MR. MIDSHIPMAN GLOVER, R.N.

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A Tale of the Royal Navy of To-day

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HE WILDLY TORE AT EVERYTHING AND HURLED IT DOWN ON HIS PURSUERS Page 86 Frontispiece

Mr. Midshipman Glover, R.N.

A Tale of the Royal Navy of To-day

BY

SURGEON REAR-ADMIRAL
T. T. JEANS, C.M.G., R.N.

Author of "John Graham, Sub-Lieutenant, R.N."
"A Naval Venture" &c.

Illustrated by Edward S. Hodgson

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1908

By
Surgeon Rear-Admiral
T. T. Jeans

The Gun-runners.

John Graham, Sub-Lieutenant, R.N.
A Naval Venture.
Gunboat and Gun-runner.
Ford of H.M.S. "Vigilant".
On Foreign Service.
Mr. Midshipman Glover, R.N.

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Preface

In this story of the modern Royal Navy I have endeavoured, whilst narrating many adventures both ashore and afloat, to portray the habits of thought and speech of various types of officers and men of the Senior Service who live and serve under the White Ensign to-day.

To do this the more graphically I have made some of the leading characters take up, from each other, the threads of the story and continue the description of incidents from their own points of view; the remainder of the tale is written in the third person as by an outside narrator.

I hope that this method will be found to lend additional interest to the book.

I have had great assistance from several Gunnery, Torpedo, and Engineer Lieutenants, who have read the manuscripts as they were written, corrected many errors of detail, and made many useful suggestions.

The story may therefore claim to be technically correct.

T. T. JEANS,

SURGEON REAR-ADMIRAL, ROYAL NAVY

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MAP ILLUSTRATING THE OPERATIONS AGAINST THE PIRATES

CHAPTER I
The Luck of Midshipman Glover

Ordered Abroad. Hurrah!

Midshipman Glover explains how Luck came to him

It all started absolutely unexpectedly whilst we were on leave and staying with Mellins in the country.

When I say "we", I mean Tommy Toddles and myself. His real name was Foote, but nobody ever called him anything but "Toddles", and I do believe that he would almost have forgotten what his real name actually was if it had not been engraved on the brass plate on the lid of his sea chest, and if he had not been obliged to have it marked very plainly on his washing.

We had passed out of the *Britannia* a fortnight before—passed out as full-blown midshipmen, too, which was all due to luck—and were both staying with Christie at his pater's place in Somerset.

It was Christie whom we called Mellins, because he was so tremendously fat; and though he did not mind us doing so in the least, it was rather awkward whilst we were staying in his house, for we could hardly help calling his pater "Colonel Mellins".

You see, he was even fatter than Mellins himself, and the very first night we were there—we were both just a little nervous—Toddles did call him Colonel Mellins when we wished him "Good-night", and he glared at us so fiercely, that we slunk up to our room and really thought we'd better run away.

We even opened the window and looked out, feeling very miserable, to see if it was possible to scramble down the ivy or the rusty old water-spout without waking everybody, when Mellins suddenly burst in with a pillow he had screwed up jolly hard, and nearly banged us out of the window. By the time we had driven him back to his room at the other end of the corridor, and flattened him out, we had forgotten all about it, and we crept back like mice, and went to sleep.

It was just at this time that the papers came out with those extraordinary yarns about the increase of piracy on the Chinese coast, and how some Chinese merchants had clubbed together to buy ships in England and fit out an expedition to clear the sea again.

You can imagine how interested we three were, especially as fifty years ago Toddles's father had taken part in a great number of scraps with the Cantonese pirates, and Toddles rattled off the most exciting yarns which his father had told him.

We saw in the papers that the Admiralty was about to lend naval officers to take command, but it never struck us that we might possibly get a look in, till one morning a letter came for me from Cousin Milly, whose father is an old admiral and lives at Fareham, and isn't particularly pleasant when I go to see him.

My aunt! weren't we excited! Why, she actually wrote that if I wanted to go she thought she could get me appointed to the squadron, as the captain who was going in charge was a great friend of hers.

You can imagine what I wrote, and how I buttered her up and called her a

brick, and said she was a "perfect ripper". I ended up by saying that "Mr. Arthur Bouchier Christie, midshipman, and Mr. Thomas Algernon Foote, midshipman, chums of mine, would like to go too".

I was very careful to give their full names to prevent mistakes, and put "midshipman" after their names just to show that they had also passed out of the *Britannia.* near the top of the list, and so must be pretty good at chasing "X and Y", which, of course, is a great "leg up" in the navy.

Two mornings after this Milly sent me a postcard: "Hope to manage it for the three of you".

We were so excited after that, that we did nothing but wait about for the postman, and even went down to the village post-office and hung about there, almost expecting a telegram.

Well, you would hardly believe it! The very next morning our appointments were in the papers.

I have the list somewhere stowed away even now, and it began:

"The under-mentioned officers of the Royal Navy have been placed on half-pay and lent to the Imperial Chinese Government for special services".

Down at the bottom of the list was "Midshipmen", and we nearly tore Colonel Christie's paper in our excitement as we read, in very small print and among a lot of other names, Arthur B. Christie, Harold S. Glover (that was myself—hurrah!), and Thomas A. Foote.

Well, I can't tell you much of what happened after that, for we were simply mad with delight; but I do remember that when I rushed off home my father and mother rather threw a damper over it all.

And when my gear had been packed and driven down to the station, I felt rather a brute because everyone cried, and even my father was a little husky when I wished him good-bye. I think something must have got into my eye too, a fly, probably, but it wasn't there when the train ran into Portsmouth Harbour station, and Mellins and Toddles met me and dragged me to the end of the pier to get our first view of our new ship, which was lying at Spithead.

Now you will have to read how all these things came about, or you will never properly understand them.

CHAPTER II

Helston receives a Strange Letter

Helston's Bad Luck—Ping Sang tells of Pirates—Ping Sang makes an Offer—Helston Jubilant

In the year 1896 two naval officers were living a somewhat humdrum, monotonous existence in the quiet little Hampshire village of Fareham, which nestles under the fort-crowned Portsdown Hills, and is almost within earshot of the ceaseless clatter of riveting and hammering in the mighty dockyards of Portsmouth.

These two men had both served many years before in the small gun-boat *Porcupine* out in China, and their many escapades and adventures had frequently drawn down on their heads the wrath of the Admiral commanding that station. Wherever the *Porcupine* went, trouble of some sort or another was sure to follow. At one place an indignant Taotai[#] complained that all the guns—obsolete old muzzle-loaders—in his fort had been tumbled into the ditch one night; at another they only just escaped with their lives from an infuriated mob whilst actually carrying from the temple a highly grotesque, but still more highly revered, joss, at which desecration they had cajoled and bribed the local priests to wink.

[#] Taotai = military magistrate.

Comrades in every adventure, and mess-mates during these four exciting years, they had ultimately drifted together on half-pay, and, with their old marine servant Jenkins, a taciturn old man, to look after them, had settled down in this village.

Both men were below the age of forty, though a more accurate estimate would have been difficult, for the shorter of the two bore himself with the vigour and alertness of thirty, yet his face was old with the lines and furrows of care and sadness, whilst the tall, gaunt figure of the second was not held so erect, nor were his actions so vigorous, yet the youthful fire in his eyes gave to his sea-tanned face and his thin, tight-drawn lips and prominent jaw the appearance of a man who had not yet reached the zenith of his manhood.

The shorter man was named Fox, a doctor, who had left the service when he married, only to lose his wife a year later, and with her his whole joy of existence. Settling down in this village, near her grave, he had worked up a small practice, which occupied but little of his time, and lived a life from which his great grief seemed to have removed any trace of his former ambition.

Not so the taller man, Helston, a commander, who had been invalided and

placed on half-pay, suffering from the effects of fevers picked up whilst cruising off the West Coast of Africa, in China, and in the Mediterranean. Though his body was weakened by disease, he was for ever buoyant at the prospects of being restored to health and full-pay, and dreamed eagerly of the time when once more he could go afloat and eventually command his own ship.

He, however, generally found a most unsympathetic audience in the Doctor, who listened, with ill-concealed boredom, to his rose-coloured plans, and cynically would say, "Who goes to sea for enjoyment would go to jail for a pastime. Take my advice and get a snug billet in the coast-guard, and don't bother the sea any more. It's not done you much good."

"It's all my bad luck, Doc, old chap," Helston would answer; "no fault of the sea. I played the idiot when I was a youngster, was always in disgrace up at the Admiralty, and now, with this rotten fever in me, they won't employ me again."

But he would always finish with, "Well, I've waited patiently enough for the last three years, and luck must turn soon".

On one such occasion, when the warmth and brightness of a May day had made Helston more than usually enthusiastic as to his chances of full-pay service, Dr. Fox, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, growled, "Next ship, indeed! You talk of nothing but ships and sea, sea and ships, when you ought to be buying a Bath chair to be wheeled about in."

"Never mind, old chap, I'm not as bad as that, and I'll bet you that they give me a ship in less than six months!"

"If they do, I will come with you," jeered the Doctor, as he stalked moodily to bed.

"That's a bargain," shouted Helston cheerfully after him.

Now one reason why Helston had settled down here with the Doctor, and the great source of his ambitious dreams, was a certain lady named Milly, who, with her father—his name is not necessary, for he was always spoken of as "the Admiral", or "Miss Milly's father"—lived close to the village. He had wooed her constantly for many years, and had known her since she was born, but the somewhat disdainful little lady had refused him many times, though not without giving him some slight hope of better success if ever he were promoted to the rank of captain. However, as Mistress Milly never personally enters this story, nothing more need be said of her than that she was one of the most bewitching little flirts who ever tyrannized over an old father, or played havoc with the heart of every man she met.

A few weeks after this incident, and whilst the two were at breakfast, the old village postman stumbled up the path leading to their house, and Jenkins, a sombre, morose man of few words, brought in a big official envelope.

"What did I say, old chap?" cried Helston excitedly, tearing it open. "Didn't I

say my luck would change? Hullo! this isn't an ordinary appointment. Whatever is it?" A large number of papers fell on the table, and, the Doctor showing some signs of interest, the two men hurriedly examined them, Jenkins standing behind at attention in order to learn the news.

The first one was from the Admiralty, informing Helston that the enclosures had been received through the Chinese Embassy, and ordering him to report himself at Whitehall immediately. These enclosures were lists of ships supposed to be wrecked on the Chinese coast during the last few years, lists of Chinese men-of-war supposed to have been destroyed during the Chino-Japanese war, and papers showing the gradual rise in insurance rates for the Chinese coasting trade.

"Where's your appointment?" sneered the Doctor. "I'm off to see my patients."

"I've got it, Doc; look here! Do you remember that old mandarin we got out of a scrape at Cheefoo once? Well, here's a letter from him. Listen!" Saying which, Helston sat on the table and read it aloud, whilst the Doctor filled his pipe impatiently:—

"DEAR COMMANDER HELSTON,—Perhaps you remember saving my life at Cheefoo many years ago? Now perhaps I can do you a good turn.

"For the last three or four years there has been a very large number of steamers, ships, and junks employed on the coast trade which have left port under favourable circumstances and apparently in good condition, yet have never been heard of since. The number has rapidly become so great, that myself and several friends interested in the shipping trade have suspected that these disappearances were not due to natural causes. This year, for instance, three of our newest steamers have left Nagasaki full of valuable cargo, and, though none of them could have experienced bad weather, yet none have been heard of since. All three, strangely enough, carried a large quantity of military stores for Pekin, which had been transhipped from German steamers, and all three left within three weeks. The captains were Englishmen—very good men, too—and what adds to the peculiarity of their disappearance is, that the captain of the English mail-steamer which followed the last out of harbour, and should have passed her eight hours later if she had been on her proper course, never sighted her. We searched the coast ineffectually for any trace of wreckage, and it is only within the last two months that we have obtained a clue.

"One of our large junks from Formosa, being short of water, made for an island, previously reported as being only occasionally inhabited by Korean fishermen. A few men went ashore to fill the casks, found the fishing-nets deserted

and no water, so followed a path leading inland and winding up a hill. When nearly at the top they came across four dead Chinamen hanging from trees, and although very frightened, they still pushed on until they came in sight of the natural harbour on the other side of the island. They swear solemnly that, lying at anchor, they saw twenty or thirty steamers and several men-of-war, and that on shore there were many storehouses (go-downs) and huts, and a very large number of natives. They were just going down for water when one of these men, who fortunately had formerly been one of the crew of the *Tslai-ming*, our crack steamer, recognized her lying there. He is a cute fellow, and at once jumped to the conclusion that these were pirates (you remember how terribly frightened they are of 'pilons'?), and ran back with his fellows to their boat.

"They brought this news to us.

"Four years ago, when this island was last visited, it was reported as uninhabited. Personally I did not doubt the men's tale. In fact, they are so frightened, and have spread their story so freely, that it is difficult to get a crew together for any port south of Amoy.

"I have made very careful enquiries to account for the presence of the men-of-war, and have discovered that many of the war-ships, and nearly all the torpedo-boats which were run ashore to escape capture during the late war, had disappeared.

"The local mandarins and officials of course know nothing, but from the natives living near I find that large ships came and stayed near the stranded ships for some weeks, and finally towed them away. There is no doubt that two, if not three, cruisers in bad plight have been sold to a couple of Europeans, and have disappeared, where, no one knows. A couple of the Yangtze corvettes have also mysteriously vanished.

"I memorialized the throne, but they would do nothing, and made fun of my report. The mandarins got hold of my informants, tortured them till they denied the truth of their story, and then of course laughed at me.

"Trade was practically at a stand-still, so we decided to send one of our best captains, an Englishman, to see if the men's story was correct. He landed at night from a junk, disguised as a native, and spent a day on the island, running great risks of detection, and being taken off next night. He reports that there are certainly three cruisers and seven torpedo-boats anchored there, and at least twenty coasting steamers, among them being the three that disappeared when laden with military stores. Great numbers of coolies were working at the narrow entrance to the harbour, and, as far as he could see, they were mounting guns behind earthworks. He thought he could distinguish some Europeans, but is not certain. He brought a rough plan of the harbour, marking the positions of ships, buildings, and guns.

”I decided to take him next day to some of the ministers whom I knew personally, thinking that they would pay more attention to the word of an Englishman. I must tell you that the three natives who first brought the news and were tortured to deny it, have disappeared, and as they were very honest, faithful men, I suspected some underhanded dealing, and, thinking to keep the Englishman safe made him sleep in my *yamen* that night. Next morning he had disappeared, and his body was found two days later in a low quarter of the town, stripped of all valuables including the plan, which he had in his pocket-book, although this itself was not taken. The gatekeeper saw him go out, and there is no doubt his habits were unsteady, but for all that his death is very suspicious.

