will but raise your eyes, you will find that the ever-faithful José attends you, and will be ready, should you desire it, to carry your adieus to the fair Señora Dora. Believe me, we will weep together for your loss."

He smiled a cruel, vindictive smile, and looked hard at Hal to see what effect the words had had, but only to be disappointed. Not a muscle of the young fellow's face moved as he returned the stare of the Spaniard with one that was as proud and disdainful as it was possible to be. Then his features relaxed, and he smiled.

"The man is a bold villain," he said, with a laugh, turning to Gerald. "When we are surrounded and held by the soldiers, so that he need fear no punishment, he does his utmost to goad us into fury. Come along, old boy; we have better things to do than to listen to such a fellow."

Taking Gerald by the arm, he signified to the sergeant that he was ready, and the order being given to the soldiers, they marched out of the building, leaving José d'Arousta biting his lips with vexation.

A large crowd was waiting outside, hoping to catch sight of the first captives of the war. The news that they were spies, who had entered Santiago in search of information, had been conveyed to them, so that the appearance of the two lads was greeted with a storm of shrill cries.

"Kill them! Shoot them!" the mob shouted, rushing towards the party of soldiers who surrounded Hal and Gerald. But a line of troops drawn up outside the house interposed, and thrust them back. Then, forming up on either side, the Spaniards marched them off to the fortress which stands perched high up

on one side of the long entrance to the harbor, and which goes by the name of the Morro Castle. Half an hour later the gates were reached, and they marched in, leaving the crowd outside. Hal and Gerald were led up a long flight of stone steps, through a dark corridor, and afterwards up more stairs. Finally, they came to a gallery, and were halted in front of an iron-studded door, at the keyhole of which a soldier fumbled.

A minute later they were thrust inside and the door was closed upon them with a clang that sent an echo ringing through the old castle.

"And so ends our little adventure," said Hal, seating himself upon a bench. "We came to Santiago with only friendly thoughts in our hearts. We were captured and accused of spying. The population jeered at us, and showed so much hatred that it took a whole regiment to put us in prison. And we are in reality two harmless young fellows. Well, it just settles the matter. Gerald, if we are here to-morrow we shall die. We must escape, and as the Spaniards have declared themselves our enemies, we will do our utmost to thwart them."

Chapter XIV

A Dash for Liberty.

Desperate indeed was the position in which Hal and Gerald found themselves, and well might their usually exuberant spirits be damped, and their stock of courage ooze away at the dark prospect before them. Even as they sat there in their cell, the Spanish colonel who had interviewed them was probably dispatching his telegram to Havana; and how would it read? "We have captured two Americans, who are probably spies. They entered the town undetected, and when discovered and called upon to surrender, showed resistance, injuring an officer. They finally fell into our hands, and were found to be bearing arms. What shall we do with them?"

That in all probability would be the message, and it wanted little imagination to sketch the answer. Across the wires would flash the words, "Shoot them."

Hal sat down upon a stone bench beneath a grated window, and thought the matter out. Then he rose to his feet, and thrusting his hands into his pockets, stared out into the night. It was as black as ink, and at first only myriads of stars shone through the iron bars. But on casting his eyes downward, he saw other and bigger spots of light, while the reflection from them trailed towards him across a sheet of water that rippled slightly.

"The harbor!" he exclaimed. "The entrance to the shipping basin of Santiago. Never before did I feel so much like a bird in a cage. Look at those vessels, Gerald! They are just what we were in search of, and now they lie so close below our feet, and yet, for all that, so hopelessly far away. But we will not be beaten. I said that we must escape, and we will! I tell you that we will, however great the difficulty. Come here, old boy, and see what you can from the window; then we'll sit down and discuss the matter."

Gerald promptly stepped beside his friend, and, clasping the iron bars, thrust his head as far through them as possible.

"Hallo! What's this?" he cried. "Hal, they've turned the old searchlight on again."

He moved to one side to make room for Hal, who at once resumed his place at the window and gazed out. Away to the left a bright beam of light was stabbing the darkness from the far inland edge of the harbor. It swept steadily to the right, illuminating the sphere upon which it fell so clearly that everything within it was visible for a moment, then disappeared, while a fresh scene flashed into view, only in its turn to give place to another. They followed the broad beam as it fell upon harbor and town, and then upon the open country. In a few minutes it had reached the entrance to the harbor, and, shooting like a bar of silver beneath the Morro Castle, and under the very feet of the prisoners, lit up the swelling ocean beyond, by chance falling upon one of the ugly torpedo boats which Hal had seen that morning.

"That just shows what kind of a chance we should have had," said Gerald, nodding towards the craft.

"I don't know that I agree with you," Hal answered thoughtfully. "We know that she is there, and with all lights dowsed we might easily slip by her."

"But you speak as though we were already on a ship," exclaimed Gerald. "Of course, it is out of the question."

Hal did not reply, but followed the searchlight with the closest attention. It moved from the harbor mouth, searching every corner and crevice of the rocks as it swept inland again. Soon it passed over a landing jetty and illuminated a small launch which was lying moored alongside.

"See that?" exclaimed Hal, seizing Gerald by the shoulder to attract his attention.

"What? The launch?"

"Yes, old chap; it will do for us."

"But hold on! Look here, Hal, what the dickens are you talking about?" Gerald asked, as if in some doubt as to Hal's condition of mind. "Man alive, we are prisoners—jailbirds in the Morro Castle!"

"Quite so; and to-morrow, if we are still here, we shall be prisoners who are about to die. Listen to me, Gerald. We have but one life apiece, and may as well make a fight for it. If we are worsted, where will be the difference? It can mean nothing worse in the end, for what sentence can be more severe than that of death? I am determined to get out of this, for life is very dear, and I mean to cling to mine. Sit down while I talk to you. There, don't interrupt me till I have finished, then you can tell me exactly what you think. Now, the position is plain and straightforward. We must escape if we wish to live. Look round the cell and say if it is possible to break these bars, or knock a hole through walls, ceiling, or floor. It is out of the question, and so also is the door. Then we must turn to the jailer. I had my eyes well open when we came in here, and I noticed that the man was new at the work. He could not find the key, and fumbled at the lock. If he is strange to prison life, he may well be less suspicious of his charges, and less expectant of danger. Now, we will do our best to collar him, and I've an idea how it is to be done. You will lie there and pretend to be ill. Just groan and kick up a fuss to your heart's content, while I knock and kick at the door, and shout for the jailer. Then, when he comes in, and, as will be natural, goes across the cell to look at you, I'll jump on him, and with your help we'll tie him up and gag him. Follow, old chap?"

"By Jove! Follow? Ra-a-ather! Of course I do; and, what's more, I'm ready for the game. After all, as you said, capture for the second time can bring no worse penalty."

"That done," continued Hal calmly, "we must use our wits to get out of the castle. We've blankets to make into ropes, and I suggest that we begin to tear them into strips at once, for we shall want something for the jailer. Once away from the castle, we'll sneak down to the launch, and get up steam. Probably she is deserted at night, but, in any case, it is scarcely likely that more than one man will be aboard. He would have to be dealt with of course, and then we'd just slip our moorings and make a dash for the sea. There, now, what have you to say?"

"Say? Why, that I am with you through thick and thin," exclaimed Gerald, in tones of enthusiasm. "If we only manage to get through we shall have had an adventure to remember and talk about to the end of our lives."

"That's so," Hal agreed. "But now for the blankets."

Sitting side by side on the stone seat, they soon tore them into long strips, which they twisted and knotted together, and afterwards wound in lengths round their waists. Then they set apart a few pieces as lashings for their prospective prisoner, and fashioned a rough gag.

"That's finished," remarked Hal with satisfaction. "And now for the other part."

"Hush! Someone is coming along the passage," whispered Gerald. "There, I can hear footsteps plainly."

Hal darted to the door, and, listening eagerly, distinguished a distant step, evidently of some heavily shod foot which was slowly coming nearer.

"Quick! Onto the bench and sham that you are ill," he cried, turning to Gerald. "I believe the jailer is going to pay us a visit."

This, in fact, was the case, for scarcely had Gerald thrown himself upon the low bench of stone, and commenced to give vent to the most heartrending groans, when heavy boots came to a halt outside the cell, and a key was heard grating in the lock. Then the door swung open, and the soldier who had admitted them when they first arrived at the castle entered, bearing on his arm a basket which contained a bottle of native wine and some bread and meat. He stopped in the middle of the cell, and looked wonderingly at Gerald.

"What's amiss? What ails the lad?" he asked in Spanish.

"Oh, I've such pain. Help me," groaned Gerald, in quavering tones.

Curious to learn what was the matter, the jailer placed his basket on the floor, and, crossing the bench, bent over Gerald. In an instant the prisoner, who had been in seeming agony before, had thrown his arms round the man's neck, drawing his face so tightly against his chest that he could not utter a sound, and was almost stifled. Then Hal sprang across the cell, and, with a hasty hitch, secured the jailer's arms behind his back. To bind his legs was a different matter, however, for he fought like a wild cat, and, wrenching his head free, gave vent to a loud shout. But he did not repeat it, for, conscious that their lives depended on the man's silence, Hal grasped him by the hair, and brought his head against the stonework with a bang.

"That should keep him quiet," he said, with a gasp. "Now for the gag."

Gerald had it ready, and before very long their prisoner lay on the floor, bound hand and foot, and incapable of speech.

"The first scene is ended satisfactorily," said Hal, eyeing him with no little pleasure; "and now for the second. Get hold of that basket, old man; grub will be welcome later on. I'll make free with the bundle of keys which the fellow carried. Now, out we go."

They gave another backward glance to see that the man was securely bound, and then stepped into the corridor, closing the door gently after them.

"Where now?" whispered Gerald.

"Follow me. We'll take the road that we know," was Hal's answer, "Keep close, and whatever you do, don't make a sound. If anyone runs up against us, go for him like the wind, and hammer him into silence. We have a chance before us that must not be lost."

He at once stepped forward, and gaining the stairs, descended cautiously. No one was in the lower gallery, nor on the second flight of steps, and the two escaping prisoners reached the door of the castle without hearing so much as a sound. It was locked, and many anxious moments were expended ere the right key could be found. Then the ponderous door swung open slowly, and they emerged into the castle yard, round which many lights were flashing from the windows of the soldiers' quarters. Taking Gerald by the hand, Hal led him to the darkest corner, where they crouched, listening for any noise, and wondering whether the jailer's cry had been heard, and the alarm given. But not a sound disturbed the silence, save the stamp of a distant sentry plodding up and down upon his lonely beat, and coughing occasionally as the cool night air entered his lungs.

"All seems well," whispered Hal; "and no one heard the cry, or we should have had the soldiers after us already. Let us get out of this yard, and down to the harbor."

It was easier to propose than to accomplish, for no doubt, sentries were stationed on the walls. The yard itself was situated on the steep side of a hill, leading upward from the town to the castle, and, crouching where they were, Hal and Gerald could look along the roofs of many of the tiny houses which stood inside the walls, into the streets of Santiago. Suddenly the revolving searchlight turned once more in their direction, and in rushing behind a projecting buttress to escape it, Hal tripped over a bucket, and fell headlong, sending it clattering over the stones.

Instantly there was a loud challenge from the sentry, to which no answer was given. Then, as they crouched in the shadow, they heard first one and then some twenty soldiers clatter from the house close to which they were lying, and run into the square.

"What was that noise?" the sentry demanded in Spanish. "Who caused the racket over in yonder corner?"

"Where? In what part?" asked one of the men.

"Close beside your quarters. The searchlight swept round, and suddenly a bucket or something of the sort was kicked. Go and look for me, one of you."

"They are coming to search here," said Gerald. "What shall we do?"

"Make a bolt into their own quarters," Hal answered promptly. "We escaped in that way before, and may well do so again."

He started to his feet, and, creeping along beside the wall, peeped in at an open window. The room was empty, and only faintly illuminated by a flickering tallow candle. Hal at once climbed in, and assisted Gerald to follow. Then they crept to the door, and, seeing no one, ran upstairs to the rooms above, which were also vacant.

"We shall have to clear from here," said Hal, looking round at the row of rough pallets which evidently served the soldiers for beds. "What about the roof? Perhaps we can reach it this way."

He ran into a room at the back of the building, and, climbing on to a window-sill, stretched his arm above his head. It was too short by a couple of feet, and the gutter looked hopelessly out of reach. Suddenly, however, he thought of the latticed shutter, and grasping the battens, and digging his feet in between those below, hoisted himself up. A moment later he had one hand on the iron gutter, and after that had no difficulty in clambering on the roof, which ascended at an easy slope.

"Hand up the grub, Gerald," he said, leaning over the edge and lowering his voice to a gentle whisper. "That's it. Let go; I've got hold of the handle. Now, up you come."

Gerald was as active as a monkey, and quickly climbed to Hal's side, when the two scrambled along the roof till they arrived at a part where the coping formed with the sloping tiles a deep angle; and here they lay full length, settling themselves into the narrow space, and taking particular pains to make sure that no part of their dress was projecting over the top. Down below in the yard there was the clatter of many feet as the soldiers ran round the building. Then the same voice that had answered the questions of the sentry was heard again, calling loudly.

"There is a bucket lying over here," the man cried, "but we can see no trace of anyone. Are you sure you are not mistaken?"

"I distinctly heard someone fall," was the answer. "Idiot! Do you think that I could make an error when it occurred so close at hand? Am I not on duty? One would think that I was a log by the way in which you talk. Mistaken, indeed! How do you know that it is not those beggarly prisoners whom we are to waste powder upon to-morrow morning? Perhaps it is they, and while you chatter and tell your comrade that he does not do his duty, they may be escaping."

The sentry bellowed out his words, and snorted with indignation, for his feelings were evidently hurt at such an accusation. But the other man was not to be subdued.

"Escaping? Ridiculous, Santo!" he cried. "They were locked in the cell. I was one of the guard, and saw it with my own eyes. Perhaps you will tell me next that these American spies are capable of flying through a locked door!"

"I tell you that I am sure that someone is attempting to get away from the castle, and I believe it to be the two prisoners who came here this evening," the sentry answered angrily. "Give the alarm, comrade, and hurry off to make sure of the matter. Do not let the cause of our country suffer because we cannot agree."

The soldier in the yard below grumbled; but, urged on by his comrades, who seemed to agree with the sentry, he hastened to the castle, and Hal and his companion heard him running up the flight of stone steps.

"Now there will be a fine hullabaloo," said the former quietly. "I vote we stick closely in this hiding-place, and do not allow ourselves to be scared by all the noise and fuss which they are bound to kick up. Once the escape is discovered the alarm will fly all over the town, and search-parties will be about. We are their first prisoners, and you may be sure they will not allow us to slip through their fingers without a struggle. But no one will think of looking for us here, and we have the great advantage of lying in a hollow to which the searchlight cannot penetrate. Half a minute, though. I'll just take a look over the side, and see where we are."

He raised his head cautiously, and, carefully keeping well away from the stone coping, took a good look over the side.

"Good luck!" he exclaimed, with some show of excitement, suddenly sinking to his place again. "If only we can find some means of fastening our ropes, we can drop directly over the wall. Keep where you are, Gerald, while I see what can be done."

He rose to his knees, and crept up the sloping roof to something which looked in the darkness like a chimney-stack. It proved to be what he thought, and in a twinkling he produced the end of the rope, made from torn-up blankets, which he had wound round his waist. Making a big loop in it, he slipped it over the brick-work and descended again.

"There," he said, with an excited chuckle, "I've fixed the rope, so that if our presence here is suspected we shall have a chance for freedom. Hush! What is that fellow saying?"

It was the soldier again, who, emerging from the castle at this moment, ran down the steps in such a hurry as to lose his balance and roll over and over into the yard. He picked himself up with an oath, and rushed towards the sentry.

"The prisoners have escaped!" he shouted, in high falsetto. "When I came to the cell the door was not locked, and inside Alberto lay insensible, and bound hand and foot. Quick! Ring the alarm bell, one of you."

A few moments later the deep notes were booming out over the town and castle, ringing the alarm so that all in Santiago should be on the look-out. That notice of it was taken was at once evident, for the change was wonderful. Shouts suddenly rang out from all quarters; and, as if thrown into a state of uncontrollable excitement by the commotion, the searchlight fluttered here and there, now flashing into the sky, and next moment burying its broad shaft of dazzling light in the deep waters of the harbor.

Then an officer ran hastily from his quarters in the castle, and called upon the soldiers to fall in.

"Get to your ranks at once," he cried, "and let each sergeant take his section and search a portion of the castle. Quick! There will be trouble if these prisoners get clear away."

Crouching in their hiding-place, Hal and Gerald listened eagerly, and heard the search-parties hurrying to and fro. One actually came into the very house on the roof of which they were lying.

"What is the use of searching here?" they heard one of the men grumble. "It is folly to expect to find them in our own quarters, for we only descended a few seconds before the alarm was given. Take us somewhere else, sergeant, for we shall be wasting our time and breath here."

They went away at once, and the two prisoners breathed more freely.

"We are safe now," said Hal, with a sigh of relief; "but we shall have to lie here as quiet as mice till the din dies down. Can you swim, Gerald?"

"Yes, rather! But why?"

"Because the best and safest way to reach the launch will be to slip down from here into the water, and strike straight for the jetty alongside which she is moored. We shall have to keep to the harbor, too; for to get on the landing-stage or to attempt to walk along it would result in certain capture. It's going to be a most trying undertaking, I can tell you, old man."

They lapsed into silence, and for two hours lay in the gutter listening to the noises which came from every side. But, little by little, the sounds of shouting in the distance and the hubbub in the courtyard of the castle died down, and finally the town regained its accustomed quietness. Even the searchlight seemed to have recovered its equanimity, for it now revolved smoothly, occasionally, however, darting to some particular spot as some fresh alarm was sounded.

"All is clear beneath us, and I fancy we had better be starting," said Hal at length. "We have a great deal before us, and we must not forget that before many hours have passed dawn will be breaking. But a fellow can't do much on an empty stomach, so I vote that we tuck in at the grub. Then we shall feel more inclined for the job, and can set out for the launch with courage raised to the highest."

It was a good suggestion, and Gerald, who was nothing loath, and, indeed, longing for something to eat, dragged the basket forward and placed it between them, while Hal searched for his knife. There was a mug lying beside the bottle, and he at once made preparations to quench his thirst. Placing his hat upon the roof, he put the bottle in it, and with a sharp blow knocked the neck in two, the glass making no sound as it fell upon the cloth. Then they divided the meat, and set to work to devour it eagerly, for both were famishing.

"There's just one thing to discuss before we start," said Hal. "Shall we stick to the plan we have prepared, or shall we make back to the hacienda? For my part, I say no. Decidedly no! In the first place, we should run a far greater risk of discovery, for we should have to pass through the town, and get through the pickets who patrol the side that faces the open country. You may be sure that they are wide awake; and, indeed, that is the side on which they will be looking out, for who would expect escaping prisoners to make out to sea? The idea would appear ridiculous to the average man, and it is the very improbability that will help us most. Then we have to remember another very important point. It is known that we hail from the hacienda, and what will be more natural after our escape than for Eldorado to be favored by a visit from Spanish troops? If we were foolish enough to return, we should certainly be captured and hauled back to Santiago, when little chance would be allowed us to make a second attempt to escape."

"You're like a lawyer, old boy," Gerald whispered in reply. "I quite see your point, and I say too, go for the launch tooth and nail, and clear from the harbor. It is our only chance, and with luck, such as we have already had to-night, we shall manage it beautifully."

"Then we stick to the old plan. Shall I go over the side first, or will you? Perhaps I'd better, for I am the heavier."

He crawled to the rope and, taking the coiled-up end in his hand, flung it over the coping. Then, having very cautiously raised his head, and inspected his surroundings as well as the darkness would permit, he squeezed Gerald's hand and lowered himself over the wall. It was an uncanny sensation to be swinging there in the open, uncertain of the drop beneath, and ignorant as to whether the rope was long enough to reach to the bottom. But Hal scarcely gave the matter more than a thought, for his attention was riveted upon the searchlight which had passed a few moments before. If only it kept steadily upon its course, they would both be down by the water's edge and in hiding from it before it came round again. But supposing it commenced its vagaries,

and began to flit to and fro, as if suspecting the presence of the fugitives, and eager to atone for its previous defeat by discovering them? Well, there was no ordering its movements, and they must just take their chance and hope for the best; but in any case they had already gone so far towards the liberty which they loved, and which meant life to them, that they would not give in without a struggle.

Suddenly Hal's feet struck the ground, and he at once relinquished his hold of the rope and lay down upon the grass, listening for Gerald's descent. Almost before he expected him he was down by his side. They shook hands heartily, and then stole down the steep face of the hill which led to the harbor.

"Come in here; this will do for us," said Hal in a whisper, drawing his companion into the shadow of a boat which suddenly barred their way, and which was propped up on its side.

They crept right into it, and lay there, full length, waiting with fluttering hearts for the searchlight to pass. At last it came, seeming to the lads, in their highly strung condition, to pause inquiringly, as it lit upon the boat.

Did the man who worked it suspect that they were there? Would he give another alarm at once and would the tolling of that castle bell, which sounded so dismally like a funeral knell, boom out over the town and set hundreds of eager trackers after the spies? Where could they fly then? The harbor? No, that would not do. Then where?

The thoughts buzzed through their heads, and the questions remained unanswered. But each crept still closer into his shelter, pressing against the planks as though that would add to his safety. And all the while their hearts beat a rapid tattoo against their ribs, for they were conscious that discovery at this moment would blight all their hopes of escape. But they were frightening themselves unnecessarily, for the beam sped on its way without an instant's halt, flashing across the water, and resting for the space of a few seconds upon the launch towards which they were about to swim.

"Now for it, Gerald," said Hal shortly. "Off with your coat and boots."

They kicked the latter off, and, rapidly divesting themselves of the former, stole down to the water's edge. Fifty yards away the beam of light was sweeping across the surface of the water, and steadily increasing the distance between them, leaving all but that part upon which it fell obscured in dense and impenetrable darkness. Nothing, in fact, could have been more opportune for Hal and his friend. They slid gently into the harbor, to find themselves in deep water at once. Then they threw themselves forward, and struck out boldly for the distant quay, in the wake of the revolving light.

Chapter XV

With the American Fleet.

It was a long swim that Hal and Gerald had started upon, but circumstances were in their favor, and they made light of it. The summer was scarcely at an end, and the water, therefore, was beautifully warm, so that there was no reason to fear an attack of cramp; and the farther they moved from the shore, the more they were helped on their course by a current which, sweeping in from

the sea through the long, narrow, neck-like opening, struck a projecting bluff below the Morro Castle, and was deflected to the center of the harbor, carrying the swimmers with it. Halfway across, Hal's hand struck gently against a large iron buoy, to which life-lines were attached, and which was anchored in mid stream. He at once turned to Gerald, laying one hand on his shoulder to attract his attention, while with the other he obtained a firm grasp of one of the ropes.

"We'll rest and get our wind here," he said. "Come round to this side, old boy. It is the farthest from the searchlight, and we shall be hidden in the shadow. Next time it has safely passed us, we'll make tracks straight for the launch, and do our best to get on board before the light revolves in our direction again."

It was a wise course to pursue, for the beam cast by the electric lantern had long ago won the race, and was already sweeping the streets of Santiago, en route for the Morro Castle and the harbor again. Soon it reached the buoy, appearing to hover over it, just as it had done five minutes before in the case of the upturned boat. But it only did so in the imagination of the fugitives, for, in reality, it swept on without a pause, and went trailing its silent, inquisitive way across the lonely water.

"Now is the time," whispered Hal. "When we reach the launch swim to the after-end, and crawl on board. The cabin is right up in the bows, for I took particular note of that when watching from the cell."

Gerald nodded, for floating with one's mouth just clear of the water is not conducive to much conversation. Then he let go his hold of the life-line, and closed up to his friend. With steady and powerful strokes, and without the least sign of haste, they swam through the water, their eyes fixed upon the opposite shore of the harbor, and on the shipping as it flashed into sight. Soon a big object rose up black before them in the darkness, and Hal's hand came in contact with the stone pier. A few strokes farther on he touched the side of a vessel, and, stretching high above his head, was able to grasp the gunwale. A thrill of pleasure at once ran through his frame as he realized that this must be the launch in which they hoped to escape from the harbor. To slide along to the rudder was the work of only a few seconds, when his fingers touched the blades of a screw. He at once obtained a firm grip of the side, and hoisted himself slowly and gently to the deck, where he was joined by Gerald directly afterwards.

"We want a breather. I'm puffed," the latter whispered.

"Yes, but we cannot take it here," was the answer. "Let us get into the stoke-hole. Here it is. Come down gently."

There was a tiny iron ladder leading into a small engine-room and stoke-hole combined, and both at once slid down this, and sat upon the floor.

"Now we can talk," said Hal in a whisper. "But first of all let us settle the question whether anyone is aboard. Sit where you are, Gerald. You're a bit blown, and want rest. I'm as fresh as a daisy, and will just go along to the cabin to see if anyone is there."

He went to the end of the boiler, and, discovering a piece of oily waste, carefully lifted the furnace door. A dull glow immediately escaped, lighting the stoke-hole dimly, and showing at once that it contained only themselves.

"Fires banked to last till morning," said Hal in satisfied tones, which he reduced to little more than a whisper. "That shows that no one intends to look at them during the night. Let me see. Yes, the boiler is full, and the pressure

gauge shows just a few pounds of steam. No good to us, though; but we'll soon raise it to bursting-point. Now I'm off."