”Naturally I had no proof good enough for the Government, but my friends and myself subscribed ten million dollars, and asked the Government for another five millions, to fit out an expedition and destroy these pirates, offering to hand over to them the men-of-war we intended buying, and also a percentage of our recaptures. They refused at first, but thinking money was to be made out of it, promised us four millions, the protection of the Imperial flag, and the use of their dockyards.

”We had thought of applying to some European power to take the matter up; but you know the great tension of affairs out here at the present, and the acute international jealousies; we therefore came to the conclusion that it would take years to bring this about through the ordinary diplomatic channels, and as every year’s trade is worth from £10,000,000 to £20,000,000 for us, we cannot afford to wait.

”I, therefore, as President of the China Trading Defence Committee, am authorized to offer you the control of this money if you will accept the responsibility of organizing a small expedition with the greatest possible speed to rid us of this unbearable piracy which is destroying our trade.

”You will get this letter and the enclosed lists and tables from our Ambassador in London, who will give you every facility for granting Imperial commissions for your ships and officers, and every information he can.

”I know enough of your service to think that if you take command of this expedition you will advance your prospects, and the opportunity of doing this I have very great pleasure in giving you.

”Wire me your decision and plans; don’t worry about money—haste is the great thing.—Your sincere friend,

”PING SANG.

”TIENTSIN, *17th March.*

"*P.S.*—If you do not accept the command it will be offered to Lieutenant Albrecht of the Imperial German Navy.

"I hope the Doctor with the broad shoulders and terrible fists is well. Give him my 'chin chin', and bring him with you if you can."

Helston finished reading, and both men stared at each other in blank amazement, whilst Jenkins commenced stealthily to remove the breakfast things.

"Well, of all the hare-brained, foolish schemes I ever heard of!" gasped the Doctor.

"There's something in it, old chap. Ping Sang was one of the richest mandarins in China when we were out there many years ago. A splendid chap, as you remember, and practically an Englishman in his ideas—he went to Charterhouse when he was a boy—and besides, his Government has taken it up, and I have to report myself to the Admiralty; so they believe in it, evidently. Why, old man," continued Helston, "if this is all true I shall get promotion out of it, and that means—you know as well as I do—that means Milly." And he danced about the room as if he never had had fever in his rheumatic legs.

"Stop that tomfoolery, and go off to London and find out whether it's all a mare's nest or not," said the Doctor. "Jenkins, go and get the Commander's things ready at once."

"For China, sir?"

"No. For London, you fool!"

"Very good, sir," and off went Jenkins.

"Well, good-bye, Helston, I'm off round the practice. Don't make an ass of yourself, and let me know the result."

By the time the Doctor returned Helston had disappeared, and it was late that evening when a telegram brought news of him. The Doctor hurriedly opened it: "Job genuine—accepted command. Send all clothes—cannot return—too busy."

Three days later he received a long letter. In it Helston wrote that he had been backwards and forwards from the Admiralty, the Foreign Office, and the Chinese Embassy the whole of the last few days settling preliminary details. "The Bank of England has one and a half million to my credit, on the advice of the Ambassador and Ping Sang, so the money is safe enough, and I am trying to get hold of any ship which will be ready in the next three months. Our Admiralty did not at first wish me to take command, and wanted to give me some captains, just as advisers, but I knew what that meant. They would get all the kudos; I should get none. So I told them that if I did not take command, absolutely and entirely, I would throw it up, and, of course, that meant that the Germans would get a look in. That stuck in their gizzards, so they piped down, and I am to be

my own boss and have any officers I want, and a large proportion of men, from the navy. They have given me an office and a couple of clerks, and already I'm terribly busy.

"From what I can gather, their idea seems to be that a couple of cruisers of the *Apollo* type and two or three destroyers will be sufficient for my purpose and well within my means; that if I find myself unable to destroy the pirates, whose existence they still doubt, I shall at least be able to blockade the island till the present tension of political affairs is somewhat relaxed, when they hope to be able to detach some ships from our fleet to help me, more especially if I prove conclusively the existence of these pirates. You may bet your boots," Helston concluded, "if I can get away from England and past Hong-Kong without interference, I sha'n't wait for other help. My luck is at the top now, and if only it will remain there for eighteen months or so, I shall be a made man. Will it? that is the question."

"Silly fool!" thought the Doctor; "he's always brooding on his ill-luck. If people would only look more on the bright side of things, we should hear less about this fatal ill-luck which they always fancy follows them."

When he returned from the round of his very limited practice and opened the London paper waiting for him, he swore angrily when he saw that two columns were devoted to the proposed expedition. "Silly fool! giving himself away to these interviewers. It may make him notorious, but the Admiralty won't like it; and if there *are* pirates, they will learn his schemes and plans almost as soon as he knows them himself."

CHAPTER III
The Fitting Out of a Squadron

Helston Tricks the Doctor—Valuable Information—The Doctor makes a Bargain—The Squadron Assembles

A month had passed by, during which time the Doctor saw by the papers that Helston had acquired a cruiser at Elswick, built on "spec", an armoured cruiser being built by Laird's, for a South American republic which had waived its claim to her, and three destroyers which were being completed at Yarrow's, Thorney-

croft's, and Laird's works respectively. At the end of the month he ran up to London, in response to a telegram, and met Helston at Waterloo.

"I should hardly have known you," he said, grasping his hand; "you look twice the man you did six weeks ago. What fool's errand have you brought me here for?"

"Going to show you round my little fleet, old chap. How's Milly and her old father?"

"She's all right. Asked after her Don Quixote the last time I saw her; but confound you, I'm hungry, I don't want to see your ships. I've seen enough in my lifetime; you ought to have known that."

"Come along then, old chap, we'll have some grub and put you in a better temper," answered Helston, smiling, and took him to his hotel.

They visited Yarrow's yard that afternoon, and next day went up the river to Chiswick, where Thorneycroft's destroyer lay almost ready for launching, with her engines and boilers on board. "Funny state of affairs, Doc, old boy," began Helston, as he patted her smooth sides, "for me to be buying ships. Fancy imagining six weeks ago that I should ever be signing cheques to the value of three-quarters of a million and thinking nothing of it!"

"How much did this one cost you?" asked the Doctor grimly.

"Just over £40,000—a mere fleabite," laughed Helston; "and she's to do her trials next week—a guaranteed thirty knots. That would shake up your wretched liver, Doc, rushing along at more than thirty-five miles an hour! It's a funny thing, but they have had several bids for her during the last few days, so I wrote out a cheque on the spot and got her. The others were a little doubtful about cash."

"Some of these smaller republics always are," laughed the manager, who was standing near them.

"It was Patagonia, too, of all others," continued Helston. "She tried to get all my ships, and, strangely enough, has never been in the market before, and doesn't possess such a thing as a ship."

"I expect she wants to become as civilized as some of her neighbours, and get up a rebellion against the army," added the manager.

After dinner that night Helston showed the Doctor a list of officers he had chosen, among whom there were several they had known in the old days. The Admiralty had put them all on half-pay and lent them to the Chinese Government for eighteen months directly Helston had made out their temporary commissions for the squadron he was fitting out. The Chinese ambassador had been empowered to sign their commissions, and the ships were to fly the Yellow Dragon.

"I see you have no doctors yet," said the Doctor. "I suppose no one has been such a fool as to volunteer."

Helston opened a drawer in his desk.

"There you are, nearly five hundred of them, men in the navy, army, and from every corner of the world."

"I didn't know there were so many fools on earth," growled the Doctor. "To whom are you going to give the opportunity of being drowned or blown up?"

"Oh, I'm not going to select them. I leave that job to my principal medical officer."

"What idiot have you managed to get hold of to do that?"

"You, old chap," replied Helston, slapping him on the shoulder; "you were the very first to volunteer."

"I!" said the Doctor angrily. "Why, I'd as soon think of volunteering for a trip to the moon!"

"Can't help that, Doc; you told me that night at Fareham, when you were in such a bad temper, that you would come with me if I got a ship, and here's your commission made out—'all belong ploper, savez'. Come on, old fellow, don't leave me in the lurch; come and have another look at China. We will look in at our old places in Japan and fancy ourselves young again. I'll make you as comfortable as you possibly can be on board a ship."

"Well, you have played a trick on me," answered the Doctor, after he had stamped and fumed about the room, "and if you were not steeped in fever and ague, I would see you at Jericho first; but I'll see you safely through this foolery—more for Milly's sake, though, than for yours, you sly brute."

"I knew you'd come, Doc; you aren't doing yourself any good moping down at Fareham, and the practice can manage itself pretty well, can't it? You'll get fleet-surgeon's pay, and Jenkins will be able to look after us both."

So this being settled, the two men discussed plans far into the night.

On the way to Newcastle next morning, and as the train was leaving King's Cross, a man jumped hurriedly into their carriage, his bags were thrown after him, and the door slammed violently.

"I'm sort of intruding," he said, by way of introduction and apology. He was a young and very handsome man, typically American from the long hair brushed off his forehead to his long pointed boots, his Western accent very strong and nasal.

"Guess you two ain't lived all your lives on land. I've been six years in the United States navy, and can spot a navy man like a pointer."

"Yes, we are both in the navy," answered Helston, smiling.

"There you are; you Britishers always call *your* navy *the* navy. Why, our American ships—ship for ship—would give 'em all points and knock spots out of them. We ain't got so many just now, but we're just scurrying around, and we've got the iron and the brains, and Congress will find the dollars. I'm quit of the

navy. The guv'nor curled up and left me a pile, so I just sent in my commission and been enjoying myself ever since—that's four years ago next fall. Going out to China in a few weeks—shake up the oil business. The old man was in oil—see! Ever been in China—Asiatic station we call it—and met the old *Monocacy*?"

"Twice," said Helston, much amused.

"Well, I was a cadet for two years in that old packet—Reginald S. Hopkins, my tally—and I guess we have mutual acquaintances out there."

"My name is Helston."

"Helston!" ejaculated the American. "Why, I know your face—couldn't guess where I'd seen it before seen your picture in every illustrated journal I've taken up for the last ten days—shake, sir, shake," and he grasped Helston's hand warmly. "Very pleased to make your acquaintance. I reckon you're just about the most talked-of man walking the face of this earth just now."

The conversation naturally turned on the approaching expedition, in which Hopkins was keenly interested. "I guess I can give you some middling-sized information about those ships the Chinese ran ashore. I was out with the Japs at Wei-hai-wei, just looking round—kind of correspondent for a Boston journal—and went on board some of them. I reckon the silly idiot who bought that lot of scrap iron wished he had left 'em there. There ain't a dockyard in the States that could make 'em keep pace with a funeral. Why, I went aboard one of the torpedo-boats—high and dry she was—I'm mighty inquisitive, I tell you—her boiler had burst and blown up her deck, when she went aground, I reckon. I've never seen such a mess as the engines were—two horrid staring corpses been there a week, too—ugh!"

"Very lucky that I met you," Helston said eagerly. "I've telegraphed to a dozen men who were up there, and none know anything beyond doubtful rumours."

"I guess most of the Europeans were just searching around about that particular time, and looting or getting quit of the place, if they'd been aiding the Pigtails," drawled the stranger.

"You didn't hear anything about the cruisers which went ashore, I suppose?" asked Helston.

"Didn't I! Didn't I! I knocked up against a little Scotchman—chief engineer aboard the *Mao Yuen* when her old skipper shoved her nose on shore and cut. He was just about in a hair-raising funk, for the mandarins wanted his head, and the Japs his body. I packed him off in a steamer, and he was mighty glad to take his head with him, you bet!"

"Did he tell you anything of the condition of his ship?" asked Helston, "for she is one of those which have disappeared."

"Didn't he!" roared the American, smacking his thigh. "Why, all the time

he was under my wing he kept shouting out, 'Oh God! Oh God!—two hundred dead bodies on board, burning fore and aft—they'll kill me if I go on deck—the boilers won't stand the pressure, and my home's in Glasgy'. He was just on being properly crazed, and during the night woke me by shrieking, 'We're on the rocks, we're on the rocks—the steam-pipe's burst, and I can't get on deck—the steam, the steam', and I found him trying to climb up the wall."

"She must have damaged herself very badly if the shock smashed her main steam-pipe," said Helston; "and they tell me at the Embassy that the *Yao Yuen*, her sister ship, which was also reported refloated, was completely gutted. It seems to me that any amount of patching up won't make these two much of fighting ships."

"You've just hit it, Captain. Give me the old *Monocacy*—you remember the old tub—and I reckon I'd wash out the whole crowd."

He left the carriage at their first stopping-place.

"Lucky we met him, Doc," said Helston; "his information may be very valuable, and he seems a fine type of an American naval officer."

"They are all tarred with the same brush," growled the Doctor—"think their own country the only one in the world, and they themselves its brightest ornament. A conceited, bragging liar I should call him."

"Liver bad this morning," thought Helston.

They went down to Elswick that afternoon and inspected the cruiser which Armstrong's had almost completed. She was, in fact, preparing for her engine and gun trials. She had been built as a speculation, and Helston had eagerly snapped her up for a trifle of £290,000. "We should have made another £20,000 if you hadn't settled at once," said the manager ruefully, "for the Patagonian agent offered us £310,000 next morning."

They next travelled to Birkenhead and saw Laird's destroyer, which was nearly ready for sea, and the armoured cruiser which was to be Helston's flagship, and had been promised in two months.

They were inspecting the cabins aft.

"If I'm coming with you, you'll have to knock those two into one," said the Doctor. "I'm not going to be cramped up in the ordinary cabin at my time of life."

"All right, old chap," replied Helston, giving the necessary directions, "what will happen if you don't get your own way?"

"Invalid myself home," answered the Doctor, with a twinkle in his eye. "Did the Patagonians want this one?"

"Did their best," smiled Helston, "but ready money did the trick."

"It seems to me that someone is very anxious you should not buy your ships, Helston. Somewhat fishy, isn't it?" suggested the Doctor, on their way back to London.

Two days later the papers published lists of temporary commissions granted by the Chinese Government to officers in the Royal Navy lent to a squadron now fitting out in England.

To Helston the Admiralty had granted leave to assume the rank of captain whilst he was in command of his squadron.

The rest of the officers, commanders, lieutenants, doctors, engineers, paymasters, marines, and warrant officers were all detailed for various duties—fitting out the ships, buying and supervising stores and provisions, and recruiting the crews.