He stirred the fire, and silently closed the door. Then he ascended the tiny ladder, and crawled along the deck till he came to the cabin, which was roofed with a skylight. Feeling in the darkness for the opening, he soon discovered a catch, and pulling the door open, descended without hesitation, but using the utmost caution all the while. It was even darker down below than on deck, and he therefore stood still, for, if he had moved forward, he might well have stumbled blindly across someone sleeping there. But his doubts were quickly set at rest, for the searchlight again came to the rescue, falling upon the launch, and sending a flood of brilliant rays through the skylight.

"Good! It's empty," murmured Hal; "and as it runs right forward into the bows, and right aft to the engine-room, it is clear that we have the boat to ourselves. All the better, say I, for every time we have to silence some fellow we add to our risks; besides, I don't like to be hammering everyone who comes in our way. But now for steam, and a glorious run to the sea. Ah, we'll feed the fires till the plates are red-hot and the funnel melts. Then, when she's trembling with the pressure of the steam in her boiler, we'll set her for the harbor mouth."

He almost clapped his hands in the exuberance of his spirits, for even the least sanguine would have had to admit that now, indeed, success was near at hand. But there was plenty of work to be done, and he returned to the stoke-hole to complete it.

"We've got to make a move soon," he said. "It must be some while after midnight, and daylight will be with us about three o'clock. We'll lift the furnace door again so as to get a good look round. I shall want plenty of fuel close at hand, but it will not do to move more than can possibly be helped till we are out of the harbor; for, on a quiet and still night, sounds, however faint, can be heard a very great distance."

"And when we are out, what then?" asked Gerald.

"Just this, old boy. You'll have to be skipper, and get to the wheel. There is one good point about it, I notice. They've placed it so close to the entrance above that it will be possible to stand on one of the lower rungs of the ladder, and steer without showing much more than your head. No doubt this launch is usually run by one man, who works her engines and wheel alone. That's why they are placed in such handy positions. If we are not discovered, all will be as simple as eating a dinner; but, if we are, then it will be a trifle exciting, and you will have to look out for the bullets. My job is the engine and the furnace. I've played the game before, and know something about it. Now, lend a hand, and go easy, whatever you do. We don't want all those dogs on our track again, if we can avoid it."

Lifting pieces of coal in his hands, Hal cast them one by one into the flames, for to have employed a shovel would have been to run the risk of discovery. It was slower work, but safer by far, and after all, with two hard at it, was soon ended. Now and again Hal went to the ladder, and, standing on one of the lower rungs, put his head up through the opening, and looked at the funnel.

"She'll do," he said at last, in tones of satisfaction. "The fuel is dry, and at present the smoke is scarcely noticeable. Wait till we get away, and put the steam-blast on. Then there'll be flames spouting into the sky, and a regular firework display."

"Yes, and a few shells flying after us," said Gerald, with something remarkably like an excited chuckle. "That's about what it will be, for I cannot see how we can hope to slip out without discovery. If the funnel does not give us away, the searchlight certainly will. But we'll dodge that if we've any luck. Anyway, we will get out of this, whatever happens."

"That's so; we will, old boy, and I fancy it's high time now to be setting about it. I've never before walked off with property belonging to somebody else, but this time it's a case of our lives, and, besides, all's fair, you know."

"Yes, in love and war, Hal. Hillo! I can hear a shindy somewhere. What's it all about?"

Hal darted to the ladder, and, thrusting his head through the opening above, hung there listening.

"There are men coming along the quay," he said. "What can they want? This is the only boat moored over in this direction."

They looked into each other's faces in the dim light given by the fire, and each noticed that the other had turned deathly pale.

"They must be coming here," gasped Gerald.

"Then we must disappoint them," answered Hal. "Quick! throw off the for'ard mooring, Gerald. No, not that way; you will get at it sooner by hopping ashore. Then do the same aft, and jump on board. Quick! hop, I say; for we have very little time to lose."

He turned at once to the furnace, and commenced to shovel coal into it at a rapid pace, keeping his eye all the time fixed on the pressure gauge.

"One hundred and fifteen pounds," he said. "Good! That will help us finely. Now we'll get the bearings warmed."

He turned the steam cock slightly, and sent a cloud of hot vapor rushing into the cylinders.

"Below there! she's loose. I've cast off the moorings," whispered Gerald at this moment, thrusting his head down into the stoke-hole.

"Then give her a good push off, and go to the wheel," answered Hal.

Gently, and without a sound, save the low drone of the fire, and the roar of flames rushing through the funnel, the launch left the quay, and, propelled by a thrust of Gerald's foot, glided some yards into the harbor. She was away only just in time, for, a minute or two later, some twenty soldiers marched up, and voices were heard.

"Halt, men, and see that you keep in your places," someone was heard to exclaim, in far from pleasant tones. "Now, señor, what is it? These beggarly Americans seem to have disturbed the whole town. First, my comrade is so upset by a blow in the face that I have to take his duty; and then you must needs turn me out at this uncomfortable hour to follow some wild-goose chase. Why could you not use your own ruffians?"

"Grumbling will not mend matters," was the suave answer, in a voice which Hal and his comrade recognized as José d'Arousta's. "These two Americans escaped from a fool of a jailer, and are still about. We have reason to believe that they are in the harbor, for their boots were found not an hour ago, beneath the Morro Castle. I received orders to call you and your men, and to instruct you to come here, so that you might get on board the launch. Caramba, but it is dark! It is like the bottom of a pit. Where can the boat be?"

"Alongside, you said, señor," the other answered sourly. "Where is it, then?"

Footsteps were heard on the paving as José d'Arousta and some of the soldiers hunted along the quay. Meanwhile the launch lay off at a distance of a few yards, her passengers crouching in the stoke-hole, and hoping to remain undiscovered.

"Look, Señor Capitan, there is the boat!" one of the men suddenly cried, "I can see flames and smoke coming from the funnel."

"What? The furnaces in full blast!" José shouted. "The fires were banked for the night, and no one was aboard her."

"Perhaps the engineer in charge has got here before us," the officer remarked. "Why not hail him?"

"Hi! Aboard there! Put in alongside the quay," José promptly sang out.

The only answer was a shower of sparks from the funnel, and the splash and noise of churning water, for Gerald had been listening to all that passed, and had rapidly interpreted to Hal.

"Sing out that you are coming," said the latter, "and then steer her for the harbor mouth. I'll give her steam."

He turned to the throttle and opened it wide, at the same time allowing the steam-blast to come into action.

"She's moving now," he cried. "Keep her well away, Gerald, and dodge the searchlight, whatever you do."

Illustration:

Hal and his Companion escape from Santiago

"Hi there! Where are you going? Where are you steering to?" a voice cried from the quay; and then, as the launch sped on into the harbor basin, José d'Arousta was heard calling to the soldiers to open fire.

"Ah, treachery!" he shouted. "Something is wrong; for see, she is running away. I have it; those rascally spies are aboard. Let your men open fire at once, señor."

A single rifle cracked immediately, no doubt fired in order to give the alarm, and almost instantly the searchlight went through the same strange antics as before. Finally it settled on the harbor, and, sweeping slowly across it, lit full upon the launch. In a minute there was a roll of musketry, and a shower of bullets hurtled about her, some piercing her woodwork as if it had been merely paper, but none, fortunately, hitting Hal or Gerald, or any part of the machinery. A minute later they had run into the shadow cast by a long line of shipping, behind which the light failed to reach them. Hal at once thrust his head up through the opening, and then cut off steam.

"They'll expect us to pop out at the other end," he said quietly, "but we'll disappoint them by going about and cutting back by way of the quay. Ready? Then shove the wheel over. There's enough row going on all round to drown any we may make."

And this was the case, for the gyrations of the searchlight and the rattle of musketry had effectually awakened the shipping world. The crews of vessels lying in the harbor came tumbling up on deck, while many of the ships rang their bells, as though a general attack by the enemy in force were imminent. A few who had news of the runaways put off in their boats, and pulled into the open water, their hands shouting loudly for information as to the whereabouts of the escaping prisoners.

"Just keep these ships in line with the searchlight," said Hal, a few moments later, thrusting his head up again. "That will give us a dark patch in which to run, and will carry us almost as far as the exit. That's it. Steady so. I'm going to pile the coal till she's fit to burst."

He dived below again, and, seizing the shovel which had already proved so useful, threw the fuel into the open door of the furnace. By now the dial showed a greater head of steam, but he was not yet satisfied, and kept at the work, even going to the length of tossing an open can of oil into the flames.

As for Gerald, with eyes shifting from right to left, and returning ever and anon to the searchlight, he gripped the wheel and steered the launch in a dead line ahead. Once, a boat suddenly sprang out of the dense darkness directly in front, and he caught sight of the water flashing faintly at the tips of the oars. But he would not alter his course, and went rushing on, only missing the other craft by a foot or two, and leaving it behind in a trice, rocking so violently that it was a wonder that it did not fill and sink at once.

"Where are they? What is all this bother about?" someone cried.

Gerald did not trouble to answer. He kept grimly on till a flash of the broad beam overhead showed him that he was approaching the edge of the harbor. Then, hesitating how to act, he looked down at Hal as if to ask his advice, and saw him stripped to the waist, and standing in the glare of the furnace, into which he was throwing coal as if life itself depended on his exertions—as, indeed, it did.

Round spun the wheel, and the launch swayed to the left, rolling heavily as she did so.

"This is my job," murmured Gerald, unconsciously repeating the words Hal had used when giving him the post of steersman. "I'll see the show through. Now for the channel that leads to the sea."

"Will the searchlight fall upon it just as we enter? Yes—no—perhaps it will not. Ah! it must. It is all up with us!"

The thoughts flashed through his mind, one moment high hope surging through his heart, and the next some movement of the electric beam shattering all thoughts of escape. The light fluttered onto the thin band of water leading out between the steep cliffs to the sea, to safety and friends, and then whisked back to the harbor, flying across every foot of its surface that it was possible to reach, and searching every nook and corner.

Round spun the wheel again.

"In the channel, and now bang straight ahead," murmured Gerald. "If the Dons who man the castle batteries do not spot us we shall be lucky. But how can they fail, when flames like that are pouring from the funnel? They're bound to let fly at us."

He cast an upward glance at the smoke-stack, and longed to be able to smother the flaring streak which poured from it into the night, lighting up the surroundings like a torch. Luck, however, seemed to have followed the runaways, for if anyone noticed them, he made no sign, not thinking that this tiny vessel, rushing so boldly out to sea, could contain any but friends. Perhaps, even, he may have thought it was the officer who had been told off to conduct the search; though then it was strange that he should feed his fires till the funnel was on the point of melting, while the escape steam whistled through the valve with a deafening noise.

Fortunate indeed was it for the fugitives that another part attracted the attention of the Spaniards. From Morro Castle, and from all the defenses, the eyes of the garrison were fixed upon the searchlight. Breathless with excitement, and too occupied to utter as much as a sound, they followed the revolving beam, till at last it fell full upon a launch steaming across the harbor. No doubt it contained José d'Arousta and his men; but the watchers were ignorant of that, and set up a shout of exultation that awoke the echoes. They rushed to their guns and rifles, and would have opened fire had not the workers of the light known more than they, and flashed it elsewhere in search of the escaping prisoners. And all the while Hal and Gerald were speeding, with their most eager efforts, along the narrow track that led to the sea.

"Another half-mile and we shall be away," screamed the latter, looking down at his friend. But the escaping steam smothered his voice, and only the click and scrape of the busy shovel answered him.

Bang! A huge column of water blew up into the night some hundred paces behind, sending a heavy swell rolling along, which caught the launch and caused it to bob sharply.

"A mine!" shouted Hal, who had heard the roar. "I should say that it is about their last. Keep her over to one side, for those infernal machines are usually laid in the center, so as to catch the large ships. A miss is as good as a mile, old boy!"

"We're out now," shouted Gerald, taking a hasty look round, and noticing that the reflection of the flames upon the wet rock on either side had just vanished. "Now where away?"

"Bang straight for the deep blue sea, old chap, and the farther out the better. If we could put a hundred miles between us and the Dons within the next few minutes I should feel all the happier."

To steer directly out was, indeed, the best course they could follow, and neither of the lads relaxed his energies till the tiny launch had plowed a way ten miles out to sea. All was in their favor, for the night, though intensely dark, was beautifully calm, and the surface of the water undisturbed by even a ripple. An hour later, when they had obtained a good offing, Hal left the door of the furnace wide open, and stopped the engines.

"I'm peckish again," he said, climbing to the deck, and wiping the perspiration from his forehead with a piece of oily waste. "Skip along, old man, and see whether you can manage to find some grub and something to drink."

Gerald at once left the wheel, and going to the forward part of the launch, descended into the cabin. He had little difficulty in discerning his surroundings, for by this time the sky had lightened considerably, and dawn was close at hand. But he was unsuccessful, and returned with a very long face.

"Not a crust to be seen," he said dismally. "I say, Hal, what shall we do if there is no food aboard, for we shall starve if we do not fall in with a ship pretty soon?"

"Then that is just exactly what we must do," cried Hal cheerfully, "and we'll have to be precious careful that she is not a Spaniard. Yes, it's rough having nothing to eat, but we must not grumble. Just think of what we have escaped. We have left prison and that fellow José d'Arousta behind, and are safe for the present. I'd rather starve for a week than take my place before a file of soldiers at this hour of the morning."

He shuddered when he thought of what a narrow escape they had had, and what fate would have been theirs, had they still occupied their cell in the Morro Castle.

Then away flew his thoughts to the hacienda. Why? Did they dwell for the space of more than a moment upon Mr. Brindle and any of the hands he knew? No, certainly not! Hal would have flushed very red had you suddenly asked him the question; for, in truth, he was thinking of someone else—of Dora, picturing her as he had seen her many a morning, standing at the top of the steps leading from the veranda, a vision of loveliness in white, with a welcoming smile that showed two rows of dainty pearls, and a glance from a pair of dancing blue eyes that always made him feel happy. That was how he had seen her every morning as he rode in from his work, and those were the happy thoughts which invariably filled his mind during the morning meal.

But the scene suddenly changed, José d'Arousta and the rascally Pedro appearing in his mind's eye in place of his employer's daughter, and they were again threatening the hacienda. At the thought, Hal sprang to his feet, his hands clenched, and a look of excitement spreading over his handsome face.

"Yes," he cried, "it is good indeed to live; for I have work to do. I have escaped from the island, but I must return again at the very first opportunity."

"Why should you? It would be madness!" exclaimed his comrade.

"Why, Gerald? Think of the hacienda, and of José d'Arousta's threat. That is my reason, for real danger threatens your father and Dora."

"Phew! I hadn't thought of that," Gerald answered, and then suddenly lapsed into silence, while a queer and sly little smile stole over his face.

"Oh, it's like that, is it?" he murmured a moment later. "But, I say, what about falling in with a ship? What do you propose?"

"As there is no food on board, and we are both famishing, I vote we turn the steam on again, and get as far away from the island as we possibly can. The chances are that it is blockaded by the American fleet, and, as Santiago is a most important harbor, some of the vessels are bound to be down this way. Naturally they would steam up and down within sight of the coast, running in closer at night. We must keep a bright look-out for them, and must hope for their appearance soon. I fancy that we are safe from the Spanish torpedo boats, for they would scarcely dare to run out so far."

"What's that over there, then?" asked Gerald, suddenly pointing to the west.

A big black cloud was floating on the horizon, and Hal looked at it long and earnestly.

"I believe it's the smoke of a fleet," he said at length. "If it is, I am for chancing the Spaniards, and running down towards that cloud."

Gerald hastily agreed, whereupon Hal dived below again, and having seen to the lubricating of his engine, opened the throttle-valve. Every minute as they ran to the west the cloud became more certainly one of smoke, and within an hour they had made out that six large battleships were bearing down upon them at an easy pace. Then a breeze got up and blew the smoke away, the masts and funnels of the on-coming fleet becoming at once visible, sharply silhouetted against the clear morning sky.

"They're wagging their signals," said Hal, poking his head up above the deck, and taking a long look. "No doubt they have spotted us, and will send at once to find out who we are."

He had scarcely finished speaking, when a long, low hull shot out from behind one of the bigger ships, and came steaming at a great pace towards them.

"A torpedo boat," said Hal. "We'll lie to, and wait for her."

Turning off the steam, he mounted to the deck, and sat down by Gerald's side. A quarter of an hour later the torpedo boat was close at hand, and, surging up beside the launch, rounded to, and circled completely about her, setting the tiny vessel dancing to the swell.

"Hooray! She's flying the Stars and Stripes," shouted Gerald, flinging his cap into the air. "We're safe at last, old boy, and there is a good square meal in sight."

"Aboard there! Who are you?" came the hail across the water. "Where on earth do you come from? and what port are you bound for?"

"We're from Santiago. We left there this morning," Hal shouted back, making a funnel of his hands.

The boat, with its murderous-looking quick-firers, ranged up alongside, and a sailor flung a rope to them.

"Hang on there, and make her fast," shouted an officer standing on a diminutive bridge. "We'll tow you home. You're a prize to the navy of the United States of America."

"Prize indeed!" Hal exclaimed. Then he laughed loudly. "We'll let it rest like that till we get alongside the flagship," he said to Gerald. "Then I fancy there will be some fun, and we shall score off our friend aboard the torpedo boat."

By this time the fleet of warships was only a mile distant, and it took very little time for the powerful destroyer to reach them with the launch in tow. Then, once more, the semaphore wagged confusingly.

"Cast off that rope, and smartly with it," shouted the officer who had hailed Hal before. "Now then, we'll take every one of you aboard to see the admiral. Prize party, make ready to hop on to her, and just knock the fight out of any that are playin' games."

He backed his vessel alongside again, and the launch was rapidly lashed in position, a few fenders being placed between to protect the brittle plates of the torpedo craft.

"Now, who are you anyway?" asked the officer brusquely, boarding the launch with a party of sailors. "One of you looks so black that he might pass for a nigger; and the other—why—what's this? It's a boy, a perfect child, and astoundingly like the lads who are to be found right over in the States. Say, who, in the name of all that's curious, are you, youngster?"

"Not your prisoner, at any rate," answered Gerald, with a laugh. "We're Americans. At least, I am; and my friend is a Britisher."

"Britisher! American! That is hard to believe. And what is all this about?" He looked at the decks of the launch, and then at the empty engine-room. "Two lads of our own blood aboard a Spanish craft, and not another soul with them! It is particularly queer!"

"It is, we admit," Hal answered, with a smile; "but you must understand that we had no choice, for we were captured in the town of Santiago in suspicious circumstances, and were thus placed in a cell in Morro Castle, with the cheerful prospect of being shot as spies early this morning. We bolted, and as this launch was lying idle beside one of the wharfs, we just borrowed her, and steamed out to sea. So I fancy that she really belongs to us."

"Borrowed her! I should fancy that was a piece of amizin' cheek," the officer laughed. "And you young fellows got through without so much as a shell whistling loudly in your ears?"

"Not quite. By the merest chance we escaped a mine, which was exploded behind us; and I fancy you will find a few bullet-holes if you care to look round," Hal answered coolly. "But there's one thing very wrong. We're awfully hungry. Have you anything like a meal aboard?"

The officer clapped him on the back. "Come along out of this tub at once," he said. "It's Spanish, and isn't fit for gentlemen. Grub? George, sir! but I've something below in my cabin that will fairly make your mouths water. Leave her there, bo'sun, and signal over to the skipper that all's well, and that the prisoners are busy putting their teeth into the best food we've got, for they are simply famishing."

Chapter XVI

The Beginning of Hostilities.

"Now, you fellows can just sit right down there and let me have every bit of the tale," said the American officer cheerfully, motioning Hal and Gerald to two seats which were fixed against the side of the tiny cabin of the torpedo boat. "I'm dying to hear all about your adventure, and let me ask you to be particularly slippy, for as soon as the admiral is informed that you've dropped in with the fleet, he'll be wanting you, so as to get all possible information. Come now; the grub will be along in a very few minutes, so you may as well fill in the time. I can tell you, sirs, that I'm right glad to meet you."

He stretched across the narrow swinging table, and shook both heartily by the hand; then he shouted to a steward, and himself helped to place food before the lads.

"Beg pardon, sir, but the admiral aer a-waggin' ter yer ter send 'em aboard," said someone at this moment, calling down the companion.

"The dickens! Signal right back that they're famishing, and will be all the better for a square meal," the officer exclaimed. "It's the truth, after all," he added, with a smile. "I should be uncomfortably hungry if I had taken nothing but thin air since the sun came up."

Some pressed beef, bread and butter, and hot tea were placed upon the table, and Hal and Gerald needed no second bidding to fall to. The keen night air had indeed given them an appetite, to which long hours of suspense and excitement had only added zest. They fell upon the viands, therefore, with a will, and made the food disappear with great rapidity.

"My! There's no doubt that you were hungry," remarked the officer, with a smile. "Don't stop. Go right on, for there is plenty more if you need it."

At last they managed to satisfy their hunger, and then they gave a rough outline of their adventures. They were in the act of completing the story when the same voice called to them again.

"Them signals aer a-waggin' fit ter split theirselves," the man cried. "Reckon it erd be jist right ter send 'em aboard."

"So; then we'll get under way. Get to your post."

The torpedo boat quivered and throbbed from stem to stern as the screws revolved in the water.

"Say," said the officer, "there's steam and plenty of it in that old tub of yours. Suppose we go aboard the flagship in it; it'll be the handier."

Hal and Gerald acquiesced, and at once stepped into the launch. A man was left in charge of the wheel of the torpedo boat. Then two were sent aboard the launch, one of whom dived into the engine-room; the lashings were cast off, and they steamed alongside the huge vessel which flew the admiral's flag.

A monster she looked, too, for the NEW YORK was one of the largest of armored cruisers afloat.

"Down below there! Hook on, and we'll bring you flyin' up," someone shouted, and the tackle of the two falls began to descend, a sailor clinging to the lower block of each. Hal was no seaman, and it was a revelation to him to see the way in which the hooks were made fast, and the launch, engines, and all, whisked aloft. A minute later he and Gerald, together with the officer, were standing on the white decks of the magnificent flagship NEW YORK.

"Admiral's compliments, and will ye sthep below?" an Irish marine said, saluting.

"To be sure I will! Stay here till I come up again," replied the officer, turning to the lads.

As he left them for his interview with the admiral, another officer approached.

"Should say that this was irregular," he said, looking keenly at Hal and Gerald. "Two prisoners left unguarded! But you'd be amazin' clever, I reckon, to do us much harm. Hallo! What's this? I've a kind of recollection of one of you. Now, where have we met?"

"And I remember you; I saw you aboard the MAINE," replied Hal quietly.

"Why, the MAINE! That you did, certainly. Are you not the Britisher? You are, of course, but what are you doin' with this young fellow aboard a Spanish craft?"

This needed another explanation, which was barely completed when Admiral Sampson, the commodore of the squadron of American ships, came up.

"Congratulations, young gentlemen," he said, extending his hand in welcome. "I have heard part of the story, and shall be glad to learn more. Meanwhile, I fancy that a bath and some clean clothes will be more in your line than anything else. Mr. Perkins, I'll be obliged if you will hurry next time something turns up. This time it's different, for they're excellent young fellows."

The officer saluted, and at once descended the gangway, and entered a boat which had been lowered, bestowing a wink on Hal and Gerald as he did so.

"Mr. Billing, you'll do me the favor of looking after our guests," proceeded the admiral. "Fix them up, and bring them along to dinner to-night."

"Thankee, sir, I will," was the reply; then he turned to Hal and Gerald, and led them below.

"You've had a good square meal, I understand," he said, "so we'll see right away what's to be done about togs. Come along here."

He led them into a cabin, and began to ransack various drawers, producing, after a long hunt, undergarments and a spare suit for each.

"Perhaps you won't mind telling us what's going on?" said Hal. "We know no more than that war was declared a few days ago."

"Then I fancy that you are as well primed with information as we are. I can tell you that this is a very queer war—in fact, quite the strangest I have ever heard of. The truth is, that neither the Dons nor my country are prepared for fighting; for, you see, ships are not sufficient to enable a nation to carry on hostilities. An army to invade is wanted, and where is ours to come from? Mind you, sir, I've not a morsel of doubt that we shall raise all the troops we want, and that very quickly too, for all America is buzzin' with enthusiasm at this very moment. But you must understand that men who have not been trained to work together stand a very poor chance when confronted with regulars. Then, again, where would our supply department be? I can inform you right now that there would be terrible confusion when it was found that a hastily raised arm of the service was called upon to feed, say, twenty thousand men, perhaps in Cuba, or elsewhere.

"So it comes to this, that we must wait till all is ready ashore. Meanwhile, the navy will have to do all the fighting, and, if only the Dons show the spirit for which their ancestors were famous, we shall have some very ticklish brushes with them.

"After our forces are ready to move, and the various departments have got into thorough working order, we shall want ships to carry them to Cuba, or even to Spain, for all I know; and then I have a notion that there'll be a heap of fun, and a mighty lot for all of us to do."

"Then there is no chance of an invasion taking place yet a while?" Hal asked.

"No, that's just how it stands. But how does it interest you, Mr.—er—er—oh, I can't remember your name. Anyhow, you're a Britisher. How do you come into the quarrel?"

"It did not interest me greatly till a few days ago," said Hal. "Now it does. You see, these Spaniards have given us a very bad time. I must admit that the greater part of the trouble has arisen through one Don in particular, who is a very bad specimen of humanity. He attacked our hacienda, and the next day did his utmost to have us shot as spies. In fact, if matters had not turned out otherwise, you may take it that he would be gloating over our deaths at this very moment."

"George! That is most uncomfortable to think of!"

"We had a precious near squeak for it," continued Hal; "and now you ask how it concerns me. I am going back to the island, and, if I find that all is secure at the hacienda, I shall join the invading forces."

"Just to make matters even, I suppose?" laughed the officer. "I can easily follow you. These Dons have given you and the youngster a warmish time, and have roused you into a temper. You Britishers have the reputation of being as easy-going as possible, and of being able to put up with a heap; that is, up to a certain point. After that, we all know that the old bull-dog nature comes to the fore, and then there's going to be trouble. And so you've got to that point? Well, I am not a morsel surprised, for there are few who would stand what you have gone through, and forget in a hurry. In fact, I reckon that the majority would have failed to come through at all. There's no doubt that you youngsters were in an almighty mess. Say, sir, what was the name you mentioned?"

"Hal Marchant."

"Ah! So that is it. Well, sir, I'm pleased to meet you. I'm Billing; Lieutenant aboard the NEW YORK. Lieutenant Samuel K. Billing."

He held out his hand, which Hal took and shook with enthusiasm.

"And so you have decided to join the boys?" continued the officer. "It's the kind of thing that a lad of your sort would do, and I don't suppose that you'll have much difficulty about the matter. But in case you have, apply to me. I haven't forgotten how you came to the fore and helped to douse the magazines aboard the poor old MAINE, and, if I can, I'll do something to repay you. Come, think the matter over right now."

He motioned both the lads to seats, and threw himself into another opposite.

"There," he said pleasantly. "Now, fire away."

"You have asked me how you can help us," said Hal, after some moments of silence. "It is very kind of you, and if you will arrange to have us landed somewhere near Santiago, we shall be most grateful to you."

"Can't be done. It is out of the question altogether," replied the officer, leaning back in his chair, and shaking his head emphatically. "See here, Mr. Marchant, you'll admit that we Amurricans have a reputation for smartness. Well, whatever the Dons may be in ordinary circumstances, they are fully alive to the situation just now, and have their eyes very wide open. Christopher, man! the coast is bristling with guns and men, and it is no exaggeration to state that you could hardly float a piece of bread ashore without its being discovered. That will give you an idea of the vigilant watch that is being maintained."

"But we must return to the hacienda. The safety of our friends demands it!" exclaimed Hal hotly.

"Is that so? What friends, may I ask, sir? Relatives, by any chance?"

"Well, not exactly in my case," Hal answered, in some confusion. "Gerald's father and sister live at the hacienda."

"You don't say so!" the officer answered quizzingly. "You don't fear that your pa's in danger, do you, Mr. Gerald?"

"Yes, I fancy he is," replied Gerald. "You see, we are anxious about him with those rascally irregulars about. Besides, there's Dora."

"Oh, ho; there's Dora!" repeated the officer, smiling at Hal. "And so you have determined to rush into all sorts of dangers, Mr. Marchant, just on the chance of rescuing your friends from some scoundrels who, after all, may never have been near the hacienda of which you speak. Well, it's a fix, for you can't exactly fly ashore, and you'll be shot so sure as you attempt to get there in a boat."

"Then I'll swim," said Hal quietly. "I'll go overboard some day when you are close inshore."

"Yes, and what about the sharks? Those loathsome brutes are just jostlin' one another round here."

"I'll swim for Cuba all the same," replied Hal steadily. "I'll chance the sharks, for I am convinced that real danger threatens our friends."

"So bad as that, is it?" the officer exclaimed, lifting his eyebrows. "Well, if you are set upon it, I'll do a trifle for you, but it won't be yet a while. We're bound elsewhere, and will be cruising up the other side of the island. But when the chance comes you shall go, and you can trust Samuel K. Billing to help you."

The young American officer, whom Hal had first met beside the magazines on board the ill-fated MAINE, and who had so miraculously escaped the disastrous results of the explosion, had not exaggerated matters when he declared that America was not ready for war.

True, her people, the nation as a whole, and the newspapers for the most part, had asked for war—nay, demanded it. Sympathy for the miserable people in the concentration camps had first stirred them into action, but the awful

calamity on board the MAINE, and the particular circumstances in which the explosion had occurred, had roused their anger and indignation. At their very door thousands of poor helpless people were dying of sheer starvation, and of the hundred and one diseases which follow inevitably where want and destitution have undermined the constitution. That in itself was an offense against their feelings of humanity. And there was no error in this case, for no lying tales had reached their ears, but only the truth. They had not been told stories innumerable of awful misery existing in Cuba when such was not the case. No. There was no doubt that there was reason for intervention between oppressor and oppressed, and America had espoused the cause of the latter with great earnestness.

She had insisted on war, and had embarked upon it, as the reader knows. But under what conditions? Her navy was one of which she was justly proud; her army, on the other hand, was far too small to undertake the task which America had set herself—namely, the expulsion of Spain from the Island of Cuba. Twenty-seven thousand officers and men were, roughly, the army of this great country; but, though few in numbers, they were, indeed, men to be proud of, for all were picked, and many were accomplished in that most important branch of war—scouting.

In addition, America possessed militia, though few of the battalions were in an efficient state; and the reason of this was that a reaction had followed the fierce civil war between North and South. There was no longer need for soldiering, and trade occupied the attention of the people instead. Had it been otherwise, the lads of the States are too much like our own to have done otherwise than throw their hearts and energy into the army, and fight for their country. And in this emergency they came to the fore with a zeal and impetuosity which warranted the statement of Hal's naval friend, to wit, that the whole of the American nation was roused to enthusiasm.

The sons of the States came forward in their thousands. Those of the militia battalions who were still of the right age, and medically fit, volunteered for active service almost to a man, and within a very short space of time America found herself with a hundred thousand men added to her regular army. The latter was sent down to the department of the South, to Tampa in Florida, and the remaining volunteers were transferred from the various departments into which the States are divided, to certain training camps, from which they were to be sent to Chickamauga in Tennessee, and from there, when efficient, to Tampa.

And now, having hinted at the manner in which the army of invasion was raised, we will turn to the navy, and to events in and around Cuba.

"There, sir, that's just about where we are," said the American lieutenant, who had introduced himself as Samuel K. Billing, throwing himself back in his chair. "As I've hinted to you, the boys ashore are drilling their boots off, and up to this it has been a naval war. On April the 21st hostilities commenced, and America made a haul, for we captured the CATALUNA, with a cargo of mules, about to sail from New Orleans to Cuba. Then Admiral Sampson—that's the commodore, you'll understand—flew his signals, and out the fleet sailed from Key West. We steamed to sea with orders to blockade the coast of Cuba from Cardenas to Cienfuegos, that is right along east of Havana. Next day we fell in with the BUENAVENTURA, and captured her, sending her along home with a prize crew aboard. That, sir, is all the news. Here we are, and here we shall stay

till the troops are ready. Lucky for you both that we happened to put in an appearance! It was by the merest chance that we came cruising down this way."

No doubt it was remarkably fortunate for Hal and Gerald; but, though Santiago with the neighboring coast was, from this day, efficiently blockaded, the failure to carry the movement out before had allowed the *Montserrat*, a Spanish liner, to approach the southern part of the island, and land troops, ammunition, and stores at Cienfuegos, whence they were conveyed to Havana. Beyond this nothing of importance had occurred in the neighborhood, while thousands of miles away, in the Pacific Ocean, an American fleet lay at anchor in Mirs Bay, on the Chinese coast, ready to make an attack upon the Philippines, Spain's stronghold in those waters. The fleet of which Spain boasted had gone to St. Vincent in the Cape Verde Islands, and awaited events there.

"And what will happen now?" asked Hal. "Are you likely to be sailing in close to Santiago? If you are, I shall take my chance and hop overboard. Besides, I'd forgotten, there's the launch. The commodore would allow us that."

"So he would, Marchant, and what would happen to you? Why, sir, that little tub would be sucked up by a Spanish gunboat before you could wink. And then—Phit! man, it would be all over with you! It is out of the question, and you'll have to get the idea out of your mind for a time. In the first place, we're not for cruisin' close in. We're bound for Havana, and when we get there you will see some fun. There's a talk of bombarding Matanzas, a coast town that comes next in size to Havana."

"Then you will have some fighting," said Hal. "I should like to be there."

"And so you shall, sir. You're guests aboard this ship, and if you want to stay, say the word. The commodore is not the man to stop you."

"Thanks, very much," answered Hal. "Until I can see a chance of being landed near Santiago, I should certainly like to remain on this ship. But why not attack Havana? It is the chief Spanish port."

"And get badly knocked about!" exclaimed the lieutenant. "George, man! There are mines to be thought of, and, besides, where should we be if we got into the harbor? Fifty thousand Spanish troops would be confronting us. No, Marchant, it is not to be thought of."

No one could quarrel with this decision. Had America possessed the necessary land forces, an attack might have been attempted; but, even then, to try to enter a harbor over live mines would have been hazardous in the extreme.

Admiral Sampson, however, had decided to attack Matanzas, for it was necessary to do something to calm the clamor of the American public. Almost two weeks had already passed since the declaration of war, and no success had been achieved, save the capture of a few merchant vessels. In consequence, the people of the States were roused to anger, for they had expected great things on the outbreak of war.

But, meanwhile, the ship upon which Hal and Gerald were receiving hospitality was steaming along the coast.

"It'll be two days before we get right round," said Lieutenant Billing, "so I propose that you young fellows get some sort of togs. The tailor aboard will measure you for coats and things, and if we chaps weren't able to dig out the unders, why, we wouldn't be any good. As you stand you'll do for the commodore to-night, for on active service there is no dressing for dinner. Come along with me, and I'll see what the tailor man has to say."

Hal and Gerald did as they were asked, and were very glad that their naval friend had thought of it, for they were absolutely destitute of belongings when they escaped from Santiago. Naturally, their flight from prison, and their subsequent adventures, had not helped to improve their clothes, so that, when they stepped aboard the NEW YORK, it was coatless and bootless, and with only the remains of very dirty plantation suits. Indeed, Hal was more like a coal-heaver than anything, and the heat of the little stoke-hole had been so great that he had even discarded his shirt, and kept on only trousers and vest.

"New suit for two Britishers?" exclaimed the ship's tailor, who was a typical Yankee. "Say, where on airth did yer get hold of them ere togs? Oh, from the lieutenant? Wall, I'll fix yer up as good. That aer the way. Hold yer arm out, so, and I'll take yer measure."

He soon obtained all the necessary particulars, after which the lieutenant led Hal and Gerald to the NEW YORK's gunroom, where they were introduced to the other officers.

"Say, Mr. Marchant, sir," said one of them, "our friend here, the lieutenant, has got the better of us. How was it that you came to be aboard that old tank of a launch? Spin the yarn, like a good fellow, and we'll feel obliged."

There was nothing for it but to recount again how they had escaped from the Morro Castle; and that same evening the commodore also insisted upon hearing all the particulars of their adventures, and probed Hal so astutely with questions that he drew from him the tale of José d'Arousta's attack upon the hacienda, and the manner in which it had been foiled.

"You never let on about that, sir," said Samuel K. Billing reproachfully, "and the admiral has scored one. Say, Mr. Marchant, you seem unusually concerned about that Spaniard, and I don't wonder at all, for he's a low-down sort of beggar; but how did it happen that you first knocked up against him? Now, no hanging back, if you please, for if you don't feel inclined to oblige me, there's Admiral Sampson, who won't let you off."

"Indeed, no. Come, Mr. Marchant, I trust you will give us the story," chimed in the commodore. "This Spaniard seems to have some special spite against you. If I remember rightly, he and his rascally accomplice would have shot you in cold blood when the hacienda was taken. What was the quarrel between you?"

Nothing loath, for the officers seemed genuinely interested, Hal told how José d'Arousta had first come across his path, and how, on three successive occasions, he had been able to thwart him.

"There's luck, they say, in the number three," remarked the admiral. "Young, sir, I consider that you have done very well, and that you have been ably helped by your friend. But luck may pull you through danger on one occasion, while on another it leaves you in the lurch. Pluck and strength of purpose are of far more use in difficulties, and when combined with luck make the issue less doubtful. So, you see, I take it that you both have a very good allowance of what we in the States call 'grit.' But for that I reckon you would have been shot this very morning, for how else could you have succeeded in escaping from the Morro Castle? As for that fellow of a Spaniard, I am not in the least surprised that you feel uneasy about him. Beware of the man, is the caution I would impress upon you. Three, I have said, is considered a lucky number. Take care when you run up against him for the fourth time, that he does not shoot you at sight. No amount of good fortune will preserve a man when a revolver is fired at

point-blank range. But there, what am I doing? Giving advice to a youngster who, in spite of his few years, has seen more adventures than many a man of forty. You've been almighty spry, my lad, and will pull through, whatever the danger."

"You may put it at that," exclaimed the lieutenant, who seemed to have taken a particular fancy to Hal. "I can tell you, sir, that this young guest of ours is as smart and as full of pluck as they make them."

Chapter XVII

A Baptism of Fire.

"This young guest of ours is as smart and as full of pluck as they make them."

These were the lieutenant's words, and those who had the fortune to be acquainted with our hero could not deny their truth; for Hal looked a particularly capable and sturdy young fellow two days after boarding the NEW YORK.

"You look a regular sailor," said Gerald, with a laugh. "When I saw you walking the deck with our friend of yesterday, I took you for one of the officers."

"And that is what I should like to be," Hal answered briskly. "Have you given a thought to our position, old man?"

"No, I can't say that I have. Everything seems very jolly, though."

"Yes, exactly; but we are guests aboard, doing nothing for our living."

"That's the fortune of war. We could not help it," answered Gerald.

"No, but I have made up my mind to do something to repay this kindness. The Spaniards began the quarrel, and three days ago I threw in my lot for good and all with America. Now, I said that I wanted to get to the hacienda, for my idea is to see that all is right there, and then to join the invading Yankees. Of course, if there is likely to be trouble near Eldorado, I shall stay; but, otherwise, I shall do all that I can for America. One who knows the country about Santiago should be useful."

"That I can quite understand," Gerald answered; "but how will you get ashore?"

"I do not know, but something may turn up shortly," Hal replied hopefully.

"Matanzas, for instance," said a voice at his elbow, with such suddenness that both lads sprang round, to find themselves face to face with Samuel K. Billing. "Say, boys," the latter continued, rubbing his hands together with pleasure, "Matanzas has turned up. It's over there, on the port bow. I tell you it's nearing a stiff naval action. The commodore has decided to attack the place."

Both lads turned their eyes to the shore, and, with the aid of glasses, saw a low-lying town on the fringe of a bay, the entrance to which was crossed by rocky reefs, through which, however, a wide and very deep channel was left. To right and left forts could be seen, while on a slope farther inland a host of men were busily erecting a sand-bag battery. It was a fine morning, and the unruffled surface of the sea showed the wind had dropped.

"Look, there's Morillo Battery pointing out right clear between the headlands!" exclaimed the lieutenant, jerking his thumb in the direction of a stone-faced fort far on the inland slope. "That promontory on the right has a powerful erection known as Fort Maya, while on the left there is another of just about equal strength, called Rubal Caya. All are armed with modern quick-firing guns, so we may expect a peppering. Say, boys, have you ever heard the sing of a shell?"

"Never. What is it like?" Hal asked.

"Poom! A burst of smoke from the distant gun, if black powder is used, and then a faint kind of whisper, getting bigger every second till it's just shrieking overhead. If she don't it's a dib, dib, dib in the water, a bit of a splash here and there as the shell ricochets, and then plump she goes to the bottom. Hallo! there's the signal flying to the PURITAN and CINCINNATI. We're steaming in. So long, till next time."

He hurried off, leaving Hal and Gerald in possession of a pair of glasses. For the moment they were occupied in looking at the other ships in company with the NEW YORK, and at the latter herself. No one took the least notice of them, and in consequence they walked the length of the decks. What a fine cruiser the NEW YORK was! From amidships three mighty funnels poured forth volumes of smoke, while the steam sizzled and roared into the air. From her masts bristled many quick-firers, pointing from the tiers of batteries which are known as "fighting tops," and which are slung at various elevations. And from the decks six long cannon of eight inches' caliber grinned through the ports, the breeches surrounded by eager gunners. Others stood at hand by the ammunition lifts, prepared to supply more cartridges. On the bridge walked the admiral and his officers, smart, cool, and collected, and with eyes fixed upon the distant shore.

Poom! A flash and a billow of smoke burst from Point Maya, and out flew a shell, singing merrily, till it plunged into the sea some distance from the NEW YORK.

"The ball opens," said Hal quietly. "Wait till we are closer in. Then it will be warm work. I reckon we are about six thousand yards from the shore, and the Dons judged the distance badly."

His words were cut short by a series of rapidly repeated reports from the guns of the PURITAN. Her quick-firers were at work, and found the range almost immediately. Then followed two roaring explosions, so great in volume that they smothered all the others, and deafened everyone within hearing.

"By Jove! the turret guns!" exclaimed Gerald, putting his fingers to his ears.

The Puritan had, in fact, slewed her turret round, and discharged two of her biggest shells, weighing a thousand pounds apiece. Instantly, up went every glass on the ship, and all eyes gazed eagerly shorewards to see what result would follow.

"Hit! Hit! Right up against the battery! There, there, away to the right!" cried Hal. "I saw the dust and bits fly sixty feet into the air."

In the direction in which he pointed, a dark brown column suddenly spurted up into the air, and floated for some moments like a cloud in front of the battery. Then, as the onlookers from the ships kept their gaze fixed upon the shore, the column suddenly subsided, and when they looked again there were the batteries, surrounded by trees and green fields, while there was no sign of damage produced by the shells.

"Hallo! They are opening on us, and here come the shells!" shouted Gerald, a moment later.

As he spoke, all the Spanish forts fired, and though none of the missiles actually hit the NEW YORK, they hurtled unpleasantly close overhead.

"This is hot!" cried Gerald, wiping the perspiration from his forehead. "Every time I hear that screech I want to bob badly, and my heart goes down into my boots."

"Yes, it's precious unpleasant," Hal agreed reassuringly; "but the Dons are making bad practice, so we can feel pretty secure. Still, that shriek is horrid. It knocks the courage out of a fellow, for, long before one expects it, you can hear a gentle whistle in the distance, gradually increasing till you'd think that the shell was close beside your ear. Then, while you are still crouching and wondering where it is going to land, you hear a dull poom! in the distance, a sharp report sounds ahead or astern of the ship, and up goes a column of water. You know that you are safe then, but it takes some time to get rid of the feeling of funk that settles upon you when the guns begin to open. But take a look through the glasses. Our shells seem to be plumping into the batteries every time."

The American ships were, indeed, making excellent practice, and within fifteen minutes had silenced the batteries ashore, each mighty shell blowing showers of débris into the air. Then they steamed away, their guns being too hot to be pleasant, and now emitting only thin wreaths of smoke. Rubal Caya, undaunted, threw one last missile, which missed, and to it the Monitor replied with a twelve-inch shell, which seemed to wreck the battery.

The losses of the Spaniards must indeed have been heavy, though they were never accurately known. In any case the earthworks were considerably battered. But this bombardment opened the eyes of many people, for it proved that fortifications do not suffer very severely under heavy fire. The heaps of débris flying into the air make it appear as if havoc were being wrought, whereas the destruction brought about at such very long ranges is nothing compared with that produced in the old days of muzzle-loaders, round shot, and a point-blank range.

"Wall, young sirs, we've had one day at it, and a precious hot one it's been," remarked Lieutenant Samuel K. Billing, "and I reckon we've wiped the eyes of the Dons. There's information to hand that one of our gunboats got mauled a few days ago. So, you see, it's only right that we should have the best of it to-day, and get some luck to make up for the other. Say, Mr. Marchant, sir, how'd you and your chum care for a little excursion? Just a game that's goin' to be started along the coast."

"I am sure we should like it very much," Hal answered. "What exactly is it?"

"That's tellin', sir. You'd like to join, you say, and so you shall; but keep it a dead secret. If the commodore knew that I had let the cat out of the bag, it would be a case of an explosion bigger than those over there."

Hal and Gerald wondered what particular excursion they were to take part in, but four days passed without anything happening. On the fourth night, however, they were turned out of their bunks by their naval friend again.

"Say, boys," he said in a whisper, "the time's come along. Get on deck right away, and make for the after gangway. There's a kettle alongside that's smokin' like a kitchen. It's the HUDSON, an armed revenue cutter. Come, shake the sleep out of your eyes, or I withdraw my promise."

They needed no second bidding, but, jumping hastily into their clothes, ran on deck. A rope ladder was hanging overboard, and they descended by this means to the cutter, which was, in reality, a small gunboat.

"Sheer off there!" someone cried, showing a light, and at once the little vessel quivered as her screw revolved. Hal and his friend turned, to find the lieutenant of the NEW YORK standing beside them.

"Naval instruction," he said, as if to explain his presence there. "That's what I am flying after; trying to get hold of the games these kettles play."

"Humbug!" exclaimed another officer, approaching at the moment. "You know as well as anyone that it is a lark, a bit of extra excitement that you're wantin'. But you're forgetting, Samuel. Introduce me."

"Right away, Lieutenant Ben Carson."

They shook hands, and Hal inquired of the newcomer their destination.

"We're bound for Cardenas," was the answer. "It's a bit of a warm place to walk into. Reefs and that sort outside. There are three Spanish boats, the same as this, in the harbor, and they are a nuisance. I'll allow that they've proved too much for us up to this, but we'll do for them this time. Say, Mr. Marchant, have you ever been under fire?"

"Once or twice," Hal answered, "and I cannot admit that it was particularly enjoyable."

"That's so; I judge that there are few who revel in the experience," was the answer. "But you must get used to it, and will have another chance, for we're goin' into that harbor right now."

That this was the intention of the HUDSON was soon made clear. Joined by the gunboats WILMINGTON and MACHIAS, and by the torpedo boat WINSLOW, she lay off the harbor of Cardenas till morning dawned. Then, the men and officers having breakfasted, the little fleet steamed in, piloted through a side channel in the reefs by a Cuban who was well acquainted with them.

"It's queer sort of work, this," remarked Lieutenant Billing, as the little cutter rushed into the bay. "For instance, the main channel's mined, and you'd get blown sky-high if you sailed that way. Then this place is full of rocks, so the fellow who is commandin' has to keep his eyes mighty wide open. But we're in the bay safe enough, and I guess the fun will commence right away."

At this moment the Machias parted company, and steamed to the east, towards Diana Key, where Spanish barracks had been erected. Very soon her guns were heard in action, though not till hours after was it learned that she had put the Spanish garrison to flight, and had sent ashore an armed boat's crew, who hoisted the Stars and Stripes over Cuban soil for the first time in the war.

"Now the band will play," cried the lieutenant excitedly, as the HUDSON steamed onward with her consorts. "Say, boys, we're after those gunboats, and I expect the shells will be flyin' about our heads before very long. But we've got to find them first; they'll be about this way somewhere, but exactly where is the particular question. Now, where can they have hidden themselves?"

"What are those over there, then?" said Hal suddenly, lifting a pair of glasses to his eyes, and directing them across the bay to a long, narrow quay, constructed of stone, which projected far out into the water from the coast-line. "I can see something lying behind there. Perhaps it is a gunboat, for that is a likely place behind which to hide."

"Perhaps it is—there is no saying; but I can't make it look like a gunboat," was the answer. "Whatever it is, I reckon the WINSLOW will soon rout it out. If it's one of those craft, her quick-firers will get to work precious soon, and I think that we shall have a rough time of it; for she's behind the breakwater, while we are stuck out in the open. That won't beat us, though, and if she's there we're goin' to have her."

By this time the three vessels were well in the bay, and while the WILMINGTON lay to off the town, the HUDSON and WINSLOW rushed in towards the wharves in search of the Spanish gunboats.

These were a constant menace to the Americans, for while they lay under the guns of the forts it was difficult to get at them. And what splendid opportunities of producing havoc amongst the ships of the enemy were in the hands of their commanders! To bold, undaunted men, with plenty of spirit about them, there was practically no limit to the damage they might do. Themselves acquainted with the bay, and with every inch of the formidable reefs that formed a barrier round it, knowing well every turn and twist of the narrow and dangerous inlets and exits so much at their finger-tips that the darkest night was no bar to their traversing them, it was possible for them to keep Admiral Sampson's fleet in a state of perpetual alarm. For who could guess when those long sleuthhounds of the sea would leave their kennels beside the wharves, and slip out into the open? And who could hope to follow those long black hulls racing through the water? It was almost impossible to do so, and it is not to be wondered at that many a look-out man, when staring into the darkness, sent an alarm ringing through the American fleet when he had only imagined that he had sighted a Spanish gunboat. Then guns would begin to go off, and a perfect pandemonium would take the place of the silence that had reigned before. On one occasion, too, owing to mistakes in showing signals, the Americans almost fired on their own gunboats, which were patrolling the seas around them.

Meanwhile, the HUDSON and the WINSLOW had been steaming closer to the low stone quay which jutted into the water, and had separated so as to form a smaller mark for the enemy, when there was a roar of exploding artillery, and a hail of shells burst on and around the Winslow.