The Admiralty lent the entire crews for the three destroyers and skeleton crews for the two cruisers, consisting of petty officers, seamen gunners, engine-room artificers, armourers, and also a small detachment of marines, whilst, acting on the advice of the Foreign Office and the Chinese Embassy, both of which threw out hints of the possibility of treachery, the remainder of the crews were taken exclusively from Naval Reserve men of known good character.

During the following three weeks several suspicious incidents occurred which suggested that influences were at work to retard or damage the expedition.

Thorneycroft's destroyer broke down on two occasions. On the second trial the finding of a loose nut in the high-pressure cylinder whilst the engines were being preliminarily turned, averted a terrible catastrophe. It was highly probable that it had been placed there intentionally.

Laird's cruiser developed several small break-downs, attributed to improperly fastened locking nuts, whilst the main bearings of one of her screw shafts became almost red-hot, and it was found that sand had been mixed with the water that was pumped over it during the full speed trial. This alone delayed the departure of the expedition for a month, as the huge casting had to be removed. Laird's destroyer was also run down one night by a tug-boat whilst lying anchored off Birkenhead, and as it was a perfectly clear night, and she was not in the usual course of tugs, this was very suspicious. Fortunately the damage was not serious.

Most serious of all was the discovery of a man, dressed as a dockyard labourer, tampering with the magazine locks of Armstrong's cruiser, with many yards of fuse and a dynamite cartridge in his pocket, which naturally he could not account for.

However, three months after the receipt of Ping Sang's letter, Armstrong's cruiser, named by Helston the *Strong Arm*, the three destroyers "No. 1", "No. 2", and "No. 3", and a stout little merchant steamer, the *Sylvia*, to be used as store-ship, were lying at Spithead, gaily flying the Yellow Dragon at their ensign staffs, and only awaiting the completion of the repairs to Laird's ship, which Helston

named the *Laird*.

Helston, the Doctor, and two or three officers were still remaining in London completing the work of fitting out the squadron.

CHAPTER IV
The Pirates are not Idle

A Disaster—"The Mysterious Three"—Suspicions Confirmed—Three Chinamen—Helston Desperate

One night after dinner, whilst they were playing billiards, the folding doors were flung open and Hopkins, whom Helston had not seen since he had first met him on his way to Newcastle, rushed in, nearly upsetting the waiter.

"Excuse me, Captain," he said, as he warmly gripped Helston's hand. "I'm always just busting with energy; only landed on the Island three hours gone; tracked you here, and now mighty glad to meet you again. Been bustling round Europe for the last two months; done the capitals and the crowned heads and other sights; and now come here to pack my traps and off again. Say, Captain, how's your picnic progressing; just booming, I reckon?"

"Oh, fairly well," answered Helston, pleased to see him and introducing him to the others. "There have been several strange mishaps lately, which look suspiciously as if somebody was already working against us, but I think we shall be off in a week or two."

"Well, I call that just prompt; couldn't do it slicker in the United States. Maybe those accidents are simple coincidences."

"They may be, but they are very worrying, all the same," replied Helston, opening a telegram a waiter had brought him. He scanned it carelessly, but his jaw dropped. It was from the captain of the *Strong Arm*: "Regret to report Government powder barge fouled ram 8.15 to-night; drifted astern and sank, blowing up as she went down. Ship making water and down by the head. Must dock for examination. Explosion caused minor damages after-part of ship and stove in starboard plates of 'No. 1' destroyer. Regret report three men 'No. 1' killed. Crew of barge took to dinghy and pulled ashore."

Helston read it aloud, to the consternation of the others. "That means our departure delayed indefinitely," he said bitterly. "I must be off to Portsmouth at once." He went up to his room to pack a bag. Presently there was a knock at the door and Hopkins came in.

"Excuse me bothering you just now, Captain, but I've gotten an idea that this explosion ain't all fair and square, and I just want to fix up a contract with you."

"Well, what is it?" asked Helston, amused at his earnestness.

"Well, I reckoned this affair was going to be a simple slap-up picnic, and if there's devilry about now there will be a jolly sight more before you've squared yards, and I'm just keen to be in it. I'm a bit of a sailor and picked up a bit of the lingo, so I should be worth my nose-bag. Will you take me on, sir, if you find this explosion was due to treachery?"

"I'll see about it when I come back," replied Helston.

"Thank you, sir. Good-night;" and Hopkins disappeared.

"I don't care for that man," said the Doctor, as he saw Helston off to Portsmouth (they were talking of Hopkins). "He talks too much, and I hate foreigners. I hope you won't take him."

However, Hopkins himself was apparently confident that he would be taken, for next morning at breakfast he joined their table, quite unasked, and kept forcing his conversation on the Doctor. Now there was one thing the Doctor would never do, and that was, talk at breakfast; not even till he had had his after-breakfast pipe was it safe to address him, and he happened to be especially "livery" that morning. He was boiling over with wrath when the meal was over.

"Bad temper, I suppose it is," growled the Doctor, as, later, he jumped into a hansom and drove to the U.S. Legation; "a villainous liver that makes me dislike that fellow. At any rate, if he comes with us we had better know all about him."

At the Embassy he managed to get hold of several old navy lists, and found the name Reginald S. Hopkins given as a cadet on board the *Monocacy* in 1885, but no mention of it in later years.

He enquired whether the Naval Attaché was in the building, and, as luck would have it, he was, and could give the Doctor more information.

"A naval officer yourself, Doctor?" said the Attaché, looking at his card.

"Yes; belong to the 'pirate-catchers', as we are called, and this man Hopkins is very anxious to join us."

"Well, I see by my books that he retired, by permission, from the *Monocacy* in 1885."

"I found that out down below; but you know nothing more about him, I suppose?"

"Well, not officially, you know; but three or four years ago I was Flag Lieu-

tenant of our Asiatic squadron, and we heard that he had been mixed up with the China-Japanese war, was in a Chinese ship at the battle of Yalu, and was afterwards said to have made a pile of money by buying the wrecked ships and selling them as old iron. He'd probably be a useful man for you to get hold of, I should think."

"I think he would," said the Doctor gravely. "I suppose you never met him?"

"No, never; but there were rumours that he led a wild kind of adventurous life among the Chinese with two partners, an Englishman and a German, prospecting for mines or running expeditions against rebellious provincial rebels. They used to be called the 'Mysterious Three' at the Tientsin Club, if I remember rightly, and were said to be hand in glove with many of the highest officials."

"It was a bad temper and a worse liver before," muttered the Doctor, as he drove away and directed the cab to a well-known detective agent, "but after hearing this—whether it's curiosity or suspicion, I'm going to find out more about that young man."

Next morning he received a letter from Helston at Portsmouth, which confirmed his fears that another and successful attempt had been made to damage the expedition. What was left of the powder barge had been examined by divers, who had reported that it certainly was not like the usual Government barges. The crew of three had disappeared, though they must have landed safely, as their dinghy had been hauled up the beach at Southsea, and this fact enhanced suspicions. Both "No. 1" and the *Strong Arm* had been docked by Admiralty permission at Portsmouth, and the repairs, which were being pushed forward night and day, would take at least six weeks in the case of "No. 1", though the cruiser was found to have suffered but minor damage.

"The bill will be tremendous," wrote Helston, rather despairingly, "not so much for the actual repairs, but it means keeping and feeding all the crews for six weeks more than I had calculated. At any rate they are, I am glad to say, all the keener after this affair to get to close quarters with the scoundrels, who have hit them below the belt. After the funeral of the three men of the destroyer who were killed, I went aboard each ship, fell the men in aft, and told them that any man who wished to back out of the job could give in his name to the master-at-arms. They broke out into cheers, and not a man has done so."

"Foul play after all, Hopkins," said the Doctor later, when he met the American.

"Well, I can't say I'm sorry about it," he answered frankly, "if it gives me a chance of a look in at the game."

Every day the detectives employed by the Doctor reported to him Hopkins's movements, but nothing suspicious whatever occurred for some days. He spent his time visiting business houses especially connected with the China trade,

and in the evenings was either at the hotel or a theatre. Then, however, he was reported to have visited, the previous evening, after dark, a large "doss-house" near the Millwall docks, a place kept by a Chinaman for the use of the Chinese firemen and the deck hands employed in the ships trading to the East. He had stayed there nearly two hours, shoved several papers into his pocket as he came out, and was accompanied to the door by two Chinese, who appeared to treat him with the greatest respect.

It happened that he had hurried away from dinner that night on the pretence of going to a theatre.

"He's a liar, at any rate," thought the Doctor, but his suspicions turned into a different and more startling channel before the morning was over.

There were two little American boys staying in the hotel who had struck up a great friendship with Hopkins. Going down the main staircase he came upon these two—fighting as usual. "Clear out of this, you young rascals!" growled the Doctor, and the two boys ran away. Two steps lower down the Doctor noticed a brightly coloured stamp on the carpet, stooped down, and found it was one of a new issue of the Patagonian Republic. "Please, sir," said one of the boys coming back, "that's ours. Mr. Hopkins, the big man who sits at your table, gave it us this morning—tore it off a big envelope."

"I've never seen one before," said the Doctor, thinking of the strange coincidence.

"Mr. Hopkins has a big crackly paper with an enormous green sealing-wax seal just like it," chimed in the boy. "You ought to see it—it's lovely!"

"Phew! that's odd," he muttered. "What's Hopkins doing with Patagonian letters? And a 'big crackly paper with an enormous green seal' means an official document, so I should think. I hardly heard of the name till Helston told me they were trying to buy his ships. Phew! I wonder if he had anything to do with that? I'll find out."

But the Patagonian agency knew nothing of Hopkins. An Austrian by the name of Von Grootze had been engaged in the negotiations for ships, so the Doctor returned puzzled.

A few days later the detectives reported that Hopkins had again visited the "doss-house" in Millwall, and that next day a very large number of Chinese had shipped for Antwerp.

"Well, he seems to have something to do with these Chinese, receives communications from Patagonia, is a known adventurer, and, perhaps most convincing of all, I don't like him," thought the Doctor. "Helston is coming back tomorrow, and I'll have a long yarn with him about this business."

So next day he told Helston all the details that were arousing his suspicions, adding, "I don't suppose there is much in it, but I am a beastly suspicious fellow

and don't like him."

"Well," answered Helston very gravely, "do you know what was found in that powder barge? A dead Chinaman!—unrecognizable except for his pigtail. We've managed to keep the fact very quiet, but this somehow seems to connect things, doesn't it?"

The best thing to be done, they both agreed, was to keep their eye on Hopkins, and to do that more easily Helston decided to make out his commission as secretary to himself. Later, when he gave it to Hopkins, no one could deny that his expressions of extreme pleasure were genuine. Two nights later, however, the Doctor, coming back to the hotel at midnight, went up to Helston's room with a very grave face.

"Pretty late to turn a fellow out," said Helston, switching on the light. "Hullo, man, you look pretty scared! What's in the wind now?"

"I've just come from that doss-house of which I told you. I pretended to the boss that I wanted a Chinese cook to take out with me. He was an ugly old Cantonese, and took me into his little room—pugh! how the place did reek of garlic and stale clothes—and went off to try and find one. Whilst I was waiting I heard a shrill argument going on in the next room—there was only a wooden partition between—and presently I heard a voice, which I would swear anywhere was Hopkins's, ordering silence."

"He told us he was off to the theatre," interposed Helston, now thoroughly awake.

"You can imagine I was on the qui vive then, and did my best to hear what was going on. Two Chinamen were evidently trying to extort money from him, but they were talking so shrilly and so fast—you know how they talk when they are excited—that I could not make out much of it till another voice chimed in, and I distinctly heard: 'He smokee too muchee opium, massa. Me go shakee him—no can move—vely big man—no can wait—go topside plenty quick—jump in boat—all plenty chop, chop—then makee blow up. Ah Tung belong dead man—you pay blother fifty dollars can do—all belong ploper.' You know their pidgin-English?"

"Can you swear it was Hopkins's voice?" asked Helston. "That must have been the brother of the man killed in the powder barge."

"I would swear to that beastly nasal twang anywhere."

It was early next morning when the two separated, and then they had decided not to let Hopkins suspect that they knew his treachery, and still to allow him to reckon on joining the expedition.

"In fact," said Helston, "to have him on board will be our best safeguard, and we must see that he does not give us the slip."

The detective reported that Hopkins had been to the "doss-house" the night before, adding, with a smile, "which you probably know already, sir, for you were

there too".

As the Doctor and Helston were leaving the hotel—Helston going to his office and the Doctor for a walk—Hopkins joined them. "Any work for your secretary, Captain?" he asked good-humouredly. "I guess I'm just aching for a bit of quill-driving. I'm just about the cut of a secretary, am I not?" and he opened out his broad shoulders and smacked his chest vigorously.

"Not till we get afloat, thanks," said Helston.

"All right; I'll just come along with you to the corner, and then I'll be off. Have to make a few dollars—you Britishers aren't half smart—before I go sailoring again."

As they came to the end of the street they saw a small crowd curiously gazing at three Chinamen looking in at an A.B.C. shop.

"I'll pull those three fellows' legs," said the American, and, as they forced their way through the little crowd, he whistled the first line of "Chin, Chin, Chinaman".

The crowd recognized the tune at once, and there were shouts of "Chin, Chin, Chinaman!"

The Chinese turned round with fury in their eyes, whilst the crowd jeered at them.

The Yankee, laughing loudly, wished his friends good-bye. "Guess a Chinaman won't learn manners in London, anyhow."

"Well, he's not a gentleman, at any rate," said Helston, when he had gone. "Funny those three being there; you don't often see them so far from the docks."

"My blessed aunt!" said the Doctor excitedly, "it was a put-up job. I see it clearly. Hopkins wanted them to be able to recognize us again. Didn't you notice that they looked at us and no one else; and, now I think of it, he put his arm through yours just at the time—that was to point you out more particularly."

"Stuff and nonsense, Doc! You must not jump to conclusions like that. It was all done too naturally; I can't believe it."

"You always were an idiot," growled the Doctor. "I'd bet you anything I'm right."

However, every day after this, Helston met these Chinese—not always the same, he felt sure—and they always gave him a cold, impassive stare from under their slit-like lids as they passed him going to or coming from the office. Did he go round a back, unfrequented way, they were waiting for him outside his office when he left it. Did he walk on the other side of the road, they crossed over to gaze at him. There was no doubt left in Helston's or in the Doctor's mind that these men were in Hopkins's pay, and were being made familiar with Helston's appearance, in order to be able to kidnap or kill him when Hopkins gave the signal. Naturally it was exceedingly difficult to remain on friendly terms with

this man, whose presence seemed to make their flesh creep, but outwardly there was no change in their relationship, or, if there was, Hopkins did not seem to notice it.

A month later and the incessant strain of being constantly watched wherever he went, and the endless worries and delays attending the expedition, began to have their effect on Helston, who was visibly losing the vigour his new appointment had first given him.

"Let us get out of this, old chap," he almost gasped one day when, coming back to the hotel, they had been met by three more villainous Chinese standing almost inside the door.

"Pour me out something to drink, Doc, to take the taste of the ugly brutes out of my mouth. If I don't get away soon my luck will desert me again, and they will murder me somehow or other. I can't stand them much longer."

Helston paced up and down in a very agitated manner, and it was very evident that the strain of the last few weeks was wearing him to a shadow.

"Look here, old chap," he said, coming to a halt, and turning abruptly to Dr. Fox, "it's my idea that if Hopkins intends mischief he will wait till the last few days before either disappearing himself or setting those sneaking Chinese dogs on to me. If we can only get him aboard and start several days before he expects the expedition to sail, his treacherous schemes may fail.

"Now, my idea is this. The *Laird* runs her after-repair trials to-morrow, and I will telegraph to her Captain and order him to report defects requiring twelve days to repair, and make arrangements as if our departure would be delayed till then, and give the information to the Press.

"The scheme is this, Doc," he continued excitedly. "'No. 1' destroyer runs her trials on Saturday next after coming out of dock. My idea is for us to go down to Portsmouth, take Hopkins with us—as if only for the trial, you understand—and, when we are out at Spithead, signal to the remainder of the squadron to prepare for sea, and to send a telegram to the *Laird* at Birkenhead ordering her to meet me at a certain rendezvous."

"That fellow Hopkins is a greater fool than I take him for if he is deceived by that," growled Dr. Fox.

"Perhaps you are right, but I will try; and I will wire to Cummins of the *Laird* at once."

"You had better use the cipher code," Dr. Fox suggested.

The twenty-four hours which followed the despatch of this telegram seemed like the same number of days.

Helston could not sleep. Twice during the night he came to Dr. Fox's room, with wild suggestions for warding off the blow he now felt certain was impending, and haggard and irresolute he paced to and fro in the smoking-room after

breakfast next morning.

At one moment he would decide to rush off to Birkenhead himself; at another, that he would pack up and go aboard the *Strong Arm* at Spithead and await results there. Finally, he did not stir from the hotel till the evening, when the reply to his telegram arrived. "Full-speed trial successful; sundry small defects; condenser-tubes require fourteen days to repair."

It was Hopkins who brought in the telegram.

"Confound him!" cried Helston, with well simulated wrath. "We shall never get to sea at this rate."

Orders were made out that the squadron would sail from Spithead in fifteen days' time, and the date of sailing was communicated to the Press.

It was only Helston and Dr. Fox who knew that it would actually sail a week earlier.

"Thank God," exclaimed Helston, "there are only a few more days of these hateful Chinese!"

CHAPTER V
The Squadron leaves hurriedly

A Break-down Averted—The "Sylvia" and the Destroyers

The Narrative is continued by Lieutenant Hugo John Pattison, R.N.

My name is Pattison, and I'm lieutenant in command of destroyer "No. 1", belonging to Captain Helston's squadron; and trouble enough I had to get her, and shouldn't have done so after all, but for a jolly little girl living at Fareham, who knew the Skipper when he was on half-pay.

"No. 1", of course, you remember, was damaged by the explosion out at Spithead, and had spent weeks in Portsmouth repairing. At last everything was ship-shape again, and on 16th October we were lying alongside the basin waiting for the Skipper, who was coming out on our trials, with steam blowing off in clouds and Elridge, our Engineer, getting very impatient. Presently down came

Captain Helston, looking pretty well fagged out, and with him surly old Dr. Fox, and his Yankee secretary. Directly they got aboard, I cast off and threaded my way down the harbour and out to Spithead. As we were passing the end of Southsea pier the Captain borrowed my telescope, and saying, "There they are again", handed it to me.

"Those three Chinese, sir?" I asked him.

"Yes; they followed me down from town, and have been shadowing me for the last four weeks. You can imagine I am thankful to get afloat once more."

On our way to the measured mile we had to pass close to the rest of the squadron anchored at Spithead, and we stopped engines alongside the *Strong Arm*, whilst a boat came across for orders.

When we started again the Skipper seemed much relieved, and I quickly knew why, for he came for'ard to the bridge and told me to make for a rendezvous 250 miles s.w. of the Needles, and that there we should be joined by the rest of the fleet. "Thank God, Pattison, I'm at sea once more!"

"Not going back, sir?" I asked, naturally very surprised.

"No, Pattison, no. I'm sorry to inconvenience everybody, but it was absolutely necessary. Haven't you wished your people good-bye yet?"

"No," I answered, getting rather red in the face, for I was thinking that I had never even thanked the little girl who had got me my appointment.

"Nor have I, nor have I," half sighed the Skipper to himself.

The Doctor was apparently in the secret, but Hopkins, the Yankee, seemed terribly cut up, as he had made arrangements for a week's leave on very urgent private affairs, and in fact was only waiting for "No. 1" to get back to Portsmouth to start. How strange it is that Americans never seem to have any idea of discipline? He took it almost as a personal insult that he had not been informed previously, and for a second I thought he would fly at the Captain, he looked so angry. However, he calmed down quickly enough.

The orders that the Captain had sent aboard the *Strong Arm* were to direct Captain Hunter to proceed to the given rendezvous at easy speed, weighing as soon as possible after sending a boat ashore to telegraph to the Captain of the *Laird*.

They were exceedingly prompt in obeying this last order, for before five minutes elapsed, we saw their picket-boat tearing along in the direction of Portsmouth.

Hopkins is a careless fellow, and nearly brought us to grief. He had been down below poking about in the engine-room, and, just before we began to settle down to our trial, Elridge came up to the bridge to report to the Captain. As he was going away again he jokingly said to Hopkins: "It's lucky I went round after you. You know those lubricator feeds you couldn't understand? I found

that you'd left every oil-cock turned off, and our starboard crank bearings would have been red-hot in a few minutes. You are a careless beggar."

"I'm so mighty inquisitive," apologized Hopkins, and asked Elridge to let him come down below again.

"Certainly not; I want you up here," said Captain Helston, in so angry a manner that everyone was quite astonished.

The news that we were not going back soon spread amongst my men, and Captain Helston ordered me to fall them in, just abaft the bridge, and made them a little speech—just the right thing—no big words and high-sounding phrases. He told them he was very sorry they wouldn't have the opportunity of wishing their friends good-bye, said he relied on them to do their duty, and held out the probability of prize-money. He has a fine, tall, commanding figure, and his speech went down with the men very well.

Nothing important happened. We never pressed the engines to full speed, and after a short time dropped to fifteen knots, which we kept up all through the afternoon, steering out of the usual course of ships running up or down channel till we reached the rendezvous and stopped engines.

Next morning "No. 2" and "No. 3" joined us. Late that afternoon the *Strong Arm* and the *Sylvia*, armed store-ship, joined company, and, ten hours later, we were all exceedingly pleased to sight the *Laird*. Captain Helston, his secretary, and Dr. Fox went aboard her as soon as possible, and the squadron, now united for the first time, steamed for Gibraltar.

I rather fancy we were all somewhat disappointed at sneaking away in the dark, as it were, and had rather expected, and looked forward to, a hearty send-off. There wasn't much time for regrets, however, for we had all our time taken up keeping station with the next ships ahead and astern, and plenty to think about.

Our little squadron made a brave show. First came the *Laird*. She was a cruiser of 6500 tons, with a narrow 4-inch belt all round her water-line. On her fo'c'stle she carried an 8-inch Q.F., another on the poop, and on each broadside were six 6-inch Q.F.—three on each side of the main deck in casemates, and three above on the upper deck behind shields.

Besides these she had eight 12-pounders and six 3-pounders, three in her fore-top and three in the maintop of her military masts. Four Maxims were mounted on the two bridges, and she also carried two 12-pounder field-guns. She had Belleville boilers, and had done 22-1/2 knots on her trial. She did not carry much coal, however, everything being sacrificed to armour, guns, and speed, so that her total coal stowage was only 900 tons.

After her came the *Strong Arm*: 3600 tons, eight 6-inch Q.F., ten 6-pounder Q.F., three 1-pounders; speed, 20 knots.

She had a search-light platform, with a fighting-top under it, on each mast, and these gave her a somewhat clumsy appearance; but she was a fine heavily armed little cruiser, and excellent in a sea-way.

The third in the line was the *Sylvia*, a trim, looking, strongly built merchant steamer, with a raking funnel and two pole masts.

She had four 12-pounders mounted on her sides and in addition carried two more field-guns and a couple of Maxim guns on field-carriages, which two guns were destined to play a very important part.

Besides 2000 tons of coal, she carried great supplies of provisions, ammunition, and stores of all kinds. On board also were the torpedoes and torpedo-tubes of the destroyers, for these had been taken out to lighten them during the long voyage to Hong-Kong. "No. 1", "No. 2", and "No. 3", in this order, brought up the rear of the line. Each of us carried one 12-pounder on our bridges, and five 6-pounders in addition. As it happened, though otherwise almost indistinguishable, my boat, "No. 1", had four funnels; "No. 2", two large ones, far apart; whilst "No. 3" had three. The identity of each could therefore be seen at a glance. "No. 2" had actually made the highest speed on her trial, 29.6 knots, "No. 3" had just touched 29.5, and my boat 28.9; but probably in a long race there would not be much to choose between them. We could practically keep up between 25 and 27 knots indefinitely, and be able occasionally to get another two knots for a short burst.

As to the men who formed the crews, there were on board:

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*Laird* ................... 463
*Strong Arm* .............. 312
*Sylvia* ..................  40
Three destroyers .......... 177
                            ——
    Total ................. 992
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The *Laird* carried 80 Marine Light Infantry and 100 naval petty officers and men; all the rest of the crew were picked from the Naval Reserve.

The *Strong Arm* had 40 Royal Marine Artillery and 60 Royal Navy men.

All the crews of the destroyers were men of the Royal Navy, previously trained in these delicate, fragile little craft.

Such was the composition of the little squadron, which, manned by nearly a thousand men, all volunteers, slowly steamed away from the rendezvous late

on the afternoon of 18th October, and, painted a dull olive-green from truck to water-line, shaped its course for Gibraltar, and soon disappeared in the rapidly closing twilight.

CHAPTER VI
The Voyage East

A Gun-room "Sing-song"—The Dumpling gets Wet—Hopkins Disappears—Off in Chase—Escape of One Patagonian—Off to Colombo

The Narrative of Mr. Harold Swinton Glover, Midshipman, R.N., serving on board the Imperial Chinese ship "Laird"

You heard about all the rum things that happened to us before we left England, and how we all went to sea suddenly, no one knew why. We thought we were safe then; but not a bit of it, and just before we got into Gibraltar they found a dynamite cartridge down in the stoke-hold, mixed up with a lot of coal. It was jolly lucky they found it, for Ogston—that's our Assistant Engineer—says there would have been an "awful catastrophe" if it had got into a furnace. Don't think we were in a funk, because we weren't—at any rate not all of us—but it is such a beastly feeling to know that you may be blown up any minute.

The Skipper was terribly worried even before we got to Gibraltar, but you should have seen his face when I took him down some telegrams they brought off to the ship. I was midshipman of the watch. He gasped like a dying fish, and sang out to the old Doctor, who was there: "They've killed the Paymaster, and taken all his papers—mine and Hopkins's; did it at Lyons, in the boat express."

They both looked so scared that I crept up on deck.

Afterwards I heard that the Paymaster had been left behind to bring some valuable papers across Europe, and to join us at Port Said.

Well, we got into Malta, and more telegrams came aboard; but I wasn't on watch, and didn't take them down. They must have been pretty serious, though, for whilst we were all shifting into plain clothes in the gun-room flat to go ashore,

the Commander's messenger came running down the ladder and sang out: "No leave for anybody!" So we had just to shove our things back into our chests and get into our dirtiest uniform, for the coal lighters were already alongside, and we were being smothered with coal dust. Jolly sick of life we were, too, I can tell you, for we had arranged to get ponies at Red Saliba's, down in the moat, and were off for a picnic to St. Paul's Bay.

"Some of us would probably have been killed or broken up, so p'raps it's all for the best," said Mellins (his real name was Christie, as I told you before, a tremendously fat cadet, who always saw the cheerful side of things), "and, now we've got the grub, we'll have a jolly good 'blow out' afterwards."

Then we all had to nip on deck, where we found any amount of row going on aft on the quarter-deck. The Skipper and Commander were there, looking very serious, with two marines close to them, holding a Chinaman covered with coal dust and in a terrible funk. You should have seen him roll his eyes.

I asked the side-boy what the row was, and he told me that a stoker had spotted him as a Chinaman, although his pigtail was coiled all round his head and he had a big cap over it, had searched him, just for luck, and found three dynamite cartridges in his pockets.

That was partly why our leave had been stopped, and one of us midshipmen had to stand at each coaling-port, with a couple of petty officers and a marine with fixed bayonet, examine every basket of coal, and prevent anybody coming on board, whilst others had to go down in the lighters themselves. "No blow out now," said Mellins sorrowfully, as he climbed down past me into the lighter; "but won't it come in handy afterwards?"

We examined that coal pretty thoroughly, you bet! Directly it came aboard it had to be upset on the deck, and we had to look through it carefully. But didn't it take a time, that's all! and weren't we jolly sick of it, especially when we couldn't get away for seven-bell tea?

Directly it got dark we knocked off, and then I had to go away in my cutter and patrol the starboard side, with nothing to eat except a tin of sardines, which Mellins passed out of the gun-room scuttle, and which I shared with the coxswain. He got the best of it, for he drank the oil.

We were relieved by another crew in an hour, and Mellins had saved me a bit of grub, which I tucked into, whilst the others started a good old gun-room sing-song.

Jeffreys, our Sub-lieutenant, who runs the show in the gun-room, suggested it. "Just show the beggars we don't mind, and cheer the men up. They've got dynamite on the brain."

When they heard our row some of the ward-room officers came down and joined in, and Hopkins, the Skipper's secretary, a jolly Yankee, gave a rattling

good song. My eye! didn't we make a noise! and soon after the men began a concert of their own, forward on the fo'c'stle. Presently the Master-at-Arms came down to order "lights out", and Jeffreys asked for another half-hour (Jeffreys is a good chap, though he does lay it into us midshipmen if anything goes wrong), and the Clerk banged away at the piano again.