"Hillo, these fellows are where you said!" shouted Lieutenant Billing; "and what's more, the Winslow's got badly hit, I fancy. Hooroo! we're bearing down to her assistance."

Slewing the helm round, the commander of the HUDSON rushed towards the quay from which the guns were firing, using his own batteries meanwhile. Hal, with a pair of glasses raised, watched the conflict, and distinctly saw the Spanish gunboats firing over the top of the quay, while they themselves were more or less protected by the stonework.

"The WINSLOW is disabled," he shouted, seeing the gunboat suddenly swerve from her course, while a hail of shells burst about her decks. "She's got her steering gear smashed. See, she's drifting nearer to the quay."

"Then we'll have her out of it," shouted the lieutenant. "Say, boys, get to one of those guns, and lend a hand."

He rushed forward, Hal and Gerald running to the after gun. Meanwhile, the HUDSON bore down rapidly upon the disabled WINSLOW, and at once found that she, too, had become a mark for the enemy. But, nothing daunted, her commander kept her straight ahead, in spite of the bursting shells, until quite close to his damaged consort.

Illustration:

Hal and Gerald ran to the After Gun

"Stand ready there to heave them a line," he shouted from the bridge. "Now, I am going across her bows."

He placed his mouth to the speaking-tube and called to his engineer to cut off steam, while, with a wave of his arm, he directed his quartermaster to steer the gunboat close beside the WINSLOW. As he did so, a storm of shot and shell came spluttering around, churning the water up as if huge hailstones were falling into it. It was a most exciting moment, and to those who were watching from the deck of the WILMINGTON it appeared that all aboard the two boats must be doomed, so close was the range at which the Spaniards were firing, and so heavy the bombardment to which both the Americans were subjected.

More than once was the line thrown, but it failed to reach. Then, as the HUDSON struggled manfully to get nearer, she, too, became almost unmanageable in the shallow water, rocking violently, and churning the sea into foam with the frantic revolutions of her propeller.

Bang! Boom! Smash! The sounds seemed to swallow her up, while the patter of bullets beat a loud and unceasing tattoo on her deck and sides. Crash! A shell had struck the rail close beside the gun at which Hal and Gerald were helping, and, exploding with a violent concussion, threw them to the deck. But they were uninjured, and at once sprang to their feet again.

At this moment a more fortunate throw of the line reached the stranded WINSLOW, and a cable was rapidly passed from the HUDSON to her consort, and made fast. Then, putting up her helm, she steamed away at full speed, towing the wrecked gunboat after her till both were out of range. And all the while the stern gun on the deck of the HUDSON growled a reply in sharp and angry snaps, while the shells from the WILMINGTON's big pieces roared and screeched overhead, in many cases to fall upon the stone quay, and injure it and the gunboats flying the Spanish flag.

"Guess that that is a bad business," said Lieutenant Billing. "Those fellows have just pitched into us and knocked us about sadly. Jove, sir, but we'll give it to them next time!"

It was, indeed, a reverse for the American navy, but a very slight one, for which the distinguished gallantry of the HUDSON and WINSLOW more than compensated.

"I never thought it possible for men to live through such a storm of shell," said Hal. "At any other time I should have been in a blue funk, but there was so much to do that I had not time to think."

"That's it," agreed Gerald. "When we ran to the gun, the crew, or part of it, had gone farther aft to heave the line, so that our help was badly wanted. Then, what with handing shell, and watching to see what luck we had in hitting the Dons, I hadn't time for anything else. But it was warm! I say, Hal, old boy, fetch me a glass of water. I feel rather done."

To Hal's astonishment, Gerald suddenly sat down upon a twisted rope fender, and turned deathly pale.

"What's the matter? What has happened?" demanded Hal anxiously. "Are you hit, or are you simply shaken by the excitement?"

"I'm hit—in here." Gerald bit his lips to suppress a groan, and pointed to his side. Then, to his friend's consternation, he fainted dead away.

"What is this? The youngster gone off! Been upset by the fighting and noise?" asked Lieutenant Billing, hurrying up.

"No, I fear he's wounded," Hal exclaimed. "Somewhere in the side, I fancy."

They ran to Gerald's help, and while Hal held his head on his arm, the lieutenant tore his coat open.

"A bit of shell struck him," he said quietly. "No wonder he feels queer. Say, one of you men, drop below and bring up a basin of warm water and some dressings. Another of you hop along to the steward and get some spirits."

He seemed to know exactly what to do, and, as soon as the things were brought, poured some brandy into a tumbler, and, adding a little water, emptied the contents in small quantities at a time down Gerald's throat. Then he ripped the shirt open, and exposed an ugly gash over the ribs.

"Guess one or more are broken," he said. "I don't profess to be a doctor, but I should say that it's nothing out of the way. The loss of blood has caused him to faint. Now, then, along with the basin."

He took a piece of lint, and utilizing it as a sponge, bathed the wound. Then he applied dressings and a bandage. By this time Gerald was showing signs of regaining consciousness; he was promptly carried to a bunk, Hal remaining by his side.

Meanwhile the HUDSON and her consorts were running out of the bay, through the narrow and dangerous channel. They left the town of Cardenas in disorder, fires having broken out in some of the buildings. Outside the barrier they hove to, and the wounded and killed, numbering six in all, were then transferred from the WINSLOW to the HUDSON.

"We're off to Key West, in Florida," said the lieutenant, coming down to speak to Hal. "How's the youngster?"

"Better, I'm thankful to say," was the answer. "He is conscious, and can speak, but I've ordered him to be silent."

"That is the best way, I reckon. Keep him so till we can get him to hospital. That'll be by daybreak to-morrow."

Running at full steam, the HUDSON made light of the journey to Florida, and early on the following morning Gerald was slung into a launch and conveyed ashore. Hal accompanied him, and having handed him over to the tender care of a nurse, sauntered into the town. Flags were flying everywhere, and the streets were thronged with townspeople and shipping folk, all of them wearing miniature American flags in their buttonholes.

"What has occurred to cause all the excitement?" Hal asked of a man who was seated outside a restaurant.

"And don't yer know?" was the astonished answer. "Reckon America has knocked spots off the Dons. Why, it aer more'n a week old. Here, look thur, and you'll allow as there's reason to get a small piece uppish."

He tossed a paper across to Hal, and began to sip his coffee. Hal opened the sheets of closely printed matter, and found a complete page given up to one subject. Across the top, in big, bold type, was printed, "Glorious Victory! Dewey annihilates the Spanish fleet at the Philippines! The battle of Manila! Full details! Wonderful gallantry displayed by the enemy! Small American losses!"

Instantly his attention was riveted, and he read the article from beginning to end.

That there should have been fighting at such a distance from America he fully expected, for Spain possessed the Philippine Islands, which lie in the neighborhood of Hong-Kong, and indeed had held them for not less than three centuries, during which period she had made a rich harvest out of them. When war commenced, an American fleet under Admiral Dewey had been lying in Mirs Bay, close to Hong-Kong; while Montojo, the Spanish commodore, was cruising close to the islands. Evidently they had met, and the newspaper had a description of the battle. Hal ran his eye rapidly down the columns of print.

"A glorious victory has been won for our nation this day, the 1st of May," he read. "Admiral Dewey, who, with his fleet of four cruisers, two gunboats, a dispatch boat, and store ships, has been lying snugly in Mirs Bay, awaiting events, sailed from his anchorage on Wednesday, April 27th, and arrived off Manila Bay on the 30th.

"The Spanish admiral had barely entered, having cruised up to Subic Bay to examine its defenses. Following in his wake, Dewey boldly steamed into Manila Bay, which, as our readers will doubtless know, is some thirty miles wide. It was a night of intense excitement. Not an unnecessary sound was made, the engines worked at their slowest, and every light was masked. Breathless with longing to be up and doing, and yet held quiet and still by love for their country, the crews, grouped round their guns, waited for something to occur.

"Like a column of ghosts the mighty battleships, cruisers, and gunboats forged ahead, a line of a mile and a half in length, at least. Led by the OLYMPIA, the flagship, they entered the deep channel and steamed steadily past Corregidor Island. Not a sound broke the stillness; not a light was to be seen. One, two, three fine ships stole by, and yet there was no alarm. Were the Spaniards dozing? Hark! What was that?

"Another and yet another of Dewey's ships passed the forts. The sixth, the BOSTON, was abreast, when suddenly the darkness was cleft in twain by a mighty flash, while a loud report echoed from the island.

"Ah, that aer more like it!" exclaimed the lads. "That'll relieve the suspense. Swish! Aint that a shell?"

"It was indeed a big shell, but it whizzed harmlessly overhead, to be answered next moment by the guns of the RALEIGH, CONCORD, and BOSTON. Unscathed, with not so much as a rope shot away, the fleet pushed into the bay, and, turning northeast, steamed at a pace only just sufficient to maintain steerage way. Hour succeeded hour, and, instead of lessening, the excitement became even more intense. The men were ordered to sleep beside their guns, but who of them could be expected to obey? It was a physical impossibility. They lay on the hard decks, perspiring in the heat, and maintaining for the most part a grim silence.

"At last, when a weary age seemed to have passed, the east suddenly flushed rosy red in the light of another dawn, the last that many a poor Spaniard was to see. As the daylight grew, the distant coast-line, rocky headlands, and gorgeous patches of fresh green rose up out of the mist. Then, away in front, the town of Manila came into view, and a gasp of astonished delight burst from the American crews, for there was the enemy's fleet, part drawn up across the entrance of Cavité Bay, and under easy steam, while the remainder were moored farther in.

"Still, not a sound broke the silence, save the gentle, half-mournful throb, throb of the engines. Grimly, steadily, and with earnest purpose, the fleet, led by Admiral Dewey, bore down upon the enemy—the spangled banner that we love floating slowly in the tropical breeze.

"Clinkety-clink! the engine dials rang out eight knots ahead, and away steamed our vessels straight for the Spaniards. Boom! boom! Splash! The water of the harbor boiled in foam, and rose in an enormous pinnacle dead ahead of the OLYMPIA, and then subsided as the ship rode proudly on, for the Dons had exploded their only mines unsuccessfully. Still not a sound, save that monotonous throb, throb. At last a gun report was heard, then another, and within a minute the Spanish ships were all engaging our fleet, their shells hurtling and buzzing everywhere. And from the Americans as yet not so much as a shout. But there is a limit to human patience. A burly giant, stripped to the waist, climbed on to the mounting of the big gun in the stern of the admiral's ship, and, waving his cap, shouted, 'Boys, remember the Maine!' It acted like magic. The shout was taken up from end to end of the fleet, and seemed to spur the admiral on to action, for a minute later the big turret guns thundered, and were very quickly followed by a perfect hurricane of shell. Shifting his course, the commodore turned, and, followed by his consorts, moved down the whole length of the Spanish line. Then he steamed back again, using his other guns.

"Five times did he traverse the line, drawing nearer every time. Two hours had passed like so many minutes, and by that time every Spanish ship was ablaze, and sinking or deserted by her crew. Then the fleet drew away, and, it is reported, steamed to Cavité, where the arsenals and shipping were destroyed.

"The Spaniards are said to have fought with heroic courage, and to have manned old and obsolete ships armed with useless guns. This would appear to be correct, for our losses amount to eight wounded, while one man died of heat-stroke. The Spaniards are said to have suffered very severely.

"Further particulars are expected every moment, but what has already reached us across the wires is sufficient to show that Dewey has crushed the naval power of Spain in the Philippines.

"Let us hope that the war is already at an end in that quarter of the globe."

"Phew! what a victory!" said Hal, lifting his eyes from the paper.

Chapter XVIII

A Desperate Undertaking.

A gigantic success had indeed been scored for America by Admiral Dewey and his fleet, and it need scarcely be mentioned that east and west, north and south, he was a hero throughout the States. For the moment the interest of the nation was transferred to another sphere; the China seas claimed the earnest

attention of all. Indeed, when fuller details were to hand, it was more and more apparent that the action in Manila Bay had been of the utmost importance; and before proceeding to detail the doings of Hal, it will be as well to describe the situation more precisely.

One would have thought, considering the importance and value commercially of the Philippines, that Spain would have strained every nerve to bring their defenses to a pitch of perfection which would have defied the might of America. But this was not the case, for just as the United States was deficient in men ashore, so was Spain hopelessly obsolete with regard to her sea-power. Though war had been expected for many months, and, indeed, had been imminent, no effort had been made to supply the Philippines with a modern fleet. Admiral Montojo, the sailor who commanded in the China seas, had but a poor squadron of vessels to depend upon, and it will be scarcely believed that, of the nine which sailed under his orders, one at least was unable to put to sea, for the simple and deplorable reason that her boilers were worn out and would not raise the necessary steam. Of the others, all may be described as obsolete in defenses and in armament. Whereas Admiral Dewey boasted of a fleet of six up-to-date ships, heavily armored, and with steel under-decks, in the case of the cruisers, which would give ample protection to the engines, the Spanish vessels had little more than thin iron plates to depend upon. In fact, in all that goes to make a fleet efficient and dangerous the Spanish ships were wanting. The American ships hopelessly outmatched Admiral Montojo's command in speed, protection, and gun-power.

The last mentioned, though not touched upon before, was not the least in importance, and here again Spain showed herself quite obsolete. Her guns were, almost without exception, old and practically useless. In addition, ancient and fairly modern cannon were placed in ships side by side—a terrible mistake, and one destined to cost their crews dear when the time for fighting came, for the task of selecting and supplying the various forms of shell and powder would be no light one.

Nor was it merely in point of fleets and armaments that the Spaniards failed. Knowing his ships to be hopelessly outmatched, it is a matter for wonder that the admiral did not sink them in the bay, after having removed all the guns and stores. Had he done so, he would have joined forces with the commander of the troops stationed in the environs of Manila, and with him could have given a decided check to the Americans when they attempted to land. Again, failing this, he might have withdrawn with all his ships to the numerous creeks which cut between the Philippines, and, lying hid there, might have sallied out at any moment, and taken Admiral Dewey unawares, thereby doing good service for king and country.

However, we have seen that he chose to set his face to the enemy, and one can only admire the courage of the man, and of all those who helped him during the engagement with the Americans. Defeat was certain, and death not improbable.

Indeed, when full details came to hand, it was only wonderful that any had escaped with their lives, for the Spanish fleet was taken unawares. Only half of the ships had steam up at the moment, while three were in the hands of the dockyard staff, undergoing repairs. Those that were ready steamed out to the open water, and formed in line of battle across the opening of Cavité Bay. As

they took up their positions, Admiral Dewey and the American fleet swerved and ran down the line.

Twice did the fleet pass along the Spanish line, and by then the Reina Cristina, the flagship, was in flames, and had lost some fifty of her crew in killed, while the greater number were wounded. The other ships had fared as badly, and had been riddled with shell. Indeed, while the American fleet had been struck in all some dozen times, the REINA CRISTINA alone had been pierced by more than seventy missiles. By the time Admiral Dewey had passed down the line for the fifth and last time, the Spanish ships were burning and sinking in all directions.

Seeing that all was lost, Admiral Montojo, who had, after the fire on board the flagship, transferred his flag to a small cruiser, gave orders that all who were able were to scuttle their ships and abandon them. The command was reluctantly carried out, the wounded being taken ashore and placed in the villages, while the uninjured marched for Manila, bearing with them their arms and the breeches of their more or less useless cannon.

Having thus put out of action Admiral Montojo's whole fighting force, the Americans drew off for breakfast, and, having refreshed themselves, steamed into Cavité Bay in two lines. Here they met with little resistance, and in a very short while had silenced the shore batteries. When at last they drew off for the night, the naval arsenal at Cavité was in their hands, all the shipping within the harbor was in flames, while the town of Manila itself lay under their guns. Indeed, the might of Spain was broken in the seas which surrounded the Philippine Islands. But there the victory stopped, for by this time the American fleet was sadly short of shell and powder, and in addition there were no troops at hand to invade the island. Consequently, as the Spanish commander refused to surrender, Admiral Dewey found himself in a dilemma, in which we will leave him for the moment, while Hal Marchant and his doings claim our attention again.

Three days after landing at Key West he went aboard the HUDSON again, and in due course stepped upon the deck of the flagship, the NEW YORK.

"How's the youngster?" asked his naval friend, shaking Hal by the hand.

"Doing well, I am glad to say. But he'll be in hospital for a month."

"And by then this war will be over," was the answer. "Our troops are getting into fighting order away over in the States, and before long they will be sailing for Cuba. Then I fancy two weeks will settle the Dons."

"And what is to happen in the meanwhile?" asked Hal.

"That's not easy to answer right now. The Philippines are going to be a bother, and may even delay the invasion of Cuba, for it seems that the natives there have made up their minds to be free of Spaniards and Americans too. That, of course, is clearly out of the question, and I believe a part of the force prepared for Cuba will be sent to the China seas. You see, Cuba will be freed and given independence, but with the Philippines it is a different matter. Up to this we Americans have held aloof from foreign conquest, but now it is necessary that we should have some possession in the East, for it is there that trouble with other nations is likely to arise in future. So, no doubt, we shall just go for these insurgents tooth and nail, till they think better of it and accept us as their masters.

"Another matter also is engaging our attention. Everyone in the fleet has to be precious sly, for Admiral Cervera has sailed with a Spanish fleet from

Cadiz, and some say has already left St. Vincent for these seas. I need not tell you that Admiral Sampson hopes to catch him, and is disposing his vessels so as to watch all the approaches to Cuban waters. If we fall in with the hostile fleet, there will be a general action, and I tell you, sir, that the Amurricans will win. At any rate, you won't find a single commander who will strike his flag.

"In the meantime, and while we are keeping an eye open for Cervera, we are to make an attack upon San Juan, which, I dare say you know, lies very close to Cuba. It is a most important station, situated on the coast of Puerto Rico, one of the Caribbean Islands, and if in our possession would be an excellent base at which to concentrate our forces for the invasion of Cuba. If Cervera were to slip in there, his gunboats would make things very hot for us. Hillo! Time's up. I ought to have been on the bridge ten minutes ago. So long, Marchant, and let us hope that we have some fun to look forward to."

He nodded gayly to Hal, and ran up on to the bridge, looking particularly smart and sailor-like in his white suit and his linen-covered cap.

Hal paced up and down the deck for some time, closely observing the other vessels. Then he dived down to the gunroom to consult the papers. Already he felt quite at home, and like one of the officers, for he had been made an honorary member of the mess, and was in receipt of sufficient remuneration to pay his way. Indeed, by a friendly arrangement, he had been engaged as guide, in the not unlikely eventuality of a party of sailors being landed at Santiago. And so long as he remained on the ship, this arrangement was to be in force; but he had been careful, when accepting the post, to stipulate that, should an opportunity occur for him to land at Cuba, he was to take it at once, promising that he would return at the earliest moment, if it were possible, and if not, that he would transfer his services to the troops when they landed to invade the island.

"I've had orders from the commodore to make things agreeable to you," said the paymaster of the ship, soon after Hal came aboard. "Somehow, he seems to fancy that you're mad keen to slip ashore, and if that is the case, you're to go when you like. Up till then, you'll be ready to land and show the boys round at any moment. In return there's free rations with the officers, and so much allowed for extra tobacco and the like. If you do slip ashore—and I think you won't, because it is the kind of thing that a madman would do—then you've got to promise to come back to the ship as soon as you can, or to fall in with the troops. Now, do you jump at it or not?"

"The terms will suit me very well," Hal answered readily, only too thankful to feel that he was no longer a guest, but had some right on the ship.

And now for many days nothing of importance occurred. As predicted by the lieutenant, a bombardment of San Juan was attempted, but with negative results, and thereafter the fleet, sailing under the orders and flag of Admiral Sampson, patrolled the seas in and about Cuba, keeping a bright and anxious look-out all the while for the appearance of Admiral Cervera's warships.

Occasionally trifling engagements took place, and the Dons, looking from their forts, seldom failed to spy one or more of the blockading fleet in the offing. But no real success worthy of the name was gained on either side. An attempt on the part of the Americans to cut the cables was frustrated by the Spanish, who in this and in other engagements proved that a few, at least, of those who garrisoned the island were efficient. On the whole the Dons scored, but not to

any marked degree. Then an event occurred which altered the plans of America, and caused Hal once again to run into danger.

"We've had news that Cervera sailed with his fleet from St. Vincent," said his friend the lieutenant one day, coming forward with a message just received on the flagship by semaphore. "The Spanish admiral hauled up his anchors and got the steam turned on somewhere about April 28th. Since that he's been lost. No one has so much as a notion where he's been, and I tell you the whole American fleet has been watchin'. Now the tale comes that the MARIA TERESA—that's the flagship—and three other cruisers, with three destroyers that were built for the Dons some time ago by Britishers over in England, have hoodwinked the whole lot of us, and have slipped safely into Santiago. Mind you, it is not likely, but it's possible—quite possible; though, how on earth he managed to get through, without being discovered, is more than I can guess."

"Then I suppose that Admiral Sampson will order his fleet to Santiago?" said Hal.

"So, young man; you'll be a naval expert before you've left us. We're right now for the place, and I should fancy that Havana will be left in the cold."

"I'm very glad you are returning to my part of the island again," said Hal in tones of pleasure, "Now I shall have a chance of slipping ashore."

"That you may," was the reassuring answer. "If Cervera's fleet is really there, we shall be doin' somethin', you may be sure. Most likely there will be a landin', but it's too early to say for certain. When it does come along, though, my promise is a promise, and I'll stick to it and give you a helping hand."

Hal had to be satisfied with this, and spent the hours that intervened before the NEW YORK reached the neighborhood of Santiago in wandering aimlessly up and down the deck, wondering all the time what had happened at the hacienda during his long absence.

Even when the green-clad hills of Eastern Cuba were in sight he was still far from his object, for as yet there was nothing more than rumor—rumor which too often misleads or deliberately lies—to show that the Spanish fleet had arrived. Evidence there was already to hand which showed that Admiral Cervera had sailed straight from his station in the Cape Verde Isles to Martinique, and from there to Curaçoa. From that moment he had been lost. Rumor, as has been said, described his arrival in Santiago, and, indeed, the news was published in Spain, the government at Madrid declaring it to have been received direct by cable from Cuba. But it is not well always to believe the report of an enemy, for this might, after all, be only a simple and harmless ruse de guerre. And so for many days the American fleet under Sampson patrolled the seas, while Admiral Schley, who had also come upon the scene with another fleet of proud vessels flying the Stars and Stripes, sailed along the southern coast, reconnoitering every harbor.

"I can't get to the bottom of these Dons," said Lieutenant Samuel K. Billing in grumbling tones one day, as the NEW YORK lay to on the ocean, slowly drifting along the coast. "Here we are, longin' to know what's happened to Cervera, and just doin' nothin'. And how are we to obtain information? I guess that a bold course would suit the case better than anything. Just sail right in to a close range, so as to search the whole of Santiago with our glasses."

"That does sound the most sensible course," Hal agreed. "At any rate, it would save all this unnecessary delay, and would keep the American people in better humor. They must be very anxious for stirring news away in the States."

"So they are. But look here, Marchant; if Cervera is really in there, why does he not make a rush at us? That is what leads me to doubt whether he's in the island, or, rather, in the harbor; for if he were anchored in Santiago Bay, and just took the trouble to send out his destroyers, why, we should be most uneasy."

This, indeed, was the argument used by many. If Cervera—who was known to have three British-built destroyers with him—were really in Santiago, why, then, did he lie hidden and skulking in there? Why did he not take advantage of his strong position, and of the uncertainty covering his whereabouts, to steal out at night and fall upon the American ships which patrolled the open sea? A bold man with such possibilities before him, and with such obvious advantages, might well do much for the country he served, and wreak havoc in the ranks of the enemy's fleet. What did it mean to one acquainted with the noble profession of a sailor? Risk? Yes, certainly; but imagine what glory and what honor if success were to crown his efforts! Choosing some densely dark night, and with all lights carefully dowsed, the commander of one of those low, rakish-looking destroyers might easily run from the harbor, dash amongst the enemy, and discharge torpedoes right and left. What if the bag were only one proud ship each night? It would still be a fine result, and the loss of confidence amongst the Americans, even with their iron nerves, would be an advantage to the Spaniards in future conflicts, for nothing tells upon the fighting qualities of a force, whether on land or at sea, like constant harassing tactics, and fear of attack which comes only when it is least suspected, and so suddenly as to make retaliation impossible.

In spite of all the possibilities, there was not so much as a move from the harbor, and even when a transport, laden with coal, was held up just outside and within shot of the batteries on Morro Castle, there was no sign of help, and no destroyers ran out to attack the American ships.

And yet, incredible though it may seem, Cervera had reached Santiago as early as May the 18th, though it was not till the end of the month, when Admiral Schley and his consorts made a reconnaissance in force, that it was definitely decided that the long-lost fleet was there. Day after day he had been lying hidden behind the promontory, with steam always up, and yet undecided how to act, and never venturing to leave the harbor. Truly a policy that was scarcely likely to win honor and possessions for his country!

It was a day of excitement and high hope when at last Cervera's whereabouts was known to the American fleet.

"George! But now it will be a game!" exclaimed Lieutenant Billing in delight. "Marchant, there'll be a chance for you yet. Wait till we've whopped this fellow to pieces, and then you shall go ashore."

"But how will you whop him?" asked Hal. "You have him safely in the harbor, I'll allow; but to reach him is another matter."