Then who should come down but the Skipper; and we made way for him to get a seat near the piano, and he joined in the chorus. When it was over, he got up and said: "Thank you, gentlemen, your sing-song was a good idea. Good-night!" And as he went away we gave him three cheers and "For he's a jolly good fellow", and went to sleep on our chests and in odd corners, for the ship and we were much too dirty to sling our hammocks.

We were at it again soon after sunrise, looking at every lump that came aboard, and some time after breakfast, whilst we were having a stand-easy, three destroyers came slowly in, flying a funny flag, which none of us had seen before, but which the signalman told me was the Patagonian.

We could not help laughing, for the first one was towing both the others, and one of these had a great list to port. It was a very comical sight. Hopkins borrowed my glass. "I reckon that ain't much of an advertise for the man who built those craft," he said in his funny Yankee drawl; nor was it, for they had evidently broken down.

Well, we got all our coal in by noon, had an hour for dinner, and then were hard at it cleaning down. It's really not bad fun, when you are horribly coal-dusty and it's jolly hot, to paddle about in bare feet, with your trousers tucked up above your knees, and the fire-hoses splish-splashing on the deck and washing the coal dust away—you get very wet, and it's jolly refreshing. I was bossing the quarter-deck, and the old quarter-master and I were watching the newly arrived destroyers, now busily coaling.

"What's them colours, sir?" said the wiry old man. "I never see'd 'em afore, and I've been nigh twenty-four years at sea, man and boy."

"Patagonian," I answered, and he borrowed a telescope and looked at them.

"Sure, there's some dirty Chinamen on board that craft, sir. Look at their heads poking out of the engine-room 'atchway."

Sure enough, there were five or six unmistakable Chinese faces, and I could see one coiling his pigtail round his head.

Of course we had Chinese on the brain rather badly, and Dunning (we called him Suet Dumpling, because his name was Cyril—a sneaking, underhanded, little midshipman, who couldn't pull himself up once on the horizontal bar), who was standing by us, ran and told the lieutenant on watch what we had seen, just as if he'd made the discovery himself, and he was sent down to tell the Skipper.

Up came the Skipper, for he couldn't see the destroyers out of his stern-ports, and stood looking at them, with that ass, Suet Dumpling, grinning with importance just behind him. "Tell the Commander I want to see him in my cabin," said the Skipper, and went down below again with a very grim-looking face.

The Dumpling ran forward to find the Commander. Now the man who was using the hose was washing down the battery-screen, close to the battery door, and, just as the Dumpling was disappearing through it, I called out to the man, and he turned round with the hose in his hand, just as I wanted, Dumpling getting it all in his back—he had just shifted into a clean white tunic, too. He was pretty wild, for he knew I had done it on purpose, but didn't say anything, though I thought I had better not sleep in my hammock that night, lest he should cut me down.

We slipped from our buoys at four o'clock and went to sea, passing quite close to the Patagonians, but there were no Chinese to be seen, and men were very busy on the two disabled ones, and the pumps on the one with the list to port were going for alt they were worth.

Of course we were all excited, the men especially, for we'd become so suspicious of Chinamen, that when everyone knew that there were some aboard these destroyers, we felt sure there must be something wrong about them.

"Why, Patagonia doesn't possess a single ship!" said Hammond, another of our Assistant Engineers, a jolly little fellow, who is a walking *Brassey's Naval Annual*, and knows every man-of-war in the world by name, and what guns she has, and all that. "Rather odd these three being there, and having Chinamen on board."

Then a rumour spread that the skipper had been heard to say to the Doctor; "If they *are*, they won't give us much trouble, for two of them seem badly broken down".

It was the detestable Dumpling who brought the news. "What did the Doctor say then?" we asked.

"'Whatever they are, they've stopped me going ashore, hang them! Everyone seems to have Chinese, pirates, dynamite, and Patagonia on the brain,'" said Dumpling, imitating the Doctor's irritable way of talking.

We all laughed. "Just like the old Doc," said Mellins. "I had to go for'ard to the sick bay this morning with stomach-ache, and he made me take some beastly castor-oil on the spot. I hate the stuff," and he grinned and said: "That's for kicking up that wretched row last night down in the gun-room. Kept me awake till midnight."

"The selfish old brute," we all agreed; "he doesn't care what happens, so long as he makes himself comfortable."

We were so excited about these destroyers, that I fancy most of us imagined

we should see them suddenly tearing after us.

Whatever the Skipper thought, he was at any rate not going to be caught napping, and directly it was dark we altered course till we were twenty miles north of the usual track, and not a single light was allowed to be shown. I had to go round all the starboard cabins and see that the dead-lights were down, and in the middle watch, which I kept aft on the quarter-deck, I was responsible that they were kept closed. Funnily enough, Mr. Hopkins wouldn't seem to understand that he mustn't show a light, and twice I saw his scuttle lighted up during the night. I was afraid the Skipper might come on deck and see it and drop on him, so went down into his cabin. He seemed very bad-tempered, couldn't go to sleep on account of the heat, and must have his scuttle open to get fresh air, and his light burning to try to read himself to sleep. At last I told him straight that I should report him to the lieutenant on watch, and he then seemed to understand it really was necessary.

Nothing happened in the night, nothing indeed till we reached Port Said, where, right in front of us, were the three Patagonians coaling again!

The Skipper got more telegrams here, and it soon leaked out that the destroyers had all left Malta only two hours after us, all three steaming very fast in our direction. The harbour-master told us they had been in Port Said for two days, going out at dusk and not returning till morning; so we then felt sure that the break-down at Malta was all rot, and that they had simply been waiting for us off Port Said. Luckily the Skipper had refused to go near Port Said in the dark, but had waited about all night a long way to the north and east—the most unlikely place for us to be.

As soon as we made fast to a buoy, I was sent away in the second cutter and ordered to board the P. & O. *Isis*, which was lying off the Suez Canal offices (she had come in early that morning from Brindisi with the mails), and bring back a lieutenant who was to join us—a Mr. Staunton, who had been left behind in London with the Paymaster, who was killed at Lyons.

When I forced my way through the crowd of boats alongside, I slipped up the ladder and asked for him. The quarter-master, however, said he had gone in a man-of-war's boat several hours before, so I pulled back and reported. Then I was sent over to H.M.S. *Hebe*, one of our own gun-boats, doing guardship there, but they knew nothing of him—they had sent a boat for mails to the *Isis*, but she certainly had brought back no passengers. This was very strange, so I made my boat's crew lay back to their oars, and reported to the Commander as soon as possible.

He took me down to the Skipper, who looked very vexed when he heard the news. After that I and two other midshipmen had to go ashore and make enquiries at the consuls and all the hotels—a terribly hot day, too, it was, with an

awful glare which fagged us all—but we could hear nothing of him. When we got back to the ship the three Patagonians had gone, and not only that, but Hopkins had disappeared, and, I can tell you, there was tremendous excitement on board.

Everyone, of course, felt sure that Mr. Staunton was on board one of the Patagonian destroyers and now miles down the canal, and many thought that probably Mr. Hopkins too had been somehow decoyed away. You see he was just the man they would want, for he was the Skipper's secretary and would know everything. Whilst we three were trying to get something to eat, the Commander's messenger sang out for me and Toddles (Toddles was the next senior midshipman), so up we had to go again.

"Get a few warm things together, and be ready to leave the ship in five minutes," he said. "You, Mr. Foote, are lent to 'No. 1', and you, Mr. Glover, to 'No. 3'." As we left the cabin to hurry down below he called out: "Don't forget flannel shirts and sea boots".

"All right, sir, thank you," we answered joyfully.

I borrowed one of Dumpling's bags, which I found lying about (I didn't ask him), and we were ready before the boat came alongside, Mellins giving us a basketful of grub as we shoved off. Toddles was put aboard "No. 1", and then they put me aboard "No. 3", where I reported to Mr. Parker, the lieutenant in command.

Luckily for me, Toddles in his hurry had forgotten his share of the grub.

I was sent aft to look after the stern ropes and see that everything was "clear" astern, for we were on the point of shoving off.

"What's up? Where are we off to?" I asked two men standing aft.

"Going after them pirates, sir, I expect. I heard Mr. Parker tell the Sublootenant that we 'ad to follow them as 'ard as we could."

I hadn't any time to ask more, for Mr. Parker sang out from the bridge "Let go aft!" and we hauled in the slip on the buoy astern. When the rope was clear of her screws and rudder I shouted out "All clear astern, sir", and away we went, following close behind "No. 2".

As we went past the other three ships the men crowded to the side and cheered us, for they had got wind of what we were going to do. It does make you feel ripping to hear and see people cheering you.

From the *Laird* Mellins made a semaphore signal with his arms, "Is grub safe?" so I waved back "Yes", and on we went into the canal. It soon became dark, and our French pilot made us run our search-light, though it wasn't much good, as the bridge got in the way. However, it lighted up both sides of the steep sandy banks, and we followed "No. 2" somehow or other. Of course we wanted to go as fast as we could, and the pilot nearly had apoplexy, shrieking and gesticulating with fright or anger, whenever "No. 2" forged too far ahead and we had to put

on a few more revolutions to close up. "The wash, it will damage the banks!" he yelled. "They will make you pay. I give up my authority—I wipe my hands." Then we would slow down again and he would be quiet.

We reached the Great Bitter Lake about eleven o'clock and there changed pilots. The Patagonians were only two hours ahead, and we simply tore through this part of the canal. I felt jolly nervous, I can tell you, for everything looked all the darker on account of the searchlight, and we were simply sticking on to the stern of "No. 2". If she or "No. 1" had stopped suddenly we should have been all in a heap. I expect "No. 1" had an English pilot on board, or a Norwegian, perhaps. Our Frenchman was paralysed with funk.

We quieted down when we got into the narrow canal again.

We had to tie up once to let a big British India mail steamer pass us, and did not get out of the canal till ten next morning.

The Patagonians, we were told, had left three hours before; so after them we bustled, only stopping to let our pilots be taken off.

"Steam for full speed" was signalled from "No. 1", and down below dived Mr. Chapman, our engineer, to superintend things in the stokehold.

"They have three hours' start," said Mr. Parker to the Sub, "and it will be a very long stern chase."

"What have we to do if we catch them?" he asked.

"Search them," replied Mr. Parker.

"But what if they won't let us?"

"Search them," replied Mr. Parker, with a queer twinkle in his eye, and then I knew that there might be a fight. It gave me a funny feeling in my stomach, but I knew I was jolly lucky to get the chance and so ought to feel glad, and I really think I did.

We were all going it now with a vengeance. The smoke from "No. 1" and "No. 2" nearly blinded us, and we were shaking and throbbing as the hum of the engines gradually rose, our bows coming out of the water, and our stern squatting down in a mass of foam as we rushed into the wake of the others ahead of us.

I had never been so fast in my life, and was holding on to the bridge rails to avoid being blown away.

We went on like this for hours, and I felt too excited to go down below and get anything to eat. That shows what a ripping thing it is to be rushing along in a destroyer with an enemy ahead.

Presently we formed line abreast, "No. 2" on the starboard and we on the port side of "No. 1", about three miles away from each other, so as to cover more ground.

As it was getting dark we saw "No. 1" slow down to speak a small merchant steamer going north, and directly afterwards we were ordered back to Suez to

inform Captain Helston that all three Patagonians had been sighted steaming south very fast.

Round went our helm, we heeled well over, our stern swung round, and we were off on our way back before you could say "knife"; but you should have heard what Mr. Parker and the Sub said, and the quarter-master too, for that matter, only he didn't do it so loudly.

We made our number to the *Laird* at Suez early next morning, having kept up nearly twenty-seven knots for the last twenty hours—a jolly good performance. We hadn't to wait long, for we ran alongside the *Sylvia*, filled up with coal, took ten tons in bags on deck, and away we went for Aden at twenty knots—quite an easy, comfortable speed.

I had to see the coal aboard, and made myself beastly dirty, and much missed the gun-room bath on board the *Laird*.

We got into Aden on the third afternoon without meeting any adventures. "No. 2" and "No. 1" were there, and so were two of the three Patagonians.

Mr. Pattison and Mr. Lang, the Skippers of "No. 1" and "No. 2", came aboard of us directly. They told us that they had reached Aden only four hours after the Patagonians.

They immediately made arrangements to coal, and meanwhile had gone on board the two Patagonians in frock coats and swords, and been received in a very friendly manner, and shown all over both, and not a trace of Staunton, Hopkins, or Chinese, for the matter of that, could they see. "We felt rather sold, you can imagine," said Mr. Pattison, "at having our long chase for nothing—a very tame ending."

The third destroyer, we were told by people on shore, had left an hour before we came, and was sighted from the top of the rock making east, till she disappeared below the horizon steaming at great speed.

"I could not follow her," continued Mr. Pattison, "for of course we had no coal, and some of our condenser-tubes were leaking badly, and both of us required a few days in harbour to put things right down in the engine-room. And not only that, but I dare not let these two Patagonians out of my sight, for Captain Helston thinks they will probably lie in wait for him in the Straits to the westward."

"We can go on directly we've coaled," interposed Mr. Parker eagerly, "for there is nothing the matter with us. Is there, Chapman?"

"No, rather not," answered our Engineer, adding, "we're Laird's built, you know."

"Very good," said Mr. Pattison, who was the senior of the three Lieutenants and therefore took command, "off you go to Colombo as soon as you have coaled, watered, and provisioned. The third Patagonian has most probably shipped Staunton, Hopkins, and all the Chinese to allay our suspicions of these

other two, and whatever course she steers, if she is going out to the East, she must fetch up at Colombo. If she won't allow you to search her there, follow her out to sea and compel her to heave-to."

"Very good, sir," replied Mr. Parker, saluting.

"Well, good-bye, old chap; wish you good luck. Lang and I will be off, for here come your coal-lighters. When you are ready to shove off I'll make you a misleading signal, which you must act upon till out of sight of land, for those fellows can probably read our semaphore, and will be standing by to get any information possible."

CHAPTER VII
The Pursuit of the Patagonian

We Sight Her—A Stern Chase—We Overhaul Her—We Have to Apologize—Spinning the Yarn

Mr. Midshipman Glover's Narrative continued

For the next two hours we were hard at work, and when we signalled that we were ready for sea, and hoisted the "permission to weigh and proceed in pursuance of previous orders", "No. 1" semaphored, "Inform *Laird* that I cannot meet squadron, as condensers require repair".

"That's the misleading signal," Mr. Parker said, as he and the Sub spelt it out; "I only hope those fellows read and swallow it, for if they do they will imagine we are going up the Red Sea again."

To "create a diversion", as the Sub put it, we steered W. after clearing the harbour till out of sight of land, as if we were going to meet the squadron, then we steered S.E. for a couple of hours, and finally altered our course for Colombo.

It was very hot, very tedious, and very monotonous work steaming across the Indian Ocean. We had to go slow to economize our coal, and all fresh food gave out two days after we left Aden, and I hate tinned stuff altogether. I had to do my share of watch-keeping during the day, and soon learnt to handle "No. 3"

as easily as a ship's steam-boat. You can imagine we grew excited as we began to approach Colombo. Whether we caught her or not depended almost entirely on whether they had believed the misleading signal at Aden, for if they thought we were on our way to Colombo, they would have, of course, hurried her away by telegraph.

"If we don't catch her now we never shall, for there are any number of places she can hide in and coal between Colombo and Singapore or Saigon," said Mr. Parker.

"Well, shall we shove her on a little?" suggested Mr. Chapman. "At this rate we shall get in to-morrow evening with eighteen tons of coal on board. I could give you another knot and a half if you like."

There was a long discussion about it—I was too young, of course, and did not have anything to say—but they finally decided it would be safer to have some few tons in hand.

"You see," argued Mr. Parker, as all three leant up against the bridge rails, "if they sight us before they know by telegram that we are on our way, they may think that we have no coal left and may 'clear out', imagining that we can't chase them. That would be certainly their most reasonable plan, wouldn't it? That's what I should do if I were in their shoes. We will just shove on every knot you can give us, Chapman, directly we sight the lighthouse, and that won't give them much time to get away."

I had the morning watch from four till eight, and had gone below to get some breakfast—sardines, jam, and ship's biscuit—when suddenly I heard the engine-room gong clang, and could feel the engines whizzing round. The plates began dancing about the table, and my coffee was nearly all spilt before I could drink it. I stuffed down the last two sardines in one mouthful and rushed up on deck. All the men were crowding forward under the bridge, gesticulating and pointing ahead. Climbing up to the bridge, I could make out the lighthouse and the long breakwater of Colombo.

"Is she coming out, sir?" I asked, for I could not see anything through my telescope—we were shaking so, and the ship was so unsteady. "The signalman says she is," said Mr. Parker, with his eye glued to his telescope. "Yes, there she goes! Look at that dark patch on the breakwater. That's smoke, and she's underneath it. My eye! she's getting up speed pretty quickly."

In another half-minute we could see her with the naked eye. She was showing up dark against the white breakwater, and was tearing through the water, running almost at right angles to us till she cleared the breakwater and the rocks. We were drawing rapidly together when she put her helm over. We saw her heel over, swing round, right herself as she settled down on her proper course, and away she flew, the Patagonian flag stiffening out astern.

"Follow her, Davis," sang out Mr. Parker to the petty officer at the wheel, as he tried to light his pipe behind the chart table. "Go to quarters, Collins (the Sub), and pass up ammunition." The Gunner and Mr. Collins flew down on deck to see everything prepared, leaving only Mr. Parker and myself on the bridge.

He shouted down the engine-room voice tube, "How much coal have you left, Chapman?"

"Nearly fourteen tons."

"How long will that last at full speed?"

"Rather more than an hour and a half," came the muffled reply.

"Then give me every ounce of steam you can raise."

At the time the Patagonian had altered course there was about one mile and a half between us, but she was rapidly gaining, for we had not yet reached our highest speed, and she was evidently doing all she knew. She was almost hidden under a great cloud of smoke, and occasionally entirely hidden by spray, for a slight choppy head sea, which we had not noticed before when going slowly, was now covering us fore and aft with spray.

Down I had to go to see the boats all ready for lowering, and when this was done run several messages to the Sub, who by this time had men at all the guns, and plenty of ammunition on deck. There wasn't much doubt that Mr. Chapman and his men were doing their utmost, for now we could feel the engines humming round like sewing machines, the ship began to throb and vibrate with a funny wriggle which you could almost see when you looked aft along the deck from the bridge. It was just as much as I could do to hang on to the bridge rails with one hand and keep my cap on with the other, whilst the spray wetted us from head to foot. The 12-pounder's gun crew had come up to the bridge and fondly cleared her away and loaded her. Then I felt that funny sensation in my stomach again, the sardines and the wobbling I expect it was, and hung on to the bridge and gasped for breath between the showers of spray.

You should have seen our funnels! What paint was left on them came off just like the skin of scarlet fever people when they peel, great roaring flames licked out of them, and clouds of smoke went rushing aft, whilst astern was a huge mass of churned-up foam, looking as if it would fall on board.

We must have been chasing her for nearly half an hour, and did not appear to be gaining. Mr. Parker kept on anxiously looking at his watch as we rushed along—now leaving Colombo behind us and running away from the dark belt of trees which marked the shore.

Presently Mr. Chapman came up on deck, sweating all over. "She's doing as many revolutions as she did on her trials," he shouted; "her engines won't take any more steam, I'm only blowing it off," and he pointed to clouds of steam hissing away from each funnel.

"Make a signal, 'I wish to communicate and send a boat', and keep it flying," roared Mr. Parker to the signalman, who was evidently prepared, for he had already bent the proper flags and pendants to the halyards and quickly hoisted them, the bunting stiffening in the wind like painted steel. I forgot to say that the Chinese ensign, the Yellow Dragon, was flying at our stern. How we did wish it was our own white ensign.

We all watched for a reply, but none came. There was no doubt we were now gaining—we could plainly make out a few men on her bridge looking at us from time to time—and judging from the great masses of smoke which were pouring from her funnels, the stokers must have been working desperately hard to escape from us.

"We're well out of the three-mile limit, I think, Collins?" shouted Mr. Parker.

"Yes, sir—ten miles away."

"Then try a shot at twelve hundred yards, Jones (the 'No. 1' of the 12-pounder). Go as close to her as you can without hitting her."

"Very good, sir." And Jones, a huge muscular man pressed his shoulder against the mounting and bent over the sights. How we did throb and pitch—the muzzle of the gun never seemed still, and it seemed ages before Jones fired. There was a beastly sharp crack, the cordite smoke drove back into our eyes, and we all strained to see the result. The shell burst half a mile ahead of the Patagonian as it struck the water.

"No one can shoot from a platform like this," Collins said angrily; "we're dancing about like a lot of marionettes."

Jones fired another shot, which burst astern, but not the slightest effect had either—still no answer to our signal, and no attempt to lessen speed.

Just then Mr. Chapman reported that he only had two more tons left, and had swept every bunker. Mr. Parker groaned, "She'll get away, and I can't even get back to Colombo. Carry on firing as fast as you can, Collins, with your two for'ard 6-pounders."

Then we heard, below us, the joyful voice of the Gunner singing out, "Target, right ahead, at one thousand—independent firing—commence."

Wasn't there a banging. But I was too excited to mind the noise, and we all cheered as every now and again one of our little shells burst close to the Patagonian. We were closing rapidly, and could see all but two of her men clear rapidly down below. Then one of our shells struck a boat they had stowed inboard near the stern, and great pieces of it flew into the air. Didn't we cheer, for at this they had evidently had enough of it, and clouds of steam came roaring out of their funnels as they stopped their engines. We were going so fast that we were almost on top of them before Collins jumped for the telegraph, and put the engines full

speed astern and the helm hard over. With a great trembling and shaking our way was stopped, we swung clear, and lay still not fifty yards away from our prize. There was hardly need to use the engine-room telegraph to stop the engines, for they were gradually slowing down. Our fires were burning low, and there was no coal to replenish them.

"Train every gun that will bear on her," sung out Mr. Parker, "and stand by to fire. Get out the boats."

In two minutes the dinghy was in the water, and Mr. Parker was bobbing across the fifty yards that separated us. I had to follow him with six men in the collapsable Berthon boat, each of them armed with cutlass and rifle.

I felt jolly proud, you can imagine. We were alongside in a "jiffy". "You first, sir," said the coxswain, and shoved me up the smooth side, and I climbed aboard, followed by two of the men.

Mr. Parker was listening to a horrid little officer who was gesticulating and talking very furiously.

"Take six of your men to the fore bridge and don't leave it till I give you orders, and kick everyone else out of it," he ordered, so up we climbed and kicked the two men still left there down the ladder. They didn't want much kicking.

In a few minutes Mr. Parker went below, followed by the little officer, still stamping and swearing. He seemed to stay there for ages, and I was wondering whether I had not better send some of my men down after him, but could not disobey his orders, and of course there was "No. 3" with her guns trained on us not fifty yards away, and that was reassuring.

Presently up he came on deck, followed by Hopkins and a man I knew must be Mr. Staunton. The men in "No. 3" saw them and raised a great cheer; indeed, it was splendid to have rescued them, and so jolly lucky too, for we could not have caught her if she had run away for another five minutes.

But the best part of the "show" was to come, for presently up poured a number of Chinamen, I should think quite fifty, and they were taken across to "No. 3" in small parties till there wasn't one left. I felt jolly sorry for Mellins and the others of the *Laird* that they weren't there to see that little man stamp and fume and curse, whilst Mr. Parker looked on perfectly unconcernedly, and my six men kept their rifles at the present. I made 'em do this—I thought it would look better. When all the Chinese had gone, Mr. Chapman and his stokers came across, and the last boat-load towed over a grass hawser. With this they hauled aboard one of "No. 3's" cables, and then it dawned upon me that the Patagonian was going to tow us back to Colombo, for, of course, as I said before, we had no coal left, and were perfectly helpless.

It seemed rather rash to trust all those Chinese on board "No. 3" with only the very few hands left in her, but the leading seaman I had with me said, "Why,

bless your 'eart, sir, them devils is all doves and sucklings now", and as he had been out on the Chinese station and knew them, that settled it.

Well, we got back to Colombo all right, and tied up to buoys inside the breakwater, and then there was a proper row. The skipper of the Patagonian went ashore and wired to his Government, and they wired to Peking, and Peking wired to us, and the result was that Mr. Parker had to put on his No. 1 frock coat and apologize very humbly for his "unwarrantable and high-handed proceeding". The fact was, you see, that the little man, who had been an officer in the Mexican navy, really had all his papers in order, and no doubt had a commission from the Patagonian Government. He swore he knew nothing about Mr. Staunton and Hopkins except that they had been put aboard at Aden from the other two destroyers, "and they take away all my good men there and give me Chinese pigs". That explained why we had seen no Chinese in Aden on board the other two.

Mr. Staunton told us his adventures, and how he had been captured at Port Said.

When the *Isis*, bringing Mr. Staunton from Brindisi, had anchored at Port Said, a man-of-war's whaler manned by men dressed as English blue-jackets, and flying the Yellow Dragon, had come alongside for him. Without the least suspicion he had been pulled across to a destroyer also flying the Chinese colours, naturally thinking it was one of our own.

Directly he climbed aboard he was seized and tumbled down below. They had not misused him, but you can imagine what his feelings must have been; and he said the food was awful, although they gave him whatever they could. "How that destroyer did stink on the way across from Aden, with all that crowd of Chinese on board!" he said, grimacing with disgust at the very thought of it.

Mr. Hopkins told his adventures too. "Just hustled ashore to have a squint at those cunning weasels alongside the coal wharf, guessed they'd played us a mighty smart trick way back at Malta, and was mighty inquisitive to see 'the cut of their jibs'. Ain't been looking at 'em time enough to see a cat jump, when round came two hands in front of my face, fingers on 'em, too, like steel claws, and laid hold of my windpipe as loving as a mother-in-law.

"Then someone caught me a whack behind the knees which brought me down, and before I could say 'Johnny Jones' I was lifted up, bundled on board, and plumped on deck like a bag of spuds." Mighty pleased they both were to be rescued, and Mr. Hopkins kept on smacking his thigh and roaring with laughter. "My snakes, how those black-livered, herring-gutted, fried-up tar-brushes of Patagonians did get to wind'ard of you at Malta! Just about won this round though, Parker?"

"I should just think we had," answered Mr. Parker, smiling.

Well, in the middle of all this off came a Cingalee telegraph boy with what turned out to be a telegram from Captain Helston. Mr. Parker came on deck after he had deciphered it, with a very grave face, and said: "Mr. Hopkins, I am ordered by Captain Helston to inform you that you must consider yourself under arrest for going ashore without leave at Port Said. I must request you to go below."

This was a facer for everybody; but Mr. Hopkins, with a look of amazement, obeyed immediately, leaving us on deck wondering why Captain Helston had been so severe. "His worries must have made him confoundedly strict," said Mr. Parker.

For the next days we lay at this buoy, keeping our eyes on the Patagonian, and with steam "up" in case she tried to leave.

We had a jolly good time ashore, and the dinners at the Grand Oriental Hotel in the cool of the evening, with the punkahs swinging to and fro, were simply ripping.

Then along came the rest of the squadron safe and sound, much to our delight, and Mr. Staunton and Mr. Hopkins were sent over to the *Laird*. The latter was certain to get a terrible wigging from Captain Helston, and we all felt very sorry for him.

Mellins and a lot of other midshipmen came over from the *Laird*, and Tommy Toddles from "No. 1", bringing a big cake his mater had sent out by the mail. We had a tremendous chin wag, and it was jolly to meet them all again, and spin them the yarn of our chase and capture of the Patagonian. How they did envy me!

Whenever I see a big cake now, I always think of that afternoon, sitting round the after 6-pounder gun platform, with the awning over our heads, and the big scavenger-birds (Bromley kites we call them) swooping round us as we ate our way through Tommy's cake.

A big P. & O. liner, too, homeward bound—she had waited an hour to take our mails—passed close to us, and the passengers all came to the side and cheered us, so we midshipmen gave a loud whoop all together, which brought Mr. Parker up on deck to order us to "chuck it".

They went back to their ship soon, and we had to patrol the mouth of the harbour after sunset, in case those other two Patagonians came in.

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Ping Sang is Outwitted

Helston's Letter—A Tsi has Information—Ping Sang Acts Quickly—Ping Sang Watches—Ping Sang in Trouble—A Tsi Escapes—A Tsi Sights the Squadron—A Tsi Gives Warning

Mr. Ping Sang lived usually at Shanghai, but on hearing of the departure of Helston's squadron from Colombo, he had hurried down to Hong-Kong to confer with a friend of his, a wealthy merchant named Ho Ming, and to arrange for the rapid provisioning and refitting of the ships.

It was very necessary for the squadron to complete its task without delay, because the expenses of its maintenance were an enormous drain on the resources of the Trading Association, and also the depredations of the pirates had become so frequent, and their raids so successful, that coastal trade by Chinese-owned ships was at a stand-still. One thing was very clear, only ships belonging to Chinese subjects were attacked, and the most tempting bait, if belonging to Europeans, was left severely alone. Not a month ago a fine new steamer of 5000 tons had disappeared without leaving a trace whilst running from Amoy to Swatow—in fine weather, too—and it appeared that the pirates had begun to extend their operations to the northern part of the coast, for several ships had lately vanished near the mouth of the Yangtze in the most unaccountable manner.