"That it is, and I ought not to have talked about knocking him to pieces. But I meant this. There he is, and there he'll stay. Do you follow? We're goin' to put a cork in the bottle."

"A cork? But how?"

"Like this," the lieutenant explained. "Santiago, as you must know mighty well, has got a long, narrow channel leadin' to the sea. Well, the water is not extraordinarily deep, and I reckon that a ship sunk sheer across the opening would act as a bung. We can't get in, as you've mentioned. It isn't exactly the

kind of job an admiral would fancy, for there are mines placed everywhere in the fair way, to say nothing of the guns linin' the sides."

"Yes, they've mines, I know," Hal interposed, with a smile, remembering his own experience.

"So you do, young fellow. I was forgettin'. Well, we don't take kindly to the notion of walking straight in, so, if the gate is shut tight, it won't matter at all to us. But to the Don it will. He'd be just like a fly in a bottle, and he'd be as much ours as if he sailed out right away, and got knocked to pieces with our shells."

"Yes, I can see that," Hal agreed. "Once he allows himself to be shut in, he will be out of the game altogether. He will be harmless to you, and a dead loss to his own side. In fact, the Spanish fleet will cease to exist."

"Put very nicely, and that is the case," the lieutenant answered. "But now, about this bung. Lieutenant Hobson will put it in position. He's a kind of specialist in naval construction, and this bottlin' game is his plan from the very beginnin'. I can tell you that he's a very fine fellow."

"Why, it will be a most risky undertaking!" exclaimed Hal. "To block the opening efficiently, the ship will have to be sunk close under the batteries. It will mean certain death for all."

"Well, it may," was the answer. "It is frightfully risky, I'll allow; but it is not certain death. You see, the darkest night will be chosen, and every man will be wearin' a life-belt, and will have a raft close handy to swim to. Supposin' the guns do go off, the chances are that no one will be hit. But those torpedoes will be precious nasty, I'll agree. They'll kill if anything does. Yes, now that I come to look into the matter more closely, I'm inclined to fall in with you, young Marchant. It is bound to be very risky; but then, Hobson is a fine, gallant fellow!"

He spoke in tones of the utmost pride, and well he might, for the officer to whom he referred, though only twenty-eight years of age, had already attained to no mean reputation in his profession. And who but a bold and resolute man could have volunteered for such an undertaking as that proposed? Surely no weakling could expect to carry it out, while for a coward to attempt to take part in it, and, more than all, to lead what was no better than a forlorn hope, was ridiculous, and utterly out of the question.

Lieutenant Hobson had a fine spirit, and a glance at his face was sufficient to show the class of man he was. "I leave myself without anxiety in the hands of Almighty God," he wrote, when setting out for the war, and he entered upon this hazardous and all-important enterprise in the same condition of tranquil and absolutely fearless confidence.

"Yes, he must be a plucky beggar," Hal agreed. "I wonder whether—er—er—er——" He became suddenly silent and thoughtful.

"Well, what is it?" the lieutenant exclaimed.

"I was wondering whether I could go with Hobson," Hal said quietly. "You see, it would be doing something for the cause, and for my bread and butter, and it would give me the opportunity for which I have been longing, and enable me to reach the island."

"Yes, and of bein' shot," the lieutenant answered sharply. "Say, Marchant, don't you do somethin' that's mighty silly. All the volunteers that go with Hobson will be made prisoners as sure as eggs. They'll run a chance of bein' shot as well. Now, if you were captured with them, that rascal of a sweep—

what's his name? d'Ar—d'Arousta; yes, that's the fellow—would spot you at once, and then—click! It would be all up with Mister Marchant, I reckon."

"It might," Hal replied thoughtfully; "but I'll take my chance. Will you help me to join as one of the volunteers?"

"Why, man alive, you're just askin' too much," the lieutenant answered hotly. "When volunteers were called for, how many do you think stepped out? Every mother's son aboard the whole combined fleet! Every one of them, I tell you, and a precious fine hullabaloo they're kicking up too, now that the matter is settled. You see, only seven boys are wanted, so there's that same number walking about just now as proud as peacocks. And there's hundreds more, officers and men, who are sayin' all that's black, and grumbling atrociously. Seven is the number, young Marchant, and you'd better remember it."

"I will, and I'll be the eighth," said Hal in the same quiet voice. "Look here, Billing, I'm very anxious to get ashore. Will you, like a good fellow, contrive to get me included in the expedition?"

"I'll try, and I can't say more than that," was the answer, given with obvious reluctance and hesitation. "Tell you what it is, Marchant. For one of your country, you're one of the best fellows I know. I've taken a fancy to you, and now you've the cheek to ask me to help to get you killed! That is playing the wrong game."

"Nonsense! It is not so bad as that," Hal replied, with a smile. "All I ask is that you will help to get me aboard Hobson's ship. I'll manage the rest."

"Well, I'll see." The lieutenant nodded and walked away, leaving Hal sunk in a brown study.

"It seems a chance," he said thoughtfully—"a chance in a hundred. Every day out here I get more anxious about the hacienda, about the safety of Mr. Brindle and Dora. I've promised to fight with the Americans, and no doubt I shall have to run many risks. This is a big one, but not greater than that which I took when escaping from the island. In that case, my knowledge of Santiago helped me to get away safely, and I see no reason why it should not aid me in reaching the land and stealing into the forest without being observed. They say that every foot of the coast is watched, but it is more likely that all eyes will be fixed in the direction of the harbor entrance, where the ship is being sunk; so that a single individual might easily evade the sentries. Yes, I know the harbor, and will willingly take the risk. The job now is to make arrangements to go, and if the worst happens, and I am refused permission, I will slip overboard and swim to the vessel selected as the bung, and climb aboard her as best I can."

That an attempt to close the entrance to the harbor of Santiago was about to be made was already public property in the American fleet, and everyone watched the preparations for the event with the greatest interest. Lieutenant Hobson, with a large force of men, was busily engaged upon a big tramp collier, the MERRIMAC, which was destined to be sunk across the entrance. For this purpose, a row of ten miniature torpedoes was fitted along the port-side of the steamer. They were each loaded with eighty-two pounds of gunpowder, and were connected by means of wires with a battery placed on the bridge. Pressure upon a simple button would fire them, and, it was hoped, would blow such a hole in the vessel's side that she would sink immediately.

Then their duties were carefully assigned to the seven men. Two were told off for the engine-room, and the remainder were to be on deck. At the critical moment steam was to be turned off, and the fore and after anchors cut away

from their lashings and dropped. Then the sea-cocks were to be opened wide, and the wheel lashed. By that time all but one would have dived overboard, and would have swum to the dinghy, which was to be towed behind the ship, and would contain life-belts and rifles.

And then would come the final act. Hobson, the last upon the ship, would press the button and explode the torpedoes, and follow his men into the water. All were to be dressed in underclothes only, with revolvers and ammunition strapped round their waists in waterproof belts.

"It's the finest thing that was ever thought of," said Lieutenant Billing enthusiastically, a few hours before the attempt was to be made. "If it does not succeed—and I tell you that that's likely—it will deserve to be remembered. I guess that the Dons will concentrate every gun on the Merrimac, and though it will be dark at the time, their searchlight will help the shootin'. So every one of the boys will have to run the chance of being shot. Are you still anxious to go?"

"I am," Hal answered, with determination. "I have thought the matter over, and have fully made up my mind to risk it. If Hobson and his men undertake it cheerfully, why should not I?"

"That just depends on the stakes," the lieutenant replied with a sly smile. "You see, our boys will be doin' somethin' for their country. They will be patriots, you understand. Now, with you it's different. You are wantin' to get ashore to see how your friends are doin'. I suppose they are particular friends. Anyway, the attraction must be very strong."

"It is," Hal murmured. "But what have you arranged?"

"Just this. I'm sure to go aboard the MERRIMAC with orders before the evenin' is done. I'll take you along too, and when you are there you must just manage for yourself, and, whatever happens, Hobson must never know."

"He shall not," Hal answered readily. "I'll hide away, and when we reach the channel, I will swim for land, leaving the others to make for the dinghy."

"Well, I hope it'll come out as rosy as that," the lieutenant replied. "Now, you get right down into my cabin; you'll find two bundles there, tied to a belt. One's a revolver and cartridges; the other is food. You'll want both. No more now, young fellow. I am not going to have any thanks for helping you to get killed. Here's good luck to you."

He shook Hal heartily by the hand, and then hurried away. As for the latter, he at once followed the instruction given him, and then, carrying the two parcels, went to his own cabin.

"I'll make all ready for a swim," he murmured, turning the contents of a drawer on to the carpet.

There were some thin cotton suits, and he at once selected a coat and the lightest pair of trousers, tearing these across at the knees, so as to make them like football knickers. Then he threw off his outer clothes, and having donned the ones he had just selected, put on his own suit over them. A minute later he was ready, the belt attached to his waist and out of sight, and the parcel of food beneath his coat.

Just as dusk was falling, a marine came to call him, and on ascending to the deck he found the lieutenant waiting. They at once went over the side into a cutter, and were rowed across to the MERRIMAC.

"There she is," whispered Lieutenant Billing, as her enormous hull hove in sight. "Good luck, Marchant! Just you slip aboard after me, and look round for yourself. So long to you."

"Right; I know what to do. Good-by, and thank you very much."

Hal stretched out his hand, and gripping the lieutenant's, pressed it warmly. Then he clambered up the swaying rope ladder on to the deck. By this time night had fallen, and as it was necessary to have no lights burning, the ship was in darkness from stem to stern. Hal at once crossed the deck, and, feeling his way along the engine skylights, came to a wide, open companion way. He slipped down the stairs, and at once found himself in a small saloon. Then his fingers touched a handle, and, turning it, he entered a small cabin, through the unshaded porthole of which he caught a glimpse of distant lights, twinkling faintly from the ships of Admiral Sampson's squadron.

"This will do for me," he murmured in tones of satisfaction. "I'll lie here till the hour for action arrives."

He sat down and kept a watch out to sea. Occasionally he heard footsteps overhead, and once the low murmur of voices, evidently from men lying alongside in a boat. But soon all was quiet, save for a low grating sound which now and again reached his ear, and told him that the stokers were at work. Hour succeeded hour, and still he remained in the cabin, though he was becoming more and more restless and troubled, for the MERRIMAC did not move. At last, when midnight was past, her anchor was hove up, and she steamed away for Santiago, her departure having been delayed, as all was not ready for the enterprise at the appointed time.

Hal at once sprang to his feet, and, having seen that his revolver was well secured, and the parcel of food tied to his belt, he pulled off his outer clothes and stood up in the thin cotton ones which he had selected. But, after all, he was to be disappointed, for suddenly there was the panting of machinery, and a low black hull rushed past, leaving a trail of fiery sparks behind it.

"MERRIMAC, ahoy!" someone hailed. "Admiral's orders that you put about at once and drop anchor over the old moorings. The dawn will break within an hour."

The torpedo boat at once sheered off, and as he watched from his porthole, Hal saw her swing round with a rush that sent her swaying and dipping into the oily sea.

"Off till to-morrow," he murmured. "Very well, it is disappointing; but I must make the best of it, and as I am here in a comfortable cabin, why, I shall stay here. I have grub with me, and there are blankets on the bunk. I'll just see what can be done with the door."

He fumbled at the handle, and discovered a key and a latch, which he fastened. Then he lay down on the settee, and covered himself with a rug. A few moments later he was asleep, worn out by the excitement of anticipation, and by the long vigil which he had kept.

When he awoke, the sun was going down, and another day was almost gone.

"Now for it!" he exclaimed. "I'll just indulge in a meal, and will then prepare for a swim."

He undid the parcel, ate heartily of biscuit and meat, and, after carefully reconnoitering, popped into the saloon, and obtained a drink from a small filter. Then he locked himself in the cabin again, and packed up the remains of the food. A few hours later the moorings were quietly dropped, and in trying silence the MERRIMAC steamed away for Santiago upon as adventurous an expedition as was ever contemplated.

Chapter XIX

Fortune Favors the Brave.

Well might it be said that the good wishes and anxious thoughts of hundreds followed the gallant Hobson and the meager crew of the Merrimac as she steamed towards Santiago. High hope of success, apprehension increased by the darkness and uncertainty as to her whereabouts, kept everyone in a fever. No one could sleep, and from the open ports, and from the silent and darkened decks of battleships, cruisers, and gunboats, a thousand and more pairs of anxious eyes stared into the gloom.

"Where was she? Had she run aground? Had she lost her bearings in the darkness? Hush! Did anyone hear that? What was it then? Oh, only escaping steam? What a relief to think of it!"

The questions were passed along the decks, time and again, and for the most part left unanswered. Then, as each man became silent in despair of hearing anything, a faint, almost inaudible hail came across the heaving water.

"Hark! Huss-s-s-h! Did anyone hear that? What was it? Discovery?"

Almost instantly a spout of flame shot from a cliff beneath the Morro Castle, cutting the darkness in twain as with an arrow, while a deafening report set the air throbbing and reverberating. Another followed, and then a third, and within a few seconds a line of flaming dots cut along the dark hillside, while shells flashed brilliantly red in the air as they shivered into a thousand pieces. Nor was this all. The torpedo-boat PLUTON was patrolling the entrance, and at once added the sharp, angry snap of her quick-firers to the din, while guns from another battery ashore, and from the REINA MERCEDES, a battleship anchored within the harbor, played upon the black hull of the devoted MERRIMAC. Add to this a couple of torpedoes, which were discharged in her direction, and some idea can be obtained of the terrors that assailed her.

Meanwhile Hal had been by no means idle. No sooner had the moorings been dropped, than he opened the cabin door and went into the saloon.

"I'll just stay here till I think we're getting close inshore," he murmured; "then I'll get on deck. Let me think. The small torpedoes are placed to port; that means that I must get away to starboard to escape the explosion. Hobson stays on board for that, and so shall I. When she begins to sink, I shall go overboard, and swim straight for the shore. By Jove! I forgot a life-belt, but perhaps there's one in the cabin."

He ran back, and felt above his head for the racks upon which the belts are usually placed. A low cry of pleasure escaped his lips, for the very thing he wanted was there. Taking it down, he promptly slipped his arms through the slings and quickly buckled the belt on. Then he crept to the companion-way, and sat down upon the bottom step of the ladder, where he waited for what, in his overstrung condition, seemed to be hours.

Bang! The report made him start to his feet, and stand there holding to the rail, while the thump of his heart seemed to shake him from head to foot.

Bang, bang, bang! Crash! The MERRIMAC shivered as a six-inch shell struck her true in the center, and piercing her thin plates as if they were sheets of

tissue paper, exploded forward of the engines, blowing a big gaping hole through the saloon in which Hal sat.

"Another such as that, and I shall get caught down here," he thought. "If I am to be hit, it will be better to receive the wound on deck, for then, when she sinks, I may have a chance, and not be drowned like a rat in a cage."

He felt his way up the ladder, and crawled silently across the deck to the starboard side, where he crouched close to the bulwarks. Above him the bridge appeared dimly, and behind that a circle of sparks flew into the air from the funnel. There, too, standing upon the frail support, was the hero of the hour—Lieutenant Hobson, the gallant officer who had devised the scheme, and begged, not in vain, to carry it out.

More than once, as the guns on the hillside flashed, Hal saw his figure silhouetted clearly against the light. He stepped from the side to the center of the bridge, and, placing his hands to his mouth, so that his voice should not be drowned by the din and uproar, shouted some order in stentorian tones to the man who was stationed at the wheel. Then Hal heard the tiller-chains rattling, and for an instant in the light of a brilliant flash, which had darted suddenly from the battery stationed on the frowning heights of Morro Castle, caught sight of the steersman bending to his work, and putting all his power into the spokes. But the MERRIMAC kept steadily on, failing to answer to her rudder, which had been smashed to pieces by a shell. At the same moment steam was turned off, and the two men who had been stationed in the engine-room hastily quitted it, and tumbled up on deck as fast as their legs would carry them.

"It's getting nearly time for the torpedoes," Hal murmured, "for I judge that we must now be approaching the entrance of Santiago harbor. Ah! what was that?"

Two loud splashes reached his ear, coming from fore and aft, and a moment's reflection told him that the anchors had been let go. But the Americans were not to have it all their own way, for ill luck again followed the MERRIMAC. A shell, unfortunate for them, but lucky for the Spaniards had crashed into her stern at a most critical moment, and had smashed her rudder into splinters; and now, when that defect might have been remedied by anchoring fore and aft, and afterwards floating her down to the entrance to Santiago, the anchors, in whose powers Lieutenant Hobson's hopes were centered, failed to grip the bed of the ocean, and in consequence the long black hull forged slowly on through the water till it took the ground near Estrella Point. As it did so, there was a series of loud and deafening reports as her intrepid commander pressed the button and exploded his row of miniature torpedoes.

"That will finish her!" thought Hal. "I'll wait till she sinks lower, and then I'll dive overboard. My best plan will be to swim away from her as far as possible, though there will be no great danger of being carried under as far as I can see, for the water here is very shallow, and will scarcely cover her upper works when the keel is resting upon the bottom. I'll just creep to the bows, so as to make it as short a swim as possible."

He rose to his feet and stole forward. But, unfortunately for Hal, a strong tide was running, and floating the sinking MERRIMAC free of the land, it swept her into deep water. An instant later, a Whitehead torpedo, discharged by the REINA MERCEDES, which lay within the harbor, rushed seething through the water at more than thirty knots an hour, and struck the hull right forward almost directly beneath Hal's feet. There was a terrific concussion, and a

blinding sheet of flame seemed to envelop the MERRIMAC. A column of water started high into the air, while Hal was hurled overboard as if from the arms of a Hercules. Indeed, so great was the shock that he lost consciousness, and might very well have been drowned in that condition. However, the cold water surging about him brought him to his senses almost instantly. Then the instinct of self-preservation asserted itself, and, without exactly knowing why, he commenced to strike out lustily, swimming away from the shore, for he was almost too dazed to know what he was doing.

Suddenly the clatter of quick-firers behind attracted his attention, and, turning, he began to forge a way towards the shore. And now he had cause to congratulate himself upon the fact that he had donned a life-belt, for the shock of the torpedo explosion had sadly deprived him of his strength. Indeed, but for the support he received, he would have sunk there and then, and the name of Hal Marchant would have disappeared from this narrative. He was not, however, the sort of lad to give in without a struggle, so, clenching his teeth, he turned on his side, and struck out with all his power. Something touched his hand—something slimy and covered with weed—which he grasped with thankfulness. Then, having rested for a moment, he dragged himself on to a mass of rock, which jutted into the sea, and seated himself upon it, his head still throbbing painfully, while his brain was dizzy and overcome by the crash of the explosion.

"This won't do," he said at last. "Dawn will be breaking before very long, and it is quite time that I looked for a hiding-place. On the appearance of the first ray of light I should at once be discovered if I were still seated here. Besides, I must not forget that, once the interest in the MERRIMAC is gone, the sentries whose attention is attracted just now to the entrance of the harbor will become more vigilant in watching for the possible landing of enemies upon the particular part of the coast intrusted to each man's care."

He rose from his seat with an effort, for he was feeling thoroughly done up. Then he groped his way across the rough surface of the rock, and, having waded through a deep pool, was in the act of climbing on to dry ground, when someone pounced upon him with a guttural exclamation of delight, and he found himself in the arms of a Spanish sentinel.

"Halt! cease from struggling, or I will kill you!" the man cried, clutching him by the shoulder and endeavoring to place his bayonet against Hal's breast.

The point pierced the thin clothing he was wearing, and dug slightly into the flesh beneath.

"Halt, I say!" the sentry hissed. "The weapon points to your heart, and, by St. James, I will thrust it home if you do but move an inch! Surrender, I say!"

"Never!" Hal answered hoarsely. Then, shaking the sentry's hand off, and pushing his weapon aside with a hasty movement, he stepped back a pace, and struck out blindly with all his might. His fist hit the Spaniard full on the chest, and sent him staggering backwards, and his rifle crashing to the ground. But he recovered himself in a moment, and threw himself upon his prisoner with an exclamation of fury.

"Pig! Villain!" he cried. "Yield, or I will toss you into the water, and drown you like a rat."

Clasped in each other's arms, they swayed from side to side upon the rocks which fringe the margin of the sea. Then Hal's foot twisted upon a stone, and both fell to the ground with a crash.

What followed was a blank to Hal. He remembered nothing, and lay upon the seashore silent and apparently lifeless for the space of more than ten minutes. Then a puff of cold air fanned his cheek, and he suddenly found himself lying with his eyes wide open, staring at the stars above.

"Hillo! What's this?" he murmured vacantly. "Stars! A clear sky! Where is the cabin, then? Where is Billing?"

He stretched out a hand, and touched something that was wet. Then his fingers came in contact with a head of hair, and he withdrew them instantly, with an involuntary shudder. At once the struggle with the sentry flashed across his wandering mind, and brought him to his senses with a start.

"By Jove! I wonder whether he's hurt?" he said. "I'll see, and then cut away for safety, for it will never do to remain here."

He stretched out his hand again, and having discovered the sentry's arm, placed the tips of his fingers on the wrist. But there was no movement of the pulse, though he longed to feel it. Struggling into a sitting position, he shuffled closer to the man, and listened to hear if he were breathing. But there was not a sound; not even a sigh rewarded his attention.

"Poor beggar! Dead!" he exclaimed. "Well, it is the fortune of war, for it was my life or his. I suppose he struck his head in falling."

This was, in fact, the case, and to it Hal no doubt owed his life. But he had no time to sit there and think. Dawn was dangerously near, and if he was to reach a safe haven, he must be moving at once.

"Ah, I've got it!" he exclaimed suddenly. "I'll change into his clothes."

He started to his feet, and going to where the body lay, undid the buttons, and tore tunic and trousers off. The boots and socks followed, and were rapidly transferred to his own person. Then he picked up the rifle, and prepared to move away.

"Supposing his comrades come in the morning and find him?" he suddenly asked himself. "They will suspect that someone has landed, and borrowed his clothes. I must tumble him into the water."

He bent over the limp figure of the unfortunate sentry once more, and carefully felt for a heart-beat. But there was none, and it was evident that the man was dead.

"It's not nice, I know," Hal murmured. "But it's for my safety, and therefore must be done. He won't be any the worse off, poor fellow!"

It was indeed a trying act for any young man to carry out, and it was not without a fierce struggle that Hal at length overcame his compunction. War was war, he told himself, and this kind of thing was bound to happen. He must put aside all feelings of compassion and act like a man.

The thought braced his nerves, and dropping the rifle for a moment, he stooped, lifted the lifeless form in his arms, and tossed it into the sea.

Then the necessity for instant action asserted itself, and picking up the rifle, he turned inland, and struck boldly for the town, leaving the MERRIMAC sunk deep at one side of the channel leading to the harbor of Santiago.

Up and up the steep rocks he toiled, till he came to a deep gully, down which a tiny watercourse tumbled towards the sea. He could feel shrubs on either side, and thick grass beneath his feet. Then, as if fortune had determined to follow him, the sky in the east commenced rapidly to lighten, and so enabled him to see his whereabouts.

"There is a thick mist, which will lie on the land till the sun is up," he said with satisfaction. "That will give me time to hit upon a likely spot. Ah! what is this? This should suit me."

He suddenly espied a hollow in the midst of a mass of volcanic rock. It was carpeted with grass, and was overhung by a few big-leaved rock palms and ferns, all dripping with moisture. It was an ideal hiding-place, and he promptly crept into it and sat down, hugging himself in his borrowed tunic, for the morning air was bitterly cold.

A little later the sun came up in all his glory, and, topping the boulders on either side, poured a flood of grateful heat upon him, warming him, and drying the leaves and grass.

Hal removed his wide-brimmed hat from his head, and cautiously looked out towards the mouth of the harbor.

"Ah! there is the MERRIMAC," he exclaimed, seeing the top of a mast projecting. "Bad luck! it's in deep water on one side, so that the entrance is not closed. Cervera will be able to come out, after all. But it was a plucky attempt, and I only hope that Hobson and his men have got safely away. Hillo! there's the raft, and I can see men clinging to it."

This was the case, for the explosion had swept the crew overboard, to find that their dinghy had been smashed by a shell. But a long, raft-like float had been prepared, and to this all swam. Even as Hal caught sight of them, a steam-launch flying Spanish colors ran out from behind the headland of cliffs, and steered towards them.

"Prisoners at any rate," remarked Hal. "That is better than being drowned, and I've no doubt that the Dons will treat them well, and admire them for their bravery; for it was a plucky thing to do."

Hobson and his men were, in fact, received in a most friendly manner. Admiral Cervera was himself on board the launch, and greeted the prisoners in the most courteous way. Then they were taken back to the harbor and placed upon the Mercedes, where the best of treatment was accorded them, Hobson being taken to the first lieutenant's cabin, while the men were sent to the quarters for'ard, where they were regaled with biscuit and coffee, with Spanish cigarettes to follow.

So highly did Cervera think of their bravery that he promptly sent an officer out to Admiral Sampson to acquaint him of their safety.

Hal watched the launch take the eight men on board, and then turned his eyes inland.

High above him, and standing far back, was a battery with open embrasures. It was partly masked in low bush, which extended down to the gully in which he was lying.

"If I wait till night and follow the stream, it will take me to the left of the fort," he said, rising to his knees, and looking between the leaves of the palm trees. "From there I will strike into the bush, and follow its edge till I get behind Santiago. Then away for the hacienda."