An English gun-boat cruising among the Chusan Islands had reported meeting three ships flying the Chinese colours, ships which they were almost positive did not belong to the Chinese Government; but when a further search was made for them, they had disappeared.

Ping Sang was also anxious that the stay of the squadron at Hong-Kong should be as short as possible, for he was convinced that if the pirates intended making any more attempts to destroy the ships, they would choose that harbour in which to do it. One reason was that, ready to hand among the crews of the myriad of junks always assembled there, were hundreds of cut-throats from the lower reaches of the West river only too willing to commit any crime for money; and he was especially anxious to confer with Ho Ming, for this merchant owned a large fleet of junks trading up the river beyond Canton, and their captains and crews would probably be better able to obtain information as to the presence or suspicious movements of these desperadoes than even the police authorities themselves.

These two—Ping Sang and Ho Ming—were sitting in the latter's smoking-room on the evening of December 21 smoking their after-dinner cigars, whilst A Tsi, Ho Ming's confidential clerk and comprador, was detailing the results of his enquiries among the native floating population.

They were interrupted by an obsequious, white-gowned butler, who ad-

vanced through the mat-screened doorway and handed a letter to Ping Sang—a letter which Captain Helston had written from Singapore.

"**The Imperial Chinese Ship *Laird***, Singapore, *14th December*.

DEAR MR. PING SANG,

My last letter reporting the proceedings of my squadron was written from Colombo on my arrival. I left that harbour on the morning of December 2, and proceeded to sea at easy speed, leaving destroyer 'No. 1' to await the arrival of the two Patagonian destroyers left behind at Aden, and destroyer 'No. 2' to keep touch with the third destroyer if she attempted to leave harbour within twenty-four hours of my departure.

They both rejoined me on 5th December at full speed, and reported the arrival of the two destroyers six hours after I had left, and that they made no immediate preparations for sea. After recoaling 'No. 1' and 'No. 2' from the *Sylvia* store-ship, a process which occupied seven or eight hours on account of a strong breeze and a slight sea, I proceeded at thirteen knots, and reached Singapore without further incident, anchoring in the outer harbour.

Here I was met by a collier, chartered in Cardiff under sealed orders, and am at present completing the coaling of my squadron.

I have determined, after the incidents of the dynamite cartridges on the way out to Gibraltar and again at Malta, to take no more coal from shore, and have arranged for a collier to meet me at Hong-Kong. Our men will alone handle the coal, so there shall be no further chance of foul play.

The man Hopkins is still under close arrest, and I consider that this course will be more conducive to the safety of the expedition than handing him over to the civil authorities, with my proofs of his complicity not yet substantiated. The fact also that he is an American citizen would open up many legal difficulties, and after the lengthy diplomatic representations as a result of Parker's opening fire on the Patagonian, it is advisable to steer clear of these shoals in future.

This morning I received a wire from Colombo informing me that the Patagonians had not yet left, and that one was still undergoing repairs.

I shall leave to-morrow, and, as the monsoon is fairly strong, I have dismounted the guns and the search-lights of all three destroyers to lighten them as far as possible.

The mail is just leaving, and by the time you receive this letter I shall be slowly punching my way against the monsoon. I hope to be in Hong-Kong not later than the 22nd.

Both Dr. Fox and I shall be very glad to renew our acquaintance with you there, and to talk of old times and adventures when we all three were much younger.

C.H. HELSTON."

Ping Sang was small of stature and plump to a degree. He lay indolently back in his luxurious, crimson-upholstered chair, resting his podgy feet on a richly embroidered footstool.

His jolly, oily face was wreathed in smiles, and he blew great clouds of smoke from between his fat lips as he slowly read this letter, his little eyes twinkling with humour and with appreciation of his own well-being and prosperity.

His fat little hands had short stumpy fingers, beautifully manicured and covered with rings, which glistened and twinkled as he raised a dainty Venetian glass to his lips. He was dressed in dark claret-coloured silk robes, with pantaloons of light green, held together with gold knob buttons and gold braid loops, and was undoubtedly a prosperous gentleman and a dandy to boot.

On the opposite side of the fire, sitting bolt upright in an attitude of keen nervous alertness, was Ho Ming himself, a tall, gaunt Manchu, whose long thin fingers, with their prominent tendons, clenched rather than grasped the carved arms of his chair. His light-blue silk over-garment hardly concealed his attenuated figure, and his face was as gaunt as his body, with thin, tightly drawn lips, deeply recessed eyes, and prominent hooked nose.

Between them and behind a carved black wood table, supported by black wood dragons, sat A Tsi, Ho Ming's comprador, almost hidden by the clouds of tobacco smoke circling round him in the dull light of an ancient bronze lantern which swung from the ceiling, and contained a cunningly concealed electric light. He was dressed solemnly in black silk, relieved only by gilt buttons. It was this man who for the last ten days had been searching for any traces of the Pirate Syndicate's intentions, and with several Cantonese sailors selected from his master's vessels had mixed, both on board their ships and in the opium dens and lodging-houses ashore, with all the floating population of Hong-Kong.

"Helston and his ships should be here in a couple of days," said Ping Sang, speaking in Chinese and handing the letter to the anxious Ho Ming; "everything is all right so far."

"Now, Tsi, tell us again what you have been able to discover."

"Nothing, sir, beyond what I have already reported. There are two large junks from Amoy at the Aberdeen Dock, whose crews are strangers to Hong-Kong. Two days before their arrival an Englishman arrived by a coasting steamer

which had picked him up at Amoy, and he is now staying at the Victoria Hotel, and one of my men has seen him go on board these junks. From what I can find out, they have a much larger crew than is customary."

"It is very unusual for junks to come down here from Amoy," interposed Ho Ming, glancing keenly from one to the other, and hardly able to restrain his impatience at Sang's apparent indifference or his comprador's stolidity. "Those junks are probably full of explosives, and it would be an easy thing to float them up against any of Helston's ships in the harbour and blow them up. We must do something—we must! Why, the ships may be here any time!"

"My dear Ming," smiled Ping Sang, waving a fat deprecating finger and settling himself more comfortably in his chair, "we must not excite ourselves—that's the only thing we can do at present. We've not the faintest reason for suspecting either the Englishman or his junks; still, we may be able to do some little thing."

"I think it might be wise, just for the sake of curiosity, to burn those junks."

"But think of the law—English law; we are not in China now. ('Thank goodness', or the equivalent in Chinese, piously muttered the comprador). We can't bribe the magistrates here; and think of the risk and the punishment."

"Well, well," continued Ping Sang soothingly, "we won't do it to-night. To-morrow I'll try and get a look at this Englishman—I may know him and he may know me. Have you seen him yourself, Tsi?" he asked. "Is there anything peculiar about him?"

"No, sir; but the man who saw him go aboard at Aberdeen says he limped badly," answered A Tsi.

"A limp had he? Well, I rather fancy I shall know him, and I rather fancy he would know me," drawled Ping Sang, "though I'll take good care he doesn't recognize me!"

* * * * *

On each side of the entrance to the Victoria Hotel is generally a motley row of coolies squatting at the edge of the pavement with their mat trays containing sweetmeats, matches, or sugar-canes for sale among the rickshaw men who come and go. Among these, next morning, was a fat old man in a dirty pair of blue trousers, with a dirty blue tunic tied round his naked shoulders, clamouring for purchasers as he fanned a swarm of flies off his sugar-canes with his broad mat hat. This was Ping Sang, and all the while he kept his eyes glued on the hotel entrance. He had bribed a coolie to give him his place for the day, and there he squatted in this extremely uncomfortable position. Sportsman as he was, with all his love of luxury, he never did anything by halves, and there he stayed on the

chance of seeing the lame Englishman, whilst the sweat ran down his back, and even the morning sun blistered it.

Presently a coolie—and Ping Sang recognized A Tsi—came out of the hotel and passed without apparently noticing him, but he had the forefinger of his left hand extended, whilst the other fingers were doubled up. That meant that the Englishman was not in the hotel. A Tsi sauntered back again. Two fingers of the other hand were extended this time. That was sufficient for the old gentleman. The Englishman had gone to Aberdeen, where the two Amoy junks were anchored. Gladly rising to his feet, Ping Sang stretched his cramped legs, slung his two baskets across his shoulders with a bamboo pole, and trotted down the main street, trying to imitate the usual ambling gait of a street hawker. It was several miles to Aberdeen, and he slowed down very quickly, dropping a sugar-cane every now and then to lighten his load, and eventually came to the outskirts of the town and to the broad road which runs along the edge of the sea. Finally he squatted down at a sharp bend of this road in the shade of a big tree, and waited with his baskets in front of him.

He had arranged for A Tsi to follow him, and presently that invaluable comprador came rapidly along in a tumble-down double rickshaw, still in his coolie dress and with a big bundle under his arm.

After much haggling with the rickshaw man, who did not appreciate the extra weight of Ping Sang's fat little person, the old sportsman got up beside A Tsi, and the coolie drew them along, sweating and grunting.

Half a mile before they arrived at Aberdeen the busy little bay, crowded with native shipping, came in sight, and A Tsi pointed out to his companion two very large junks lashed together in the middle of the harbour.

"These are the two from Amoy. They came in two days ago, and have not yet discharged any cargo. In fact they don't seem to have any," said A Tsi. "If you will wait by the landing-place I will go off to the junks under pretence of selling this bundle of ready-made clothes, and try and find out more about them."

They stopped the rickshaw some hundred yards from the centre of the village, paid their grumbling coolie, and then Ping Sang trudged down to the landing-place with his baskets of sugar-canes, and squatted by the road-side, in spite of the hostile looks of the vendors already there.

A Tsi followed at some distance, got into a *sampan*, and was sculled out to the junks.

Ping Sang watched him clambering over the ship's sides; but almost immediately afterwards he noticed that a scuffle was going on and saw A Tsi thrown overboard, and, missing his boat underneath, fall with a splash into the sea, bundle and all. He swam ashore easily and scrambled up the beach with a very rueful countenance, amidst the shrieks of laughter of the coolies along the sea-shore,

who had gathered to see the fun.

As he passed Ping Sang he made a previously agreed-upon sign, which meant that the Englishman was aboard, then he entered an eating-house across the road.

Hardly had A Tsi disappeared when a rickshaw came rushing up, a Chinaman jumped out, threw a piece of silver on the ground and ran down to the water's edge, got into a *sampan*, and urged the boatman to hurry off to the same two junks. Ping Sang just caught a glimpse of his face and it seemed familiar, but where he had seen it before he could not think. He watched him board the junks, and wondered whether he too would meet the same rough treatment; but he did not reappear—he evidently belonged to them.

The old gentleman racked his brains, but could not, try as he would, remember that face.

An hour went by, the bell at the little dockyard rang out, and the workmen poured out to their dinner, and Ping Sang, after his unaccustomed exercise, felt very hungry, and longed for his usual luxurious lunch and Manilla cigar. He even felt annoyed that he, one of the smartest business men in the Chinese empire, should be such a failure as a hawker, for no one would buy from him. In desperation, hunger overcame his disgust, and he munched one of his own sugar-canes, smiling grimly to himself at the unappetizing meal. Presently the crowd was scattered by a double coolie rickshaw. The men, in gaudy uniform, stopped close to him, and shortly afterwards, for he kept his eyes on the junks all the time, he saw a European in a white helmet climb down into a boat alongside and come towards the shore.

The *sampan* rasped against the shore, and the white man stepped out and slowly limped up the sloping landing-place, scanning the faces of the men on either side.

Ping Sang's surmise was correct. He was one of the three men—the Englishman of the "Mysterious Three"—whom he had mentioned in his first letter to Helston—the most reckless adventurer of the lot.

Ping Sang thought there was little chance of his being recognized, but took the precaution of pulling his broad hat over his eyes and bending down over his baskets. It struck him too that his shoulders and back were not grimed and blackened with the sun, and he was hastily pulling his dirty tunic over them, when he was prodded heavily in the stomach, his hat was knocked off, and standing above him was the Englishman, bursting with laughter.

"Ask this man for his license!" shouted the Englishman, and a big Sikh policeman did so. Ping Sang had not one—the one thing he had forgotten in his "make-up"—and he fumbled in his belt to give himself time to think. Out rolled two of his favourite cigars, wrapped in silver paper (he had kept them to smoke

on the way back after dark), and they were worth more than a hawker could earn in a month.

He grabbed them hurriedly, but the policeman was too sharp for him, and hauled him to his feet with an unmerciful twist of his pigtail.

"Robber! thief!" grunted the highly amused crowd, which had now flocked round them.

Poor old Ping Sang was dumfounded, and though ready for most emergencies when dressed in his usual clothes, had now not a word to say. In fact, thoughts and words do not come quickly when your scalp is being nearly torn off at every move.

The crowd made way as the huge Sikh shoved his way through, and Ping Sang had perforce to follow, vainly trying to ease the strain on his pigtail.

The Englishman came with them to the police station and charged him with stealing the cigars, and before Ping Sang knew what had happened a pair of handcuffs were snapped on his wrists and he was shut up in a room. As the door closed behind him he heard the Englishman say to the sergeant in charge:

"That's a double-dyed villain, sergeant; was a servant of mine once; had to get rid of him for prigging my things. There's another of them somewhere about, and if you'll lend me a couple of your men I'll have him here in no time."

Poor old Ping Sang's heart went to his feet, for if A Tsi too were caught, no one would know what had become of them. They might be in jail for a week or more before being identified, and meanwhile Helston's ships would arrive, and no word of warning could reach them except from Ho Ming, who, he well knew, was useless in any emergency.

A Tsi, however, had seen the whole incident from an upper window of the eating-house, where he had had his clothes dried.

The affair was evidently premeditated. Somebody must have given information as to Ping Sang's presence there, and no doubt remained that this European with a limp was the Englishman whom Ping Sang, the previous night, had said he probably knew.

Now the old man was under arrest, and till he could be identified and released any plan of action would be delayed, and so much time would be gained by the pirate syndicate.

It was useless his going to the police station and stating that the dirty old hawker was no other than the wealthiest merchant in China and the president of the Trading Association, for he himself was a dirty, disreputable-looking object, and would be probably clapped in jail as an accomplice.

No; he must get back to Ho Ming as quickly as possible.

He crept down the rickety stairs and was just going out into the street, when he saw the European with a couple of Sikh policemen coming straight

towards the house, led by some gesticulating men who had seen him go in there.