He lay back in his hiding-place, and, feeling secure from discovery, opened his packet of food, and ate a hearty meal. A draught from the stream appeased his thirst, which was great after the salt water he had swallowed. Then he lay down, and, worn out by his exertions, fell asleep. He awoke some hours later, when it was getting dark.

"Now for it," he said. "I'm feeling as fresh as a daisy, and, after the trouble I have been put to, mean to reach the hacienda. If anyone tries to stop me, it will be the worse for him."

He jumped to his feet, and looked hastily to his rifle, to make sure that it was in good condition, and the bayonet fixed. Then he stole into the gully, and waded up stream. It twisted and curved, bearing steadily, however, to the left. At last, when Hal judged that he was beyond the fort he stepped on to the bank, and struck off into the bush.

"Now I'll go for the mules," he said, suddenly recollecting that when he and Gerald left the hacienda on their way to Florida for the purpose of fetching more negroes, they had placed their animals in the hands of an aged native living on the outskirts of the town. "The fellow we left them with is sure to have taken good care of them; and if only the Spaniards have not relieved him of his charge, I shall be able to get a mount, and so reach the hacienda long before the dawn breaks."

An hour later he was at the tumble-down cottage in which the native lived, and, having roused him, quickly got him to understand that he required the mules. A few minutes sufficed to saddle them; then he mounted one, and, leading the other, set off towards Eldorado at a brisk canter.

"Halt dar! Who am dat? I fire if you come one step nearer!" a voice suddenly cried out as he rode through the dense plantation of sugar-cane which surrounded the hacienda.

"Don't shoot, boys! I'm Hal Marchant. I'm dressed in Spanish uniform," Hal shouted in reply.

Then he heard a conversation being carried on in low tones, and a moment or two later someone struck a match and advanced with it between his fingers. The tiny, fluttering flame showed the burly figure of a negro, clad in plantation clothes, and bearing a rifle slung over his shoulders.

"Come forward if you de boss," the man cried, "Seems I know de voice."

"Of course you do, Jake," Hal answered, slipping from the mule and stepping up to the man, who was now closely followed by others. "Look at me carefully. Though I am disguised, you who knew me before will have no difficulty in recognizing the overseer."

There were at once shrill cries of delight from the negroes, and they ran towards him with outstretched hands.

"Sure you am de boss right 'nough," Jake cried, for it was he who was in advance of the others. "Oh, won't de missie be glad! Quick, sar; you come right 'long up to de hacienda, and not wait one little moment. All say ebery day, 'Where am de boss Hal and de young master? Am dey killed by de Spanish dog? Oh, where am dey, Jake?'—Jake him not know. No boy know, and eberyone go 'bout wid sad heart, and tink dat José dog get hold ob de masters and shoot. Tink never see 'em more. All de boys plenty sad, sar, and de missie an' de boss more dan all. Come quick, sar; eberyone be plenty glad."

The good fellow held out his hand, and clasped Hal's with a fervor which showed how genuine his feelings were, while the flickering and uncertain light cast by a second match which one of the negroes struck at the moment showed tears in Jake's eyes, for he was very fond of Hal.

"Yes, I dare say that all will be glad," Hal answered gayly, "especially when the news I bring of the young master is so good. But there, trot along, Jake; I'm in a hurry to reach Eldorado."

"Quiet there, my men! What is this sudden commotion? Who is that standing there with the mules?"

It was Mr. Brindle's voice which came through the darkness, and Hal at once shouted to him.

"It's Hal Marchant," he cried. "I'm just returning, and Gerald is well, and in Florida at this very moment."

"What? Hal again! Where on earth have you been? What has happened to you both since you left us? Come into the hacienda at once. My dear, dear lad, how rejoiced I am to see you again!"

Mr. Brindle rushed forward and shook Hal eagerly by the hand, till his arm positively ached.

"What does this mean?" he asked, noticing the Spanish uniform. "Dressed as one of the enemy! But not one, really, I am open to wager all that I possess. Come in, though. You can tell the tale when we are seated."

They hurried to the hacienda, and were just stepping upon the veranda, and were close beneath a lamp which threw all its light upon them, when Dora ran out, having been disturbed by sounds in the plantation. Instantly her eyes fell upon Hal; she stopped abruptly, brushed her hand across her forehead, as if uncertain of the reality of what she saw, and then staggered towards him with a low, quavering cry upon her lips.

"Hal—Hal Marchant back to life again!" she murmured doubtfully.

"Yes, the same, safe and sound, too, and come back home again," said our hero, advancing boldly and taking her by both hands. "Are you glad to see me Dora?"

It was a question that might well have been left unasked, for the truth was clearly to be seen in her upturned face, which was flooded with the light from the lamp, and showed eyes sparkling with joy, and overflowing with tears of thankfulness, while her lips trembled with emotion as she endeavored to speak to him. Poor Dora could not steady herself to do more than whisper his name, but she did that which was far better, and went a long way to make amends; for, like the brave, simple-hearted girl she was, she straightway stood on tiptoe, and, placing a hand on either shoulder, kissed Hal on the cheek.

"There," she said at last, with a return to her old playful mood, "you may see for yourself, sir, whether or not I am pleased and glad at your home coming. Glad! I am overjoyed! A weight is lifted from my heart, for now I know that you are safe, and a glance at your face is sufficient to tell me that Gerald, too, is well."

"Yes; he was wounded, but is recovering fast," Hal answered, still in some confusion after his hearty welcome, and the honest way in which Dora had shown it. "No wonder that you have been upset at our long absence, and at receiving no news. We have had many adventures, and as I can see that you are both longing to hear all about them, I'll run through them right away.

"Let me see; we had scarcely left the hacienda, when we were arrested as spies in Santiago. Things then were bad enough, for we offered resistance, and, I am sorry to say, damaged the face of the officer who was foolish enough to attempt to arrest us. We were captured after a chase, and then José d'Arousta turned up like a bad penny, and made the aspect of affairs infinitely worse. We were found to be carrying arms; and, in short, with that fellow's evidence against us, we were convicted of spying, and were sent to the Morro Castle with the pleasant prospect of an early breakfast, a short walk, and then death at the

hands of a file of soldiers. I need not tell you that we managed to get the better of our captors, and escaped from our prison during the night. A launch happened to be in the harbor, and we promptly steamed out to sea in her. Since that we have been with the American fleet. There, you have it all, I fancy."

"Escaped! Slipped out to sea in a launch! Why, a prisoner in the Morro Castle is deemed as secure as bullion in the strong rooms of the Bank of England! And you two lads managed it? Splendid! Just what we might have expected. Now I can understand the noise and excitement that occurred in Santiago on the night of your arrival there. But tell us how it is that you have been so long away."

Mr. Brindle rattled off his remarks and his questions in a manner that was most confusing, and Hal at once prepared to give a full account of his adventures.

"Come," said Dora, with a smile, "Hal is thirsty, and, no doubt, hungry too. Let us take him in and give him something to eat and drink. Then perhaps he will be good enough to satisfy our curiosity."

"That I will!" Hal exclaimed. "I can tell you that I am as hungry as a hunter or as fifty hunters, for the matter of that, for I have not tasted more than a bite since I swam from the sinking Merrimac twenty hours ago."

Chapter XX

The Invasion of Cuba.

"And so you were aboard the MERRIMAC, and were one of that extraordinarily gallant crew?" said Mr. Brindle, when Hal had at length told all that had befallen himself and Gerald since they left the hacienda to fetch more help from Florida. "Indeed, my lad, it seems to me that you have seen more adventures and more of this war, short though it has been, than anyone else taking a part in it. One thing strikes me forcibly, and that is your determination to return to the hacienda in spite of all difficulties. What made you undertake the task? Consider the frightful risks you ran, for now that you have time to look into the matter, and judge of the dangers that menaced you, you cannot but admit that your life would have paid for it had you been captured. There is not a man in Santiago who would not give you over to the authorities if he happened to recognize you; while, had the military but laid hands upon you, your fate would have been sealed, for they have a score to pay off, and would take good care that you did not outwit them as before."

"I don't know that the danger was so very great," Hal answered quietly. "You see, Mr. Brindle, you have been like a father to me since I lost my own. You gave me a home and employment when I was an outcast and in want, and I should have been an ungrateful cur if I had not endeavored to return your kindness in some way. You sent me on a mission to obtain negroes to defend the plantation, and when I left you, you were in what one would call a very sorry plight. Unfortunately, I happened to fall in with that fellow José d'Arousta, who we all know bears the hacienda and its owners little love. I failed entirely to carry out your wishes, and have naturally been anxious to know how you were doing without the help which you so sorely needed. Once we had

given the slip to the Spaniards, I felt certain that they, led by that fellow I mentioned, would do all in their power to discover us, and one of their first actions would certainly be a visit to Eldorado. The consequences might well have been serious, and, as a matter of fact, I have imagined that all sorts of evil things had happened. That is the reason why I have worked hard to get here, for I felt that I must settle the question. As to the risk, well, I admit that it was great, but it is past now, and I can afford to laugh at the adventure. Now, as to why I failed to bring negroes when I sailed to Florida with Gerald. No one, not even the President of the United States, could have chartered a boat to bring them here, for transport is at a premium; and, moreover, the Spaniards watch every foot of the shore. You heard how one poor fellow spotted me in the darkness; what chance, then, had I of landing with a batch of negroes?"

"Not the smallest, my lad. There is no need for an explanation as to why you did not carry out your mission, for we all know by now that what Hal Marchant sets himself to do he does, if it is possible, in spite of all dangers and difficulties. As a matter of fact, I recognized that your hopes were doomed a few days after you had ridden away. And now let me tell you how we have fared. When you awake to-morrow, and go out on to the veranda, you will find that a great change has taken place about the hacienda; for the beautiful Eldorado, of which we were so proud, is now little better than a fort. Bags, in which tobacco leaves are usually kept, have been filled with earth, and arranged outside the walls and in front of every window. A double row protects the top of the veranda, and, better than all, a tall tower surmounts the roof, and looks down upon the clearing. Yes, we have been hard at work, I can assure you. To begin with, while some felled the trees at the edge of the clearing, a few, who could ill be spared, lay out in the forest and plantation, and scouted round to warn us of the approach of the enemy. The remainder worked—well, like the slaves they were once upon a time, or as their fathers and mothers were before them. It is incredible to me even now how they managed as they did; but, within a few days of your departure, our defenses were completed, and not a moment too soon, as I will tell you.

"Not a week had passed when the outposts, which I had stationed away in the forest, brought me word that a mounted party was approaching. I at once concentrated my meager force amongst the trees, and awaited developments. Then, as the strangers drew nearer, I sent forward a white flag and demanded their business, informing them at the same time that I was prepared to resist any violence.

"As you might expect, José d'Arousta was the leader of the gang, and he at once advanced to meet me, as unconcerned and as impudent as ever, and to all appearance careless of the consequences.

"I carry a warrant here for the arrest of your son, and of his accomplice, the Englishman, señor,' he said, in his suavest tones, not forgetting at the same moment to lift his hat with a flourish.

"Indeed,' I answered; 'and for what reason have you been intrusted with such a document?'

"Pshaw, señor, you cannot prevaricate with me,' he said disdainfully, and with an aggravating sneer for which I could have struck him. But I was careful to maintain a calm demeanor.

"Prevaricate!' I retorted. 'Surely José d'Arousta, the would-be thief, is scarcely the man to say that to me. Prevaricate indeed! I will have you know

that I do not stoop to telling an untruth, even though a regiment of Spaniards were at my door.'

"At that our old friend lost his temper, for my words touched him on the raw.

"You are telling an untruth,' he cried. 'You would have me believe that the two for whose arrest I hold a warrant are not here. They are spies, I tell you, and you are aware of it, for you must have sent them into Santiago. That is where they were captured, in the very heart of the town. Deliver them up to me, señor, or it will be the worse for you.'

"You may guess, my lad, that my heart leapt to my mouth at his words. You and Gerald captured! It was a shock to hear it. Next moment, however, I was comforted by the reflection that, if he now asked for you both to be handed over to him, you must have effected an escape.

"If they were indeed captured, Señor José d'Arousta can scarcely want them delivered into his keeping now,' I said quietly; 'and if he does, he should apply to his own countrymen. In any case, the lads are not spies.'

"Señor,' he replied hotly, evidently having lost all patience, 'I ask you again to hand them over. Where are they, I say?'

"And I answer, if you have lost them, find them for yourself. I will give you no help,' I rejoined, in the same calm tones.

"I will," he cried angrily; 'I will take them now, at this instant, from the hacienda, and then I will do as I promised, and set the place flaring about your ears.'

"Then you will do so at your peril,' I answered with an easy smile. 'Here are some of my men. See, they are armed, and will fight for me till I tell them to hold their hands. Now, draw back to your set of scoundrels, and do your utmost.'

"You shall suffer for this, señor,' he shouted. 'I will shoot every hand on the plantation, and then look to yourself and to the adorable señora. Those who attempt to hinder the servants of his Majesty King Alfonso of Spain must pay heavily for their temerity.'

"I bowed haughtily to that, while he withdrew to his men. Then the whole Spanish party put spurs to their animals, and came galloping towards the hacienda. We brought them to their senses at once with a volley, which emptied three of their saddles, sending the men crashing to the ground. A second, equally well aimed, dispersed them, and when they fled back to Santiago it was with their heads held less haughtily in the air. From that day to this I have seen nothing of the pleasant José, nor has the hacienda been attacked by any marauding Spaniards."

"I am very glad to hear it," said Hal, in tones of satisfaction. "Had I known it, I think that I should have waited longer before coming. But anxiety for your safety got the better of my fears. Then, too, I had intended to remain here in case you should need another rifle. But now, with your permission, I will leave the island again and join the Americans. I had no part in this quarrel between the two nations when I left the hacienda, though I admit that my sympathies were strongly inclined to the Yanks; however, my ideas are changed now. But for a lucky escape, Gerald and I should have fallen as spies before the rifles of a file of Spaniards. I seek no revenge for that, but it has made me throw in my lot with your countrymen. I have seen some fighting with them already, and now I hope to act as guide when they invade this part of the island."

"I cannot blame you for your resolution," Mr. Brindle answered. "Until this struggle is settled one way or the other, none of us can return to our usual employment; nor can we feel secure. I thank you, my lad, for all you have done, and particularly for the thought which prompted you to return to us in spite of such difficulties and dangers—dangers, by the way, which would have deterred many a man of more mature years. You find us very well able to look to ourselves, and you have relieved our anxiety as to your own and Gerald's safety. Go, therefore, as soon as you wish, and join the army of invasion. When the war is over, return to us, for here is your home, and here you may be sure of a real welcome."

He reached across the table, and shook Hal heartily by the hand, sending a cup clattering to the ground as he did so. There was no doubt that Hal's devotion had touched him deeply, and the same could also be said of Dora. To hide the tears which would come when she thought of all he had gone through, and of all the dangers he must yet encounter, she knelt on the carpet and commenced to pick up the pieces of broken china that lay scattered there; for Dora was, indeed, very fond of this fine young fellow, who had come into the lives of the hacienda folk in such a curious manner.

"I am glad you agree," said Hal, returning his employer's grip; "and now, as you throw no difficulty in the way, I will prepare to slip from the island again. Of course I shall have to leave when the American fleet is near, and, in any case, I must arrange to join the troops when they reach Cuba."

"Which will be shortly, I fancy," Mr. Brindle said, rising from his seat and going to a bookshelf. "Here are the chief American papers up to a few days ago. I do not pretend to know how they were landed, but I secured them through a native, who is in communication with one of the plantation hands. Evidently President McKinley and his government have been hard at work, for troops, consisting of regulars and volunteers, have been mustering and drilling everywhere. It is of course impossible to create an army in a day, even though you happen to have some thousands as a nucleus. Then, too, transport, engineering, supply, and doctoring are items which cannot be arranged rapidly. It takes weeks, sometimes months, to get these departments to work smoothly, a fact which has only dawned upon our generals and people, and is no small source of worry. Still, much has been done; for under General Miles, who is the Commander-in-chief, chaos has gradually developed into some form of order. Another seventy-five thousand volunteers have been called for to make up the deficiency caused by the necessity of sending troops to the Philippines. Now, I understand from these papers, Chickamauga and Tampa are overflowing with troops, while other camps in various parts of the States are in a similar condition. Transports lie at Key West ready to carry the boys across the sea, and in that vast country everyone is on the tiptoe of excitement at the thought of invasion at last, which no doubt will take place in this neighborhood. The arrival of Cervera's fleet has altered the sphere of action, which is unfortunate enough for Spain, for the bulk of her troops are at Havana, where enormous preparations to resist attack by land or sea have been made by Marshal Blanco. Santiago is even now in a state of famine, and if our troops land near, the town is sure to fall, and the Spanish colors give place to the Star-Spangled banner.

"Now I fancy that you have all the news. Fitzhugh Lee, a veteran of the civil war, is one of our generals, as also is Joseph Wheeler. Theodore Roosevelt has raised and equipped a cavalry regiment, which is likely to lead the Dons a

dance, for it is for the most part composed of cowboys. Astor, another patriotic millionaire, has supplied a battery of quick-firers, with men, horses, and equipment complete. Others have come forward with money, and last, but by no means least, American women have commenced to organize hospitals, so as to be ready for the reception of sick and wounded, of whom there must needs be many, particularly of the former, for it must be remembered that swamps are to be found everywhere in this country, and that fever, combined with hardship and exposure, is far more fatal to an invading army than are swarms of bullets and vast masses of the enemy."

This, indeed, is a wholesome truth that it would be well to remember always. An army sent into the field cannot prosper and give a good account of itself unless its more peaceful departments are in a state of perfection. For supposing the transport and supply fail, where would all the hungry men and horses obtain food? Grass can generally be had in abundance for the animals, but even grazing is often scarce. As for the men, they may by great good fortune pick up plenty to keep them going, but the chances are, especially if they have entered the enemy's country, that they will find little, and even then only after a long and fatiguing search, during which they may suffer heavy loss by the fire of the enemy. Therefore, the army which possesses an efficient supply department, following ever upon its heels, will be far more capable of success than an ill-fed force of men, who, after a long day in the field, must perforce wander away to find food. Of no less importance, too, is the medical department. Men who are exposed to hardship and rough work will almost inevitably fall ill, and who is to look after them, and those who are wounded in action, when they are helpless, if organized hospitals, each with an efficient staff, are not attached to the force? Men would die untended by the roadside, while the number of sick would increase by leaps and bounds till they hampered the army, and destroyed all hope of rapid movement, and therefore of success.

Mr. Brindle had given most of the news, and to bring the events of the war up to date it is necessary to add only a little. Fourteen thousand men, together with the new Astor Battery, were sent to San Francisco, and from there, owing to the lamentable want of transports, were conveyed in batches to the scene of operations in and about Manila, in the Philippines. This naturally caused delay, so that many weeks passed before active measures could be taken. This expedition was commanded by General Wesley Merritt.

And now a small but extremely important incident had upset all calculations. Cervera and his fleet had arrived at Santiago, and it was at once necessary that the town and harbor should be subdued, and the fleet destroyed. Admiral Sampson, who, after the MERRIMAC's adventurous voyage, had made several reconnaissances in force, declared that to rush the entrance was impossible. He called urgently for troops, and General Shafter was at once ordered to hold himself and twenty-six thousand men in readiness to sail from Key West.

Hal stayed at the hacienda for a week, and then he rode away for the coast, still disguised as a Spanish soldier.

Almost every night while at Eldorado he had heard the guns of the American fleet playing upon Santiago and its forts, the noise on two occasions, when the dynamite gunboat, named the Vesuvius, was in action, being prodigious. When he arrived on the seacoast, he at once hid in a big grove of palms.

"From here I ought to be able to get some idea of the movements of the fleet," he said, seating himself upon a rock, and lifting a pair of glasses to his eyes. "It seems as if a landing were intended."

He was not mistaken, for some cruisers were steaming slowly along the coast as if searching for an opening. Suddenly they turned shorewards, and their guns began to fire upon a small fort.

"Now is my chance," thought Hal. "By riding hard I ought to be there in time to join any landing-party that may be sent ashore. They have chosen Daiquiri."

He jumped into his saddle again and cantered off. An hour later he rode boldly down to the shore, to a point from which a small pier projected. A party of American marines had just landed, and Hal found himself at once a prisoner amongst friends.

"Why, who aer this? Come off that 'ere moke!" cried one of the marines, grasping his bridle. "You must be the durndest fool as ever wur, or perhaps you're what's wuss, and that's a cove what goes back on his pards."

"I am nothing of the sort," Hal answered, with a laugh. "I am British born, and American just now for choice. You would do me a great favor if you would drop the point of that bayonet, my friend."

"Wall, that kind er knocks me all ter pieces!" the marine answered, starting back in astonishment, while a roar of laughter burst from his comrades. "A Britisher, and no durned son of a Don after all! At any rate, hop off it right away, and come along slippy. You may be a pard, as yer say; but then yer mayn't. Ef it aer that sort er way, it'll be a case with yer."

He took Hal by the sleeve, and conducted him to the officer in charge of the party, where explanations were soon made and accepted.

"Where are you going now?" the officer asked. "I presume you've come here on purpose?"

"Yes; I wish to get aboard the flagship," Hal answered. "I was there before, and, in fact, only left a week ago, when I managed to get ashore."

"Ah, you did? Then come along right here, sir, and tell us how the Dons are doin'. Then, if you wish it, I'll send you aboard the admiral's ship. But if you'll take my advice, you'll remain with us. We're the advance landing-party."

"I will with pleasure," Hal replied; "and if you wish it, will act as guide."

"That would suit finely. Say, do you know Guantanamo, the port forty miles east of Santiago?"

"Yes; I have been there once. I rode from the hacienda to it, and followed forest paths all the way."

"Then you'll be very useful, for it's there that we're goin' to land. We're here for the night only."

This indeed was the case, and the marines encamped close beside the pier that night, Hal taking up his quarters with them, and making use of the opportunity to borrow a suit of American clothes; for it was no joke being dressed as he was, and running the gantlet of the abundant chaff which his Spanish uniform attracted. We will do him the justice, however, to say that he made a very fine, soldierly looking fellow in his unaccustomed kit, and would have taken first place for size and general air of manliness among the Spaniards quartered in Santiago, or, for the matter of that, in any part of the island.

"You'd get copped as sure as eggs if you met any of the enemy," was the remark which one of the marines made to him. "As soon as you'd put yer head

into one of the Dons' camps you'd find a tidy lot er bullets fizzin' close by yer nose, for I reckon they don't show many of your sort. There's somethin' about you, young mister, that looks like beef, good old honest roast beef, the stuff that Britishers boast of, and the same that them Froggies and others of the same sort sneer at, and jist wish they could crow about. But get it off—I mean them togs, else p'raps the sentry yonder will be makin' a mistake, and sendin' a plug of daylight through yer."

On the following day the marines re-embarked, and steamed along the coast to Guantanamo, where three cruisers and two gunboats at once entered the roads, and rapidly dispersed the Spanish garrison. Then the PANTHER, a transport, carrying 850 marines, steamed in. The men at once disembarked, Hal accompanying them. They encamped on a hill near a village called Playa del Este, and pushed their pickets into the bush, which grew down close to the water's edge. On their right, Caimamera, another village, was in flames, having been deserted and fired by the Spaniards.

"Mr. Marchant," said the officer in charge, to whom Hal had been introduced, "will you take a rifle and help the boys?"

"Certainly," was Hal's ready answer. "I fancy that your men will soon be engaged, for this place is surrounded by bush, as you can see for yourself, and that is an ideal cover for Spanish irregulars, who, I may tell you, are masters at that particular form of fighting, having been taught many bitter lessons by the insurgents. There! Listen to that!"

They went outside the tent, and heard the distant rattle of musketry, and then the answering shots from their own pickets. Taking up a rifle, and filling his pockets with cartridges, Hal at once ran up the hill to join them.

"Keep yer noddle low thar," a sergeant sang out to him. "The Dons aer sendin' their bullets skimmin' over here, and it's odds yer don't quite see from where. That's the ticket. Get low down, and keep a lively look-out."

Hal took the advice given him, and, copying the example of the sergeant, threw himself down behind a rock. Then, dropping his rifle for the moment, he commenced to build up a little breastwork, just like the schantzes used by the Boers in South Africa. Having obtained excellent cover in this way, he knelt up and stared into the bush.

Ping! thud! A rifle flashed three hundred yards away, and the bullet struck a foot or two to his right, sending chips of rock and a fine dust flying into the air. *Ping! phit!* Again the rifle cracked, and all that Hal could see was a dense mass of tangled green trailers and ferns.

"Wait a bit," he murmured beneath his breath. "I see that big fern moving. Why, as I live, it has crawled ten feet in the last half-minute. There must be a man behind."

He aimed carefully and fired. Instantly the waving fronds started high into the air, and, falling asunder, disclosed a Spanish guerrilla reeling blindly from side to side. Then he flung his arms wildly above his head, and, twisting round in his agony, fell prone to the earth.

Illustration:

He aimed carefully and fired

"That aer one for you, pard," the sergeant cried. "Guess it wur a mighty fluke."

"Wrong, then," Hal answered. "The Spaniards have stuck ferns into their hats, coats, and belts, and that is the reason why you do not spot them. It's a very old trick of theirs, and one that they learned from the Cubans. Watch for moving leaves, and pull your trigger with the sights leveled three feet beneath."

"So! aer that it?" the sergeant answered wonderingly. "You're mighty cute, young feller. Hillo! Durn me, but thar aer a fern on the walk."

He rose to his knees, and, sighting carefully, pulled his trigger very gently. The report was followed instantly by a commotion amidst the leaves, which suddenly fell to the ground.

"That fetched home, I'm thinking," he cried. "Here goes for another. Ah——"

Hal turned his head, to see the unfortunate American suddenly collapse, and lie motionless across the bowlder. A Spanish bullet had brought quick revenge for the death of a comrade.

"Poor beggar! The fortune of war," Hal remarked sadly. "Well, as he's gone, I must act for both."

He placed a cartridge in the breech and went on firing. Then he passed the news that the Spaniards were, like Malcolm's army of old, decked with boughs and leaves, along the lines of trenches which had been thrown up hastily for the protection of the outposts. Hour after hour the musketry duel continued, and so clever were the Spanish guerrillas at taking cover that they forced the American pickets back to the main body of the marines. About midnight Hal retired from the firing line for refreshment and sleep.

"What advice do you give about these fellows?" asked the officer. "They're certainly clever at keeping out of sight, and there seems no way of getting alongside them. We've four killed already, including our surgeon, and if it wasn't for the bad shootin' of the enemy there'd be heaps more."

"I should say, turn on the electric searchlight till morning, and then pound the bush with the guns of the ships," Hal answered. "If that does not stop the firing, you'll have to choose between retiring and rushing their cover."

"We're not going to do the first, in any case," the officer replied sturdily; "but that is a good dodge—to turn on the light. I'll signal down for it," and he went away at once.

Hal ate a meal of tinned meat and rusks, which he washed down with a big draught of coffee from the lid of his canteen. Then he rolled himself in a blanket which had been given to him, and quickly fell asleep, for he was worn out with his long day in the trenches. But all night long the musketry flickered along the hillside, and when morning dawned it was as active as ever. Early in the day a band of Cuban insurgents joined the invading Americans, and gave information of a Spanish camp four miles away.

"There's going to be a fight to-morrow," said the marine officer to Hal. "We've just had orders to march out and attack this Spanish encampment. Cubans will lead the way, so that we shall not be wantin' you as guide; but if you'd care to come, why, you know you're welcome."

"Just what I'd like. When do you start?"

"Early dawn. We'll get breakfast for all hands, and then away, so as to make a day's job of it. The ships are now going to throw shells into the bush."

He had scarcely finished speaking, when loud booming was heard from the sea, and missiles commenced to hurtle overhead. Every corner of the bush was searched by the exploding shells, but, in spite of the flying fragments, the same

desultory and harassing fire continued, for the Spanish guerrillas clung tenaciously to their posts.

Next morning a force of six hundred, including marines and Cubans, marched from their bivouacs, Hal joining the party, armed as before with a rifle.

"I reckon we'll have to be precious wide awake," said his new friend. "Cubans are out as scouts, but in this thick bush we want something in the shape of a balloon. How far should you say we are from the Dons?"

"They told us that the camp was four miles from us," answered Hal. "We have been marching for an hour, so I fancy that we must be within half a mile or less of the enemy. Hillo! Lie down quickly!"

The silence of the bush, through which the troops were forcing a way, was suddenly broken by the crackle of musketry coming from directly in front. Fortunately, the marines were moving in open order, or otherwise the losses would have been heavy. As it was, no one was hit, though showers of leaves were stripped from the trees, and came tumbling in a cloud to the ground, or upon the heads of those who happened to be beneath.

"A Spanish ambush!" exclaimed the officer. "Here, sir, hop along over to the signaler, and tell him to let the Dolphin know whereabouts they are lying."

"Right! I'll do it!" cried Hal. "You can expect me back shortly."

He bent low in the bush, and ran to the left, to a knoll upon which a signaler was stationed. On his right nothing but thick scrub was to be seen, from which, however, the continuous ping of musketry rang, proving that hidden foes lurked there. Straight ahead was the coast, towards which a gunboat, the DOLPHIN, was steaming so as to aid the land party with its guns.

Hal at once gave his message, and watched the signaler wag his flags to those on the gunboat. A few minutes later small shells from the quick-firers began to fall into the cover in which the Spaniards were lurking. Then rifle volleys were directed at them, searching every corner. At length, unable to face the hail any longer, they broke and fled.

"After them! Charge! All together, boys!" shouted the officer in command; and, springing to their feet, the whole party dashed forward.

"Hold! Lie down, all of you! You'll get knocked to pieces by the shells!" the officer shouted again; and, producing a whistle, blew a shrill blast upon it. For the DOLPHIN's guns were still playing upon the bush, and to attempt to cross it would have been to incur heavy loss. At length, however, the gunboat was signaled to cease fire, and, at once rising to their feet, the whole of the invading force dashed towards the Spanish camp.

Rifle in hand, Hal ran ahead of the men, and alongside the officers, and was one of the first to rush amongst the huts in which the enemy had taken up their quarters.

"There are Spaniards just in front!" he shouted. "At them! Let us have some prisoners."

"Hooroo, lads! Charge!" the officer shrieked at the pitch of his voice, and at the order the men who were nearest swept like a torrent to the end of the narrow and dusty little street.

"Hands up! Surrender! You are prisoners," he commanded, coming suddenly in sight of a Spanish lieutenant and some eighteen men. Instantly rifles were dropped to the ground, and the small party of the enemy, who had been unable to escape, held their arms above their heads in token of submission. Then their

young officer advanced, and with saddened face and a sigh of resignation tendered his sword to the American officer.

"We surrender, señor," he said, in very fair English. "The fortune of war has smiled but blackly upon us."

Hal only waited to see that the prisoners were safely taken, and to hear the American officer make some consoling reply, before he again dashed forward in pursuit of the enemy. Suddenly a rifle cracked from a hut in front, and the bullet pierced the rim of his hat, whistling shrilly as it hurtled by his ear. Then a Spaniard stepped into the open, and, shooting a cartridge into the breech, took a calm and steady aim at him again. The figure was at once familiar, and a turn of the head at that moment disclosed the handsome but scowling features of José d'Arousta.

Hal did not hesitate, but, lowering his bayonet, he rushed full tilt at his old enemy. There was a sharp report, the stunning effect of a concussion close at hand, the shock of which can only be realized by those who have been unfortunate enough to experience it, and he staggered back, half dazed. Next moment, with an oath at his want of success, José sprang behind the building into the bush, where he was at once lost to sight. As for Hal, he was too stunned to be able even to see for a few moments, so great was the effect of the rifle which had been discharged at point-blank range. When he was able to look round, not a Spaniard was in sight, but a poor Cuban, who had been at his side, lay wounded at his feet, having been struck by the bullet which José d'Arousta had intended for himself.

Chapter XXI

Nearing the End.

Hal Marchant returned to Guantanamo with the marines after the successful attack upon the Spanish camp, which was left a mass of flame from end to end. Their arrival was greeted vociferously, for theirs was the first real victory ashore. They found their comrades in a great state of excitement, news having arrived of the army of invasion. It had already embarked, and had actually sailed from Tampa. But, after all, it proved to be a false start, for the very next day brought information that the fleet of transports had been ordered back, for fear that Spain's one remaining squadron of warships, which sailed under the flag of Admiral Camara, should suddenly fall upon and annihilate it.

This, however, proved to be a false alarm; and on Tuesday, the 14th of June, the transports steamed away with their freight of men, horses, and equipment for Key West, where they were joined by a powerful fleet of warships, which were to act as escort. On board the troop-ships were rather more than 15,000 officers and men, while 10,000 more were ready for embarkation as soon as the transports could return to Tampa.

Arrived off the southeastern coast of Cuba, after a delightful sail extending over a week, the fleet lay to, while General Shafter, Admiral Sampson, and their respective staffs went ashore at Asseraderos, and there met General Garcia, who had been the recognized leader of the insurgents for many years. It was an

historical meeting, and at its termination Daiquiri was finally settled upon as the point of landing for the long-expected invading army.

"Mr. Marchant, we're removing from here right now," said the marine officer a day after the fleet of transports had been sighted. "Daiquiri is the point of invasion, and we are to steam along in that direction. But I don't expect that we shall have the luck to land; the troops—lucky beggars!—will do that, of course. What on earth sent us to Guantanamo and kept us there is more than I can say. What did we do for the cause? Next to nothing, I guess. Just hashed up one of the camps, and nearly got into a precious mess with those guerrillas."

"It does seem strange that you were sent there," Hal agreed. "Here have we been hanging on to the place and sacrificing valuable lives, and all for nothing. However, the invading force is at hand, and the business is to commence in real earnest. As to Daiquiri, its proximity to Santiago must be the chief reason for its selection, for, situated as it is, it will save a tremendous amount of bush fighting. Fancy marching from Guantanamo through forest and scrub! Why, the Spanish guerrillas would certainly deal with us as the Cubans have with them in former times."

"That is about the truth, I fancy; but, anyway, we're clearing from this right now, so pack up your kit and make all ready," the officer replied.

That night Hal was on board the gunboat, and by dawn they were lying off Daiquiri, surrounded by enormous transports, which were filled with men in boisterous spirits. Beside the troopers the gunboat looked so small that one might have thought she could be of no fighting value. And yet a glance at the underwater fittings of the torpedo-tubes, and the quick-firers upon her decks, showed that, though small in proportions, she was a dangerous customer to deal with, and capable of sinking any of the transports with the greatest ease.

Grouped upon her deck, the marines shouted to their comrades, and looked enviously in their direction more than once. Indeed, they were far from pleased at having had to vacate Guantanamo, after having to fight so stubbornly for it. The brush with the enemy had been keen while it lasted, and had satisfied their martial ardor; but all were disappointed with the order which had compelled them to embark again, and it was no wonder that they asked indignantly why they had ever been sent there if the town and position were not to be held. It was a sheer waste of time and lives, and the men were amongst the first to recognize this.

Meanwhile, General Garcia, with a rag-tag army of three thousand insurgents, watched the point selected for the landing. They were all fairly well armed, but, without exception, they were ragged to a degree, and presented a half-starved appearance.

June 22nd broke fine and clear, and straightway a bombardment of the various forts and villages along the coast commenced.

"I imagine that we are knocking bits off the blockhouses, and holding a general action all along the line, so as to mislead the Dons," said the officer of marines. "Hillo! That was fine!"

His exclamation was caused by the simultaneous lowering of boats from all the transports lying off Daiquiri. Then men swarmed into them, and as soon as they were filled, strings of the tiny craft were attached to launches, which steamed at once for the coast, which had already sustained a fierce bombardment. That evening some six thousand Americans had landed, consisting, for the most part, of the division under General Lawton. In addition,

a portion of General Wheeler's brigade of cavalry had disembarked, and with them had come a machine-gun battery. The method of landing the artillery horses and transport mules was most interesting. The animals were thrown overboard, and as they were unhampered with kit or harness of any sort, they came through the ordeal wonderfully.

Hal, ever on the look-out for adventure, had not allowed the day to pass without an effort to get ashore. Indeed, he contrived to find a vacant place in one of the boats, and in due course landed at the tiny jetty which projected from the beach into the sea. As he walked along it, someone, dressed as a trooper, rushed frantically towards him.

"Hal! It's Hal! By Jove, how glad I am! Hang it, old man, don't you know me, or are you too proud? Where the dickens did you come from? I heard that you had gone ashore in the MERRIMAC. Well, this is a day!"

It was Gerald Brindle, looking strong and well again, but somewhat bewildered and out of breath as he accosted his friend and shook his hands up and down as if he would never cease.

"Steady, old boy! Of course it's Hal! Look out, you're breaking my fingers. There, that's very nice; and now, if you'll stop for a moment, I'll tell you all that is worth telling."

Hal wrenched his hand away, and, stepping a pace backward, stood looking critically at his friend.

Gerald was dressed in a uniform of khaki, not unlike that worn by the British troops in South Africa, but differing in one or more important respects. For instance, in place of the helmet, which is only required in the hottest countries, the American troopers had wide-brimmed, thick felt hats, calculated to withstand a fierce sun, and well able to shelter the head and shoulders when a torrent of rain was descending. Then, again, this felt hat had a decided advantage for men on active service, for, when they were lying down and skirmishing, it would not hit upon the back of the neck and be tilted over the eyes at the most critical moment. Another difference was that the Americans wore a light gaiter, instead of the puttee.

Gerald, with his head-covering pulled rakishly over one ear, looked a very smart and soldier-like young fellow, and seemed to be well able to manage the rifle which he carried in one hand.

"A trooper?" said Hal, looking at him closely. "Well, old man, you look every inch of it. Supposing you tell me how it is to be done, so that I may follow suit, and take my place at your side."

"That's easy enough," answered Gerald: "The ranks are filled up, but we'll find room for you; for I happen to know one of the staff officers, who will arrange for it, if I ask him. Why, Hal, I have a splendid billet! I am one of Roosevelt's own; one of »Teddy's Terribles«, or »Roosevelt's Rustlers«, as we are sometimes called. You must have heard of us by now. We're the cowboy lot, and we've all sorts and sizes in our ranks. Fellows who are out of all employment, and who have not so much as a cent to bless themselves with, and others who are the sons of millionaires, or millionaires themselves, with so much to jangle in their pockets that they would not miss it if you took the average man's yearly wages from them. But, whatever their wealth, they are all rattling good fellows, and all bent upon fighting. But we've no horses. That's the joke of this invading army. The fact is that transports are scarce as it is, and none could be spared

for the mounts. However, we weren't going to allow that to stop us, and here we are, ready to have a fling at the Dons on foot, if need be."

"So you are one of the 1st United States Cavalry, sometimes known also as the Rough Riders, or by the other terms that you mentioned?" said Hal. "Gerald, I'm for it, too. We'll see this war through together."

"Right, that we will," Gerald answered eagerly. "Look here, we'll just take the bull by the horns, and arrange the matter at once. Let's go right away to the staff officer."

Hal agreed, and they at once ascended the steep slope leading to the camp, till they came to a pile of ammunition boxes, beside which a pole was erected, bearing a piece of crimson bunting, while beneath it stood an officer whose uniform proclaimed that he belonged to the staff.

"Well, Mr. Brindle, what is this?" he asked, with a smile. "Introduce your friend."

"He's Hal Marchant, the fellow who sneaked on board the MERRIMAC when she was about to be sunk off Santiago. You will remember, Captain Cromer, that the tale leaked out, and that Lieutenant Billing was said to have come in for a wiggling."

"That was so. So you're that fellow, are you?" the officer asked, looking closely at Hal. "Now, what's wanted? I know your sort very well. You're dying to be right in the very thick of it; isn't that somewhere near the case?"

"It is the very thing!" Hal exclaimed. "I am anxious to join the Rough Riders till the campaign is over."

The staff officer thought for a few moments, during which he regarded the two lads with some curiosity and amusement. Then he produced a notebook, and hastily scribbled a few lines.

"Want pay?" he asked suddenly.

"No, not a dollar," Hal answered promptly. "I want all the fun, though."

"Then slip along right now with that to General Wheeler's brigade major; I fancy it will just settle the matter for you, so that he'll allow you to go with the boys."

He nodded, and turned to give some directions to an orderly who had just approached, while Hal and his friend hurried off as fast as their legs would carry them. By early morning the former was a temporary trooper in the celebrated Rough Riders.

"I suppose we shall be moving very soon," said Gerald, as he and his friend sat down for a meal. "There is one thing, though, that may delay us. You see, things were so rushed at Tampa that all the equipment most wanted is down at the bottom of the hold, while perfectly useless stuff is at the top. But I hear that they are working very hard to set matters right."

This, in fact, was the case. Disembarkation of stores had been going on day and night, not only at Daiquiri, but also at other parts of the coast. The invading army consisted of three divisions—each split up into three brigades—and of a cavalry brigade. While the second division and the horseless cavalry had been landing at Daiquiri, the first division, under General Kent, had begun to disembark at Siboney. Meanwhile, General Shafter, the Commander-in-chief, had his quarters aboard the transport SEGURANÇA.

The very day upon which Lawton's division landed, he pushed forward with the greater part to some wooded hills northwest of Daiquiri, which he occupied without firing a shot. As for Hal and Gerald, with their comrades of the cavalry,

they left camp early on the following morning, and marched to Siboney. By the time they reached the latter place, both lads were on excellent terms with their fellow-troopers. Indeed, Gerald was already well known, and it wanted only a mention of Hal's adventurous trip ashore in the MERRIMAC to bring a crowd surging round him, clamoring for all the details.

"Tell yer this, you're born ter be lucky, that's how I size it," said one big cowboy. "Yer see, since this war got started, you've seen a rare lot er moves, and never got so much as pipped with a bullet. That jist shows as you're kept for somethin' more perlite, so I tell yer I shall keep as close alongside as I can squeeze as soon as the shootin' starts."

"Perhaps that might not be quite as secure a place as in front," Hal answered, with a smile. "A Cuban ran beside me only a few days ago, and the bullet which was intended to take my life picked the poor fellow off."

"So? Then I'll stick in front; but, all the same, I guess you're born to be lucky."

The cowboy nodded his head knowingly, and strode off. That night orders were issued to the Rough Riders to prepare for active measures.

"We are to advance against Sevilla, which is three miles away," said Hal, having gleaned some tidings from one of the sergeants. "It seems that all the Spaniards are falling back upon Santiago from the blockhouses and outposts, and a few only are left at Sevilla to bar our progress. Of course we shall soon brush them aside; though, if the fighting is anything like last week's, we shall have our work cut out for us, for it will be bush warfare every foot of the way, and the Dons have shown themselves masters of that particular art."

"And afterwards, what shall we have to face?" asked Gerald.

"That is a difficult question to answer; but if your father is right, some seven thousand half-starved Spanish regulars. They cannot hope to resist for very long, for food has completely run out in Santiago. Even now many of the civil population are said to be dying daily of starvation in the streets."

"Then the sooner we end their misery the better," exclaimed Gerald. "Hillo; orders, I fancy!"

A message from headquarters had just been brought to the troopers, telling them to prepare to march on the following morning.

"The Rough Riders and other cavalry are to advance early to-morrow on Las Guasimas," said the sergeant who had brought the order. "The regulars will march to the right, and will take four Hotchkiss quick-firing mountain guns. Boys, we aer goin' ter turn the Dons out!"

"Hooroo! By Jingo we aer," the men shouted.

"We'd do it better if we had horses with us," one of them said. "Say, pard, you've been having gay times with the enemy; what's your opinion on the case?"

"I fancy that we are better as we are," Hal answered, with assurance. "You see, I know the country hereabouts; it is densely covered with bush, in which animals would be worse than useless, for they would stand clear against the green, and would show where we were lying. Without them we shall be more efficient scouts."

"Pass the word there for Trooper Marchant," the sergeant now shouted.

"What is it? Here I am," Hal answered, stepping forward.

"You are acquainted with these parts, I hear?" the sergeant answered.

"Yes, I have ridden through the bush more than once. What then?"

"The general'll be oblee-e-ged to yer ef you'll get ahead of the column and lead the way. We're kind er strangers here, yer see."

"I'll do what I can," Hal answered briskly, being overjoyed at the prospect. "I suppose my friend can come along too? He knows the country much better than I do."

"In course he can. Now, you'll be ready early, that's the order."

Hal nodded, and at once began to talk the matter over with Gerald. Next morning they left the camp with six other men, and marched some five hundred yards ahead of the main body. A Rough Rider, who had been a cowboy right away in the west of North America, was put in charge of the little party.

"Now what aer the partic'lar jokes of these fellers?" he asked Hal, as they pushed along the road. "Yer foller, ef it wur Injuns, or even bad men of the prairie, I'd be enter their games quicken'n a knife. But these here Dons most like has a way of acting out er the ordinary, that aint easy ter catch hold of."

"They have, certainly," Hal replied. "To begin with, from the experience we had at Guantanamo I fancy you will find that the enemy will make a stubborn fight of it. Then they will lie hidden in the bush, and, look as you will, you will never see more than masses of moving green, for they cover themselves with leaves and fronds of ferns."

"Christopher! That aer the game? Wall, pards, whenever yer fall on a movin' bush pull yer trigger at it quicker than yer can wink," cried the cowboy. "Now we'll separate, so's to have about twenty yards between each man. Me and this here pard'll work the center, and t'others can fix enter the sides. When any of yer spots somethin' that's out of the ord'nary, send the warnin' along, and let every feller mark it. Then we'll bring a cross fire ter bear upon it that'll rip through the leaves, and clean the Dons off the face of the airth."

It was a good suggestion on the cowboy's part, and the scouts promptly carried it out, Hal and his new acquaintance taking the central place. And now the road became almost impassable, for rain had fallen, saturating the ground and trees, so that after a few minutes' work in the bush all the scouts were drenched from head to foot.

"It aer moist," the cowboy, whose name was Harman, exclaimed. "But it's warm, so it don't matter no more'n nothing. Say, aer that Spanish fellers thur?"

He pointed to a prominent hill in front, along the face of which were rows of trenches, and, though the distance was great, it was not difficult to decide that this was the enemy's position.

"Yes, those are Spaniards," Hal answered. "But look out! If I am not mistaken, the bush to the left is filled with guerrillas."

Scarcely had he spoken when a volley burst from the scrub in front, the bullets whistling overhead.

"That aer partic'lar bad shootin'," said Harman. "They aer right off the mark."

"I don't think so," Hal answered quickly. "Look away behind; the Dons have spotted the Rough Riders, and other dismounted cavalry, and are firing long-ranging volleys."

This indeed was the case, and the bullets which whistled overhead were meant for their comrades in the distance. Meanwhile, the column, composed of regulars, who were marching on the right, had come in touch with the enemy, while the cavalry were closing up to them on the left. Suddenly the quick-firing Hotchkiss guns opened from the bush, and commenced to shell the Spanish trenches, the reports being the signal for a general rifle engagement.

"This is warm," Hal shouted, as a stream of bullets swept overhead, lopping twigs and leaves from the cover.

"Say, Harman, let us work over there into the bush. It'll be a better place from which to fire."

They gradually edged through the scrub, till they reached a lower position, where they lay for a time, firing up at the ridge in front of them, and at the hill upon which the main body of the enemy was stationed. From there a machine gun was busily at work, scattering missiles through the foliage, and Hal found it a new and somewhat trying experience; for the distant rattle was accompanied by a rushing hail of long-nosed bullets, which flew low, and swept every corner of the bush. Then the noise would pass away, to be replaced by the zip-zip of Mausers, and by the distant ping-ping of the reports. Soon the main body of the cavalry came up, and, creeping along the ground, the whole force advanced rapidly on the Spaniards, Colonel Roosevelt being some yards in front of his men.

"Reckon a rush'll do it, boys," sang out one of the sergeants. "Just keep yer blinkers on the boss, and look out for a lively time."

Indeed the moment had arrived for something besides firing, for, as the cavalry advanced, the Spaniards had retired slowly and doggedly, firing all the time. And now a wide clearing cut across the front of the Americans. Suddenly Colonel Theodore Roosevelt was seen standing in it, fearlessly exposing himself to the bullets, and holding a smoking rifle in his hand. He pointed eagerly to a tumble-down sugar factory away in front.

"Boys, we'll take it," he cried. "Forward, the Rough Riders!"

A shout rose from the troopers, and springing to their feet, they joined in a mad rush up the hill, firing as they ran. A few shots answered, and then the enemy was seen to be hastily retreating, and within five minutes the factory was captured. At the same moment, the Spaniards retired from the ridge and hill; and the Americans, after sending out scouts and pickets, sat down to rest and talk of their victory.

"It aer a reg'lar fine start off," said Harman, excitedly. "Right from the commencement we've shook them Dons up. That aer better than being pipped all over and getting forced to give back. It'll liven us all up, and, you bet, we'll take Santiago so quick yer'll scarcely believe. My aunt! Aint this fightin' the thing ter make yer blood warm, not ter say boilin'!"

"It aer all that, Harman boy," another trooper broke in. "It aer scorchin', I'll allow. I tell yer, comin' along through the bush, under a sun as hot—wall, as hot and hotter'n blazes, it fairly cooked yer. Then, when the bullets came flickin' like so many flies—why, it kind er made yer queer."

"It did that," Gerald agreed. "My pal and I have compared notes. We were roasting, it was so hot; but when the bullets began to rush, we felt as if cold water had been poured down our backs. However, we got used to it, and mighty quickly felt the broiling heat of the sun again."

"Say, boys, did any of yer see them skunks of Cubans?" asked another Rough Rider.

"See 'em! Not much!" Harman exclaimed disdainfully. "They wur to have come along to-day, but when we marched past their camp, not a single one of the varmint moved. Jist fancy! We're here fightin' fur them critters, too!"

A murmur of indignation and disgust went round the circle, for already the Americans had taken a dislike to the natives. They had begun to discover that

these dusky insurgents were very good at lying away at safe but impossible ranges, and firing an immoderate quantity of ammunition. And whenever there was a prospect of plunder with no blows to be feared, the Cubans were much to the fore, as they were also if there happened to be an opportunity of ill-treating Spanish soldiers.

"Ugh!" exclaimed Harman in disgust. "These black critters aren't a patch on the Dons, who aint bright specimens themselves, for they're fellers one can't kind er understand, and then they've picked hold of such a jabberin' lingo. But they can fight! Them aer little chaps aer tarnal good 'uns with a rifle, and I reckon that away here in the bush they'd take some beatin'; they'd knock spots off a Red Injun, and that's the truth."

A chorus of assent came from the men, who at once began to discuss the remarkable pluck shown by the enemy. Then inquiries were made for a list of casualties, but it was not known until later in the day that sixteen had been killed on the American side, and fifty-two wounded.

That evening the Rough Riders and other cavalry lined the ridge and hill of Las Guasimas, and, looking across a patch of open country, could see the hill and fort of San Juan, and, beyond that, Santiago with its harbor and ships. El Caney, a village of small importance, which was destined to become a point of attack, stood close to San Juan.

"What will be the next move?" asked Gerald, as he and Hal sat down side by side that night, and waited for their turn of sentry-go.

"That is difficult to say," Hal answered thoughtfully, "but I fancy that the first thing will be to feed the troops. It is a question which seems to have been entirely forgotten. Then we must remember that the stores are still aboard the transports, and if they have been packed as carelessly as reported, days must pass before we get guns and sufficient ammunition and food. In any case, before we advance on Santiago, there should be a reconnaissance, and the approaches should be thoroughly explored."

That the latter was a necessary precaution the least experienced in military matters will say, and yet, strangely enough, the necessity for a careful survey did not seem to have struck the leaders of the American troops. And this, no doubt, was one of the evil results of a hastily organized army. Soldiering cannot be learned in a day, and amateurs cannot maneuver troops when they have had no practice. From first to last the Americans had suffered from the inexperience of their various leaders. Troops had been concentrated in the southern camps of America, where the heat was very trying, and had been kept there for a long time inactive, and exposed to disease. As a result, many had died, while other young fellows had returned home with health shattered—and this without having fired a shot.

Then, too, the commissariat arrangements had been indifferent, and quite insufficient. Troops were indeed conveyed safely to Cuba, but after they had had a taste of war, they were left in the heart of the unhealthy bush, with nothing better to eat than salt pork and hard biscuit; coffee, tea, sugar, and such necessaries were unheard of.

And on the beach at Daiquiri and Siboney a growing pile of useless articles collected, while cases of food were searched for—articles which the wisdom of some inexperienced person had placed first of all in the ship, when they should have gone in last. No wonder that the heat and moisture soon found victims, for men cannot stand hardship and exposure if they are ill fed. Indeed, the week's

delay before fighting recommenced laid the seeds of disease in many men. And then the fatal moment arrived when lack of precautions on the part of those in authority was to cost many a poor fellow his life in the attack upon San Juan.

Beyond Las Guasimas was an open stretch of country to which troops must march by one of two roads that led through the bush and forest, and upon the openings of these the Spaniards had naturally concentrated their guns, with a certainty of shooting accurately, for the ranges were known. On the American side, no attempt was made to open up other tracks, and this proved disastrous to the men; for on the 1st of July, when another forward move was made, many unfortunate troopers were struck dead at the first volley. This was, indeed, a memorable day for both attackers and attacked. Marching northwest from Las Guasimas, the divisions separated, Lawton's, accompanied by four guns, making for El Caney, a village of small proportions, and situated on an elevation. General Kent's division, marching with the cavalry and Rough Riders, made the fort and hill of San Juan their objective. In both cases open country had to be traversed; but in the latter the troops had first to make their way through a dense belt of forest which gave place to the open quite suddenly, and only two tracks existed.

To describe each phase of the big engagement would be to puzzle the reader; for it was like a game of chess, the pieces being in this case the various units going to complete the divisions, and the board an area covering square miles.

On the right, after nine hours' stubborn fighting with a force less than a tenth of his own, Lawton's division captured El Caney, and some hundred prisoners.

In the center, Kent's men, with the dismounted cavalry, and our two heroes, lay at the edge of the forest, suffering heavy loss for some hours; for the Spaniards sent long-ranging volleys into the trees, which did much execution. Then, too, their quick-firing guns had the range to a nicety, and sent showers of shrapnel sweeping through the ranks. At length, unable to bear this loss without retaliating, the Americans burst into the open, and stormed the hill and fort, every man fighting desperately. Indeed, when the day was done, victors and vanquished admitted that both sides had shown undaunted courage. Undoubtedly the Spaniards had fought a brilliant rearguard action, and their stubbornness, and the fact that half their small numbers were killed or wounded, showed the spirit which possessed them.

As for the Americans, though many of them had been soldiers for only a few weeks, they attacked with a courage and a sternness of purpose that were truly admirable, and did credit to the stock from which they came.

Chapter XXII

The Flower of the Hacienda.

Two days after the memorable attack on San Juan the American cause seemed in as hopeless a condition as possible. From El Caney to the coast the troops held a long line of trenches and faced a series of works, all of which were manned by determined, though half-starved, Spaniards. To the north and west Santiago was free and open to the enemy, while, where the invading forces

besieged it, their line was so thin as to be practically useless. To attempt now to press an attack home to the walls of Santiago would be to court disaster, for large re-enforcements were needed for such an action; while, if the Americans could but hold the line that they had won, they would be doing well.

The shortcomings of an army raised in haste were beginning to show. Rations from the first had been poor, and as a natural consequence men fell ill under the hardship and exposure. To these hundreds of wounded were already added, and to attend to them all there was a medical staff that was hopelessly insufficient. No provision, in fact, worthy of the name had been made. No stretcher-bearer corps had been organized, and when the wounded came crowding in, even drugs and dressings were found to be lacking. Could anything be more discouraging? No wonder that General Shafter thought the situation serious. No wonder that he telegraphed urgently for re-enforcements.

And now the strangest and most unexpected move in the campaign occurred, and altered the prospect of the war. To describe it fully, one must once more turn to Hal and Gerald, for this lucky pair had a splendid opportunity of observing everything. Both had taken part in the attack upon San Juan, and both had been wounded—Hal through the fleshy part of the thigh, and Gerald in the hand. Some hours passed before either went to obtain the services of the surgeon.

"This is rather late, young fellow," the latter said to Hal, as he rolled up his trousers and showed the wound. "I suppose you couldn't get here before?"

"Yes, we could have come earlier," Hal answered; "but you were busy, and neither of us was badly hit. But I'd be glad if you'd look at my wound now. It's painful and I feel feverish."

"Which is exactly what I was thinking. Put that under your tongue, and we'll see what the temperature is."

An examination of the thermometer showed that Hal's temperature was high, and a searching inspection of the wound revealed that it was inflamed.

"You are both feverish and out of sorts," said the surgeon, as he dressed Hal's leg. "Both with flesh wounds, which will get worse if something isn't done. I'll send you to the coast for a day or two. A blow aboard ship will set you up again."

Neither Hal nor Gerald objected, for it was already known that no active engagements would take place till re-enforcements arrived, so that if they went to sea for a day or two, they would lose none of the fun. They trudged to Siboney, therefore, and that evening were resting on board the gunboat GLOUCESTER, a converted yacht, which happened to be lying close in beside the town when they arrived.

Many and eager were the questions put to them by the men and officers aboard, and Hal and Gerald were treated like heroes.

"Tell yer what, young fellers," said one of the men, "you boys ashore aer havin' all the fun. Why, I'd pitch all these fine rations and easy times ter Jingo, if I could slip ashore and see a trifle of the fightin'. They say that San Juan wur hot. Away out at sea we could see the Spanish shells burstin' like fireworks."

"Don't yer grumble, Jimmy," another broke in reprovingly. "Up to a week or more back, we sailors wur exceptional busy. P'raps we'll get a go in again. Thur aint never no tellin'."

How near he was to being a true prophet this sailor had no notion, nor anyone else in the American fleet. And yet, on that very evening, Admiral

Cervera's fleet lay in the harbor of Santiago, with steam up, ready to slip cables and run from the harbor. But for what reason? Were not the Americans doing their utmost to capture the Spanish fleet? Then why play into their hands, and rush from security to destruction?

The question will probably never be satisfactorily answered. It is said that direct orders were received from Madrid; but in any case, on Sunday morning, the 3rd of July, the whole of the Spanish fleet was observed steaming out from the harbor in bright sunlight. Instantly, every man on board the American ships was wide awake.

"Hillo! What is happening?" an officer on board the GLOUCESTER shouted, as a puff of smoke darted from the flagship. "A gun, by Jingo! That's from the Brooklyn, the flagship while Admiral Sampson is away. Tumble up there, boys! There's fun commencing."

The bell to the engine-room at once sounded, and the GLOUCESTER began to run towards the entrance of Santiago. Hal and Gerald immediately forgot their wounds, and hastened to help the men serving the quick-firers.

"Steady there, all!" cried the commander of the GLOUCESTER. "Our guns are no good against battleships. Well wait for the gunboats. Evidently the whole fleet is coming out."

Led by the INFANTA MARIA TERESA, with Admiral Cervera aboard, a line of Spanish ships sailed from Santiago harbor, and, turning west, steamed off in single file. In all there were six, the two last being gunboats.

"Those are our mark," cried the commander, pointing to the latter. "We'll get after them at top-speed. Boys, you can commence with the guns."

Rushing forward at seventeen knots, the GLOUCESTER began to fire her weapons, and soon shells were singing about the decks of the PLUTON and the FUROR, the two Spanish gunboats. Then a lucky missile crashed into the engine-room of the latter, and in a moment she was a wreck, and rapidly sinking.

"Now for the other," shouted the commander. "Give it her all you know, boys!"

The men responded with a will, and with such success that the PLUTON was soon in a sinking condition, and to save her crew was run upon the rocks.

"Now we will see what else can be done," the commander of the GLOUCESTER cried. "Keep her straight along the coast, quartermaster. Perhaps we shall be able to pick up some prisoners. Hillo! Our boys are givin' it to the Dons."

Admiral Schley's fleet was, indeed, handling the Spanish ships severely. Steaming straight in for Santiago, the Americans had put their helms to port as soon as they were well within range. Then their guns began to roar, and soon they were obscured in big clouds of smoke. Running west along the coast-line of Cuba, the INFANTA MARIA TERESA and her consorts returned the fire as vigorously as their poor armaments would allow, and all the time rushed ahead at their fastest pace, hoping to escape.

"They'll do it," shouted Gerald, excitedly. "They've the lead, and will get dead away."

"Not a bit of it," Hal answered quietly. "We have some fast ships out there, and the NEW YORK is patrolling the coast higher up. Admiral Cervera's fleet is doomed."

"It aer that," one of the sailors standing near by burst in. "Them 'ere ships won't run much more'n an hour. Look at 'em now, and the way the shells aer strikin'."

With eyes glued to glasses, or with hands held above the brows to keep away the glare of the sun, every officer and man on the deck of the GLOUCESTER followed the course of the naval battle with breathless interest.

The leading Spanish vessel, the MARIA TERESA, was by now nearly six miles from Santiago, but she stood not a ghost of a chance. Every available gun was turned upon her, and she was struck by no fewer than twenty-nine shells. The number of hits was actually small in comparison with the guns employed; but they were crushing blows. Two enormous twelve-inch shells crashed into her stern, shattering everything in their course towards the bows. Eight-inch, five-inch, and six-pounders exploded in every part, killing numbers of the unfortunate sailors. But even now she was steaming as steadily as ever, and was pluckily replying; for her armor casing had protected her water-line and her most vulnerable part, the engines. However, she was not to escape, for the woodwork caught fire, and as there was a great deal of it, and as the water main had been cut by the shells, she was soon a blazing mass, drifting hopelessly and helplessly towards the land.

"There's work for us there, boys," cried the commander. "Those poor fellows are roasting, so let us do what we can for them. Mr. Morton, tell off a party to land in the cutter. Some of the Dons may swim ashore, and I can see a crowd of those sneakin' Cubans there. Just pitch into them if there's trouble."

"Aye, aye, sir," was the hearty response. "You boys from the for'ard gun 'll come with me."

"I'd like to be one of the party, too, sir," said Hal, stepping forward.

"And I also," Gerald chimed in.

"What! you two wounded troopers? What would be the use?"

"Wounded! I'd forgotten all about it," cried Hal.

"So you had, and I believe you," the officer answered. "You've both been working with our boys like bricks. You can take it that you are to come."

Highly delighted at the prospect, Hal and Gerald quickly provided themselves with cutlasses. Meanwhile, the GLOUCESTER had been steaming at half speed towards the unfortunate MARIA TERESA. Already the Spaniard was close in shore, but the gunboat drew very little water. Steaming alongside the blazing war vessel, she lowered a boat and sent a party aboard, while another went ashore. On the beach a number of ragged Cubans were standing, and as the exhausted Spanish sailors swam to the land, they fired at them or threw them back into the waves. Dashing through the surf, the American sailors swept the insurgents on one side.

"Back, yer black-skinned murderers!" cried one of the men, rushing at a Cuban who was in the very act of dashing a poor Spaniard's brains out. Then his fist shot out in truly British fashion, and next moment the native went crashing to the ground. "Thur; lie still, yer sweep," he exclaimed, standing over the man. "If yer just so much as lift yer skinny finger, I'll smash you."

He looked it, too, every bit of it, and the Cuban cowered, not even daring to move.

"Some of you lads just look to these blackguards," cried the officer. "If they try any of their games, cut them to the chin with your cutlasses. The others can bear a hand with these poor fellows."

But there was little fear that the Cubans would attempt more violence, for when blows were threatened all their courage oozed through their fingers. They drew back from the beach and sat down, glowering at the men who had come to the island to bring them freedom. As for the Spanish sailors, they were taken on board the GLOUCESTER, Cervera and his son being amongst the number. As the former stepped on board, Commander Wainwright advanced with outstretched hand.

"I congratulate you, sir," he said heartily, "on having made as gallant a fight as was ever witnessed on the sea."

Meanwhile, the work of rescue from the MARIA TERESA went on. Flaring from end to end, and with deck and side plates white hot from the furnace raging within her, she slowly drifted nearer the coast, her guns exploding as the flames reached them, and her ammunition bursting with deafening reports. But the undaunted Americans stuck to her, and would not quit till every Spanish sailor needing help was over the side. A quarter of an hour later the ALMIRANTE OQUENDO, which had also taken fire and was sorely battered by shells, ran ashore a little farther up the coast.

"There are more to rescue there, boys," cried the commander of the GLOUCESTER; and at once the gunboat steamed towards the burning wreck. Then again the same gallant and successful attempt at rescue was made; but barely in time, for suddenly the flames reached the magazine, and the ALMIRANTE OQUENDO blew up with a deafening roar.

Quick to follow her fate, the VISCAYA also drove ashore, and became a total wreck. The CRISTOBAL COLON was the last of Cervera's fleet, and by now she, too, was in sorry plight. Escape, which had seemed possible to her, was now out of the question, for the fast ships, the TEXAS and the NEW YORK, were rapidly overhauling her. Shells began to hurtle above her decks and crash through her plates; and, finally, seeing the hopelessness of the struggle, her commander struck his flag. But the CRISTOBAL COLON was no prize for America, for already she showed a list, and scarcely had all the prisoners been removed when she filled and sank, this being due, it is asserted, to the action of one of her crew, who opened the sea-cocks.

One fine scene there was as this magnificent vessel surrendered, and it deserves to be recorded. The commander of the TEXAS stood on his bridge, and silenced the cheers of his men. Then, lifting his hat reverently from his head, he called upon each and everyone to give thanks to God for this victory, and for his own safety through the fight.

Hal and Gerald did yeoman service on this memorable day, and it was not till every Spanish sailor who could be rescued was aboard the GLOUCESTER that they thought of themselves. Then, indeed, they discovered that they were worn out, and that their wounds were unusually painful. But a long sleep did all that was necessary, and fresh air being added to it, they soon began to mend. A week later they were once more with their comrades, the Rough Riders.

"Back again, and seen the last of Cervera's fleet," said Harman, in tones which showed that he was not exactly pleased. "I never did drop upon such pards as you. Talk about fire-eaters! Why, I believe this feller, Marchant, has smelt Spanish powder ever since the war started. You're meant for something bad, that's all I can surmise. A chap that goes all through this war, and only gets in the way of a single pip, aer got somethin' coming."

He nodded his head significantly at the lads, and grinned.

"Wall, I'm kind er jealous, I own," he proceeded. "Here aer we, a-kicking our heels in the trenches, and you chaps enjoyin' yourselves. And the grub! My! I've had my teeth through some mighty queer stuff, but some of the salt pork doled out ter us 'd make a nigger squint! It aer that tough that the only comfort aer ter work it into sausages. But it aint going to last for long, for this here row has got the heart knocked out of it. There's been a palaver, and now there's an armistice, while the bosses discuss terms. Santiago aer done fur, and if you take it true from me, so aer the war. The Dons aer fairly pulled ter pieces, and aer durned sorry fur theirselves."

That this was the case was self-evident, and the capitulation of Santiago came as no surprise. On Saturday, the 16th of July, the deed of surrender was signed, and, led by General Shatter and his staff, the American troops took possession of the town, which was filled with starving soldiers and civilians.

Courteous and truly honorable were the Spanish officers, and, looking at their pallid faces and wan cheeks, the boys from the States realized that these were foes indeed, and men of whom any army could be proud, and whom any nation might hold in high respect.

That same day Hal and Gerald heard news which upset them considerably, for, just as evening was drawing in, Jake, the faithful negro who had previously warned them, came into the camp, and fell exhausted at their feet.

"Quick, boss!" he whispered. "Dat bad man come again. De missie and de master fighting for deir lives."

"Where? At Eldorado?" cried Hal, his heart palpitating with fear at the ominous words. "Here, some water, Gerald. Pour some down the poor fellow's throat. That will pull him round, and help him to get his wind again."

Gerald swung his bottle to the front, and rapidly unscrewed the cork. Then he poured some of the contents down Jake's throat.

"Ise better now," said the negro, in stronger tones. "But don't wait, boss. Jake look to himself. Ride quick for de hacienda, for dat bad man come dere two, t'ree hour ago, and rush at it wid his men."

"Then there must be no delay," cried Hal, rising suddenly to his feet with a stern look upon his face. "Two or three hours ago! That time has passed since José and his ruffians attacked Eldorado! Quick! There is not a moment to be lost, and every second is of consequence. Here, Gerald, you see to Jake's wants, and get the poor beggar on his pins again, while I go across to our friend the staff officer and ask him to do something for us."

He turned on his heel at once, and hurried towards a stone-built house, above which floated the directing flag, and above that again the star-spangled banner. A moment later he was face to face with one of the regulars who was stationed outside, and on mentioning his business, was immediately ushered into an office where, seated at a table, was the staff officer who had befriended him before.

"Well," said the latter pleasantly, "had your fill of it already, and come to cry off now that the fun's gone down?"

"No, not that, sir," Hal answered promptly, and in a voice which was somewhat agitated in spite of himself. "You've been so kind before, that I have come to ask another favor. The truth is that I am in serious trouble. Will you—can you help me, sir?"

The officer, who was arranging some papers on the table, swung round and looked at him curiously.

"Phew! trouble!" he exclaimed, giving vent to a shrill whistle. "It's bad, I reckon, for the lad who slips ashore on the MERRIMAC, and risks his skin at the game, is not the one to be easily put out. What is its nature?"

Hal was not the lad to talk, especially when deeds were wanted and time was of the utmost importance, so on this occasion he contrived to explain the situation in a few short sentences.

"I am to understand, then, Mr.—er—I don't remember your name—that you've friends close at hand, who are bein' worried by a scoundrel," said the officer. "And since you've mentioned it so particularly, I take it that the girl has got something to do with the flurry into which you've worked yourself. Now, what is in the wind? What are you asking for?"

"Give me thirty mounted men at once," Hal blurted out. "I promise to return with them as soon as possible."

"With what's left, you mean! Thirty mounted men! Well, I don't know that I couldn't oblige you."

He looked out of the window, and cogitated deeply for a few moments.

"Yes," he exclaimed, as if he had suddenly made up his mind. "Look here; take this order and go quickly."

He hastily jotted down a few words to the officer commanding one of the very few troops of cavalry whose horses had disembarked on Cuban soil, and, having sealed it, handed it to Hal.

"There, go! Get away as quickly as you can," he cried, "and the very best of luck, for you deserve it."

Waiting only to blurt out his thanks, Hal tore away, and soon presented his message. Half an hour later a small company of horse cantered out of camp, and took the road to Eldorado. In front and leading them rode a sergeant, sitting his horse with the grace and easy swing of a practiced cowboy, and on either side of him were Hal and Gerald. Two hours later they were within a mile of the hacienda, and called a halt for a rest.

"There aint no firing now," said the sergeant, going into a clearing to listen. "No, there aint so much as a sound, so you can take it that they aer alive and kicking. If these critturs we aer after had rushed the show, there'd be sparks flying into the darkness by now, I guess, and they'd be cooking their dinners over the flames. You can put it down that things has quieted down for the night; but the row'll fizzle up again in the mornin'."

"Then do you suggest that we shall remain here?" asked Hal, who was impatient to get on, and full of forebodings for the safety of his friends. "Supposing that brute attacks during the early hours, he'd——"

"That aer jist about his game," the American answered coolly, "and it'll be for us to put a stopper on it. Say, you, sir, take it easy, and have a blower here for half an hour or more. Then we'll walk on, and when we're pretty close, we'll leave the horses, and skirmish up among the trees. Bet yer bottom dollar we'll soon see how the worry lies."

Accordingly, after resting themselves and their horses, the troop set forward again, dismounting and leaving the animals in charge of one of the men when some three hundred yards from the hacienda. Then Hal and the sergeant crept to the edge of the clearing.

"There's a fire burnin' away yonder," said the latter, pointing across to the opposite side. "Reckon them skunks aer campin'."

"There are some stone buildings on that side of the clearing," Hal explained. "I expect José and his gang have taken shelter in them."

"That's the ticket, and they're as safe behind the walls as it aer possible ter be. But we'll turn 'em out, see if we don't. Say, will yer lead some of the boys over yonder, so as ter cut in behind them critters? If so, you'd better move off at once. When the light gets brighter, keep yer eyes wide open, and let 'em have it full blaze. Mind yer fire to the right, or else it'll be a case with us."

Hal readily agreed, and hurriedly returned to the troopers. Then he and Gerald, accompanied by ten men, crept round the edge of the clearing to the farther side, and sat down to wait. At dawn some sharp reports rang out from the stone buildings, and answering flashes could be seen spurting from the sand-bag fort on the roof of the hacienda.

And now Hal's work began. Creeping through the plantations, he at length reached a spot from which it was possible to see the men who were firing at Eldorado. There were thirty or more, led by a man dressed in draggled white, whom he easily recognized as José d'Arousta.

"We'll give them a volley," he said, turning to his comrades. "Then we'll get at them full tilt. Fix bayonets, boys!"

Not a word was said in answer, but there was the ominous click of steel against steel. A moment or two later a volley was fired into the midst of the Spanish guerrillas.

"At them, boys!" cried Hal, springing to his feet. "Charge!"

At his shout the troopers dashed forward, and the greater part of the enemy at once bolted. Some, however, were too astonished to move, and fell at the point of the bayonet. As for José d'Arousta, he died as he had lived, a hard and cruel man, but one gifted with extraordinary tenacity and courage. Dodging a bayonet thrust with the rapidity of lightning, he sprang back a pace or two, and, drawing a revolver, fired point-blank at the trooper who was charging by Gerald's side.

"Take that, yer durned son of a Don!" cried the man, thrusting fiercely at him again. "Ha! tit for tat, my sonnie!"

The bayonet caught José full on the chest, and, thrusting right through him, pinned him to the wall. A deathly pallor at once spread over his face, his mouth gaped, and the revolver almost slipped from his nerveless fingers. But the manhood in him forced itself to the surface, and he lifted his head to glare at his enemies. Then an oath escaped his lips as his glazing eyes fell upon Hal, and with a last effort he lifted the weapon and fired.

Hal took no part in the further stages of the war. Indeed, there was little else to happen, for the fall of Santiago had been the beginning of the end. The American fleet being freed by the destruction of Cervera's fleet, the Government at Washington threatened to send some battleships to bombard the coast towns of Spain, and in the meanwhile dispatched an expedition to Puerto Rico. Menaced by a revolution at home, the Madrid Government finally gave way, and, on the 12th of August, peace was patched up between Spain and America, the former relinquishing her possessions in the Caribbean Sea.

It came just in time to stop the campaign in Puerto Rico, where some brisk engagements had taken place; but the news arrived too late, alas! to save the many poor lads who had come from the States to fight for their country, and who lay dying of fever near Santiago.

Of the Philippines there is little to tell. Manila was captured on the 13th of August, and with it went Spanish rule. But not so the islands, for, led by a native called Aguinaldo, the inhabitants, who had previously rebelled against their old masters, now objected to the new, and chose to fight for their freedom. Thus for many a long day the Philippines remained in insurrection.

And now to close this story. Struck in the ribs by José d'Arousta's bullet, it was weeks before Hal was up and about; and he undoubtedly owed his recovery to Dora's devoted nursing. No wonder that when at last he tottered on to the veranda, he turned to her with a flush of pride, and drew her arm beneath his own, saying to Mr. Brindle:

"Dora has promised to be my wife some day, and to that I know you will agree, for you have practically told me so. Congratulate me, for I am a lucky young fellow. I left England friendless, I came to this beautiful island as a stranger, and I have won the flower of the hacienda."

"You have, my lad!" exclaimed Mr. Brindle, advancing with outstretched hand. "Fortune, they say, favors the brave, and yours is well deserved, for you have fought manfully Under the Star-Spangled Banner."