It flashed across his mind that whoever had seen Ping Sang had seen them together, that he was now going to be caught on some trumpery charge, and he knew well enough that, unless he could escape, their predicament might not be known for weeks.

He made his way to the back of the house, but the inn-keeper, already suspicious of him, barred the way, and he fled up the unguarded stairs again, looking eagerly for some place in which to hide, but the rooms were as bare as a barn. He then ran to the rear windows to see if he could jump to the ground; but even if he did so, there was no escape from the yard behind, for two walls, too high to climb, ran back to the face of the hill, which here was cut in a perpendicular cliff.

Already he heard the tramp of heavy boots up the stairs, and, in desperation, was about to jump and chance scaling the walls, when he suddenly noticed that next to this house was a small temple or joss-house, and that a grotesque carving at the corner of one of the projecting eaves stuck out within jumping distance. Once he was on the roof of the temple he might climb across to some lower buildings behind, and might possibly find some place to hide himself.

It was his only chance; so without a second thought he kicked off his shoes, clambered like a monkey to the roof above him, crawled to the edge, balanced himself unsteadily, and sprang for the gilded dragon seven or eight feet away from him.

As he sprang he came in view of the street and heard a yell from the crowd; but it only made him grip more firmly as he fell on the grinning dragon, the rotten wood creaking and cracking as he drew himself on to the top of the joss-house.

Moving cautiously along, he jumped to the lower buildings behind, and saw, to his great joy, that they were built right up against the cliffs, which were here much less abrupt and might possibly give some foothold. If he could but climb to the top he would be able to reach Ho Ming across the mountain; so, clinging to bushes and clumps of grass, pulling himself up from rock to rock, he painfully made his way upwards. Looking over his shoulder, he saw one of the Sikh police following him. The man jumped from the roof of the eating-house to the joss-house; but the dragon, already cracked, broke under his weight, and he fell into the court-yard beneath.

This gave A Tsi a momentary start, for they now could only get on to the roof by climbing the pillars in front of the joss-house, and this was a difficult thing to do.

The crowd in the street began throwing stones at him and several struck him, but in desperation he clambered up and up, forcing his bruised toes into every crevice that would give foothold, now slipping and sending down a shower of stones, now gaining a yard or two. His hands were bleeding and numb with

pain as he fought his way, till with a gasp of relief he wriggled and wormed his way to the top, and with a last effort swung himself over the edge and rolled breathless into some bushes.

Cautiously peering over the edge, he saw several coolies clambering after him, whilst the Englishman and the Sikhs encouraged their efforts from below.

Once they reached the top he knew that he would be captured in no time, for with his naked feet and want of training he could not hope to distance these sturdy coolies in a chase over the mountain-side.

As he clutched the edge, wondering what best to do, he accidentally dislodged a stone. It rolled down and made the climbers hesitate. Instantly seeing his opportunity, he wildly tore at everything he could loosen and hurled it down on his pursuers. The foremost was hit on the hand, and slid some feet before he could steady himself. Another had his eyes filled with earth and sand, and then with great relief A Tsi saw them all retreat, slipping and sliding to the roof of the joss-house, in spite of the threats and cajoling of the police.

Then he saw the crowd streaming along the road, and knew his pursuers would climb up some other way. Getting on his feet, he began painfully pushing his way up the thickly wooded side of the mountain slopes. He was now free from immediate danger, but must reach Ho Ming without a moment's delay. He dare not descend to the main road, because the police would be certain to be on the watch for him, besides which he dare not go into the town till after dark, for he was bleeding from many cuts, and his clothes were in tatters.

It was a terribly long way and terribly hard work to climb the mountain to the Peak, but he must do it and wait till dark before striking one of the roads running down to his master's house.

Hour after hour he climbed painfully and slowly, getting his directions from the sun, and occasionally catching glimpses of the harbour beneath him.

Presently he came to a large clearing, breasted the slope in front, and saw the whole panorama of the harbour below him glistening in the sun, and the dark mountain ranges of the mainland looming behind it. The tiny boats moving backwards and forwards were the ferry-boats to Kowloon, and like toy ships lay several English cruisers.

As he stood panting with his exertions, the boom of a gun came up from below, then another and another at regular intervals. A man-of-war saluting! He searched the harbour below him, but saw no sign of powder smoke. Quickly he glanced towards the narrow waters of the Lyemoon Pass, knowing that through this entrance men-of-war usually arrived, and then from a little black, moving object on the water he saw a tiny ball of white smoke shoot out, and presently the report came gently up to him. Nineteen he counted, then twenty and twenty-one, and understood enough to know that it was a foreign man-of-war saluting

the British flag.

Throwing himself down on the coarse grass, he watched the black speck moving nearer and nearer, and as it emerged from the dark shadows of the Lyemoon Pass, he saw that it was followed by five others, the last three mere dots on the sea.

Gradually the little squadron become more distinct, and he was able to distinguish two cruisers with masts and military tops leading, a merchant ship with short, stumpy funnel, and then three destroyers. At last Helston's squadron had arrived, a day before it was expected, and, unless he could give warning, the ships would run the greatest danger before night was over.

Not a moment was to be lost, so painfully he pushed on, crawling round rocks and shoving his way through the undergrowth till he came to the outskirts of the villas on top of the Peak. Creeping behind garden walls and thick hedges, he made his way, without being seen, to the belt of trees and bushes which ran by the side of the road, among which he hoped to conceal himself till dusk made it possible for him to descend to his master's house.

Fortune, however, favoured him, for who should he see wobbling down as fast as his fat little legs could carry him but that merry little tailor Hong Sing, with a great bundle of clothes under his arm. He knew him well, and called him by name as he came near. The little man gave a frightened look round, and would have made off had not A Tsi seized him by the arm and pulled him into the bushes.

When Hong Sing had calmed down he hurriedly explained matters.

Luckily the little man was returning from trying on some clothes for a customer, and had in his bundle enough clothes to rig A Tsi as a respectable-looking butler. He had no shoes, but Hong Sing knew where he could borrow a pair from a house close by, and within half an hour A Tsi was walking boldly down the road with his escort.

As they neared Ho Ming's residence A Tsi stayed behind, whilst Hong Sing went on to reconnoitre; but all was safe, and at last the faithful comprador had finished the first part of his task.

Ho Ming had already returned from his office, but it was very difficult to make him act energetically. Like most Chinamen, he had the utmost fear of the law and those who administered it. He was more polite and obsequious to a police sergeant than to the wealthiest merchant in the colony, and it was a long time before A Tsi could persuade him to take immediate steps for the release of Ping Sang. He had not even heard of the arrival of the squadron, and walked rapidly up and down the room bemoaning the absence of Ping Sang and his own helplessness. "What can I do? What can I do?" was all he could say.

"You go at once to the Chief of Police and bail out Mr. Ping Sang; they will do it for you. Get them to telegraph to Aberdeen to send him up to head-quarters

with an escort. Write a letter to Captain Helston before you go, and I'll take it aboard and warn him of his danger."

"Yes, yes; we ought to do that," faltered Ho Ming, already trembling at the prospect of interviewing the Chief of Police, and sat down to write a letter, whilst A Tsi went away to change his butler's clothes for some of his master's.

With the letter in his pocket, A Tsi hired a chair with four sturdy coolies, and was soon carried down to Murray Pier, off which the little squadron was now at anchor, and, taking a *sampan*, pulled alongside the *Laird*.

CHAPTER IX
Captain Helston Wounded

Ping Sang Kidnapped—Cummins gives Advice—A Narrow Escape—Helston's Fears—A Futile Search—An Exchange of Prisoners

The Narrative is continued by Dr. Fox

We arrived at Hong-Kong on the afternoon of December 22, after an uneventful voyage from Singapore, and received permission to moor at Admiralty buoys.

Helston expected Ping Sang to come aboard immediately, and was rather upset that he did not appear. He is still very nervous and irritable, and the chilly evening made him complain again of his rheumatism, though he certainly seems much improved in health and spirits since he shook off the Patagonian destroyers, and has, so far, brought his ships in safety.

He and I were smoking in his after-cabin, and making up our minds as to whether we would wait any longer for Ping Sang or go ashore, dine at the Club, and afterwards try and find the old gentleman, when Pritchard, the officer of the watch, brought down a letter.

Helston hastily tore it open. I saw at once that it contained bad news, but he handed it to me without saying a word, and rang for the quarter-master to bring down the messenger.

The letter was from a Mr. Ho Ming, of whom we had never heard.

”DEAR CAPTAIN HELSTON,

”I do not know what to say. My comprador brings you this, and you may trust him. His name is A Tsi. He knows all. You are in the greatest danger. Mr. Ping Sang has been thrown into prison this afternoon, and there is a fearful conspiracy to sink your ships. In great haste and distress,

”**Yours respectfully**, ”HO MING.”

Hardly had I read it before the bearer of the letter was shown in—an honest-looking Chinaman, not marked by small-pox. He appeared exhausted, was much scratched about the face and hands, and I saw that a patch of blood had soaked through the right sleeve of his silk coat.

He told his story in a very direct, straightforward manner, and would not be disturbed in the telling of it, although Helston kept constantly asking him unnecessary questions, wanting to know the end of the yarn before he had barely started. I admired him for his pertinacity—though I generally detest Chinamen—and for his pluck, because he was evidently almost on the point of collapsing. In fact his legs nearly gave way under him several times, and at last I pushed a chair forward and made him sit down.

Helston seemed somewhat relieved when the story had been told, for, as a matter of fact, there was little enough evidence of immediate danger, and the thought of Ping Sang the sybarite shut up in jail as a common thief was somewhat amusing.

Hardly had he finished, though, before Pritchard came down from the quarter-deck followed by a native who was one of the tallest I have ever seen, and as thin as a lath. He was in an extremely excited condition, flopped down on a chair, said his name was Ho Ming, and began wringing his hands.

”Mr. Ping Sang has disappeared,” he broke out; ”gone, no one knows where. I go see Chief of Police and tell him who Ping Sang is. He perfectly satisfied if I will stand bail. Telephones to Aberdeen police station to have him sent up. They reply, 'The master of the man arrested this afternoon withdrew the charge and has taken him away'. What shall we do? What shall we do?”

He was in a state of most intense alarm, pitiful to see, even in a Chinaman.

”Phew!” ejaculated Helston, ”that makes it more serious. Did they know where he had gone?”

”I no wait,” whined Ho Ming. ”I come to you quickly.”

There was silence for some seconds whilst Helston and I looked at each other, for if Ping Sang had actually been kidnapped by this scoundrel of an En-

glishman, it was a most disastrous event for our expedition, because he was the head and brains of the Trading Association, and it was through him, and by means of his enormous credit throughout China, that the heavy expenses of the squadron had to be met.

Without him it was almost impossible to move, as I well knew that the funds with which Helston had in the first instance been supplied were well-nigh exhausted.

"See what Cummins has to say about it!" we both suggested, breaking the silence.

Cummins was the Commander of the *Laird*, and, even in the few months the ship had been in commission, had become the one man relied upon in every emergency either for advice or action. Short of stature, with a little thin body and very sloping shoulders, his head looked too big for his body and his long thin nose too big for his head. It was only when he talked, which he seldom did, that his dreamy grey eyes commenced to light up, and then they had the most humorous twinkle in the world. He was a great mathematician, had been a torpedo lieutenant, and was taken for a dreamy philosopher till you saw those twinkling eyes change to eyes of steel, and his somewhat effeminate, irresolute lips harden. This was only when he had a big job to undertake or a weighty decision to make.

He sauntered in, dressed as usual, without regard to appearance, in an old ill-fitting monkey jacket, the pockets of which had been roughly stitched at the sides, for he always had his hands in them and wore them out rapidly. He was chewing his usual wooden toothpick, biting off little pieces, which he carefully put in his left-hand pocket, whilst he carried a store of new ones in the right-hand one.

When he did speak he always commenced with a silly little chuckle which was distinctly irritating—to me at any rate.

He seemed vaguely amused at the presence of the two Chinese, and at the details of the crisis which Helston recounted to him.

"What do you advise?" asked Helston, biting his words, as he always does when excited. "Whatever we do we must do quickly."

"Heugh! heugh! heugh!" chuckled Cummins, selecting a fresh toothpick from his pocket, "I should give that cove some brandy first of all," pointing to A Tsi, who was looking pretty ill, and he smiled blandly at us, wandered off to a corner of the cabin where Helston kept his cigars, and lighted one, whilst a servant brought the drink and turned on the electric light, for by this time it had become dark.

Every now and then he gave vent to an irritating chuckle, as if immensely amused at the whole story, whilst Helston watched him with ill-concealed impa-

tience, knowing that it was useless to hurry him.

Then suddenly turning round, he gave his advice:

"Communicate with the police, sir, and have Ping Sang traced. Get search warrants issued, and search every junk leaving Hong-Kong to-night. This Englishman has got a long start, but there is no breeze to speak of, and if he tries to get him away to the mainland, we might catch him if you sent the destroyers out at once. That man—the one with the brandy—would possibly recognize the junk. Send him with Parker ('No. 3'); he's the smartest of the three, and will probably get away first. I will go up and make the necessary signals, and have their searchlights sent over from the *Sylvia*. They may be able to get away in an hour."

Without waiting for Helston's "All right, Cummins, you carry on," he sauntered up on deck, and we heard him singing out for the signalman; and then, putting his head down the skylight, he chuckled; "Heugh! heugh! heugh! You need have no fear for your Chinese friend, sir; they won't hurt a hair of his head. They'll want to exchange him for that rascal Hopkins."

"Bless my soul, I never thought of that!" exclaimed Helston, much relieved; "I never thought of that!"

The Skipper's galley being called away, he and I went ashore, taking Ho Ming with us.

We landed at Murray Pier, and had to push through a crowd of curious Chinamen.

Helston clutched my arm and whispered excitedly: "There are some of those brutes who shadowed me in London. Get out of this quickly, old chap!" I thought he was probably mistaken, and put it down to his nervousness, but when we got into rickshaws and were driven rapidly up the street, I could swear that several detached themselves from the crowd and followed us in the dark shadows of the trees on either side.

However, there was no trace of them when we reached the main road.

By a stroke of luck we found the Chief of Police at Headquarters, and he telephoned to Aberdeen for more information.

Ping Sang had been discharged two hours ago, and was taken aboard the Amoy junks, one of which was just then sailing.

He listened impatiently whilst the Chief of Police spoke through the telephone.

"Has she left the harbour?" ... "Well, can't you follow her?" ... "How about the steam-boat?" ...

"She is already out of the harbour," he said, turning to us and hooking up the telephone-receiver, "and their steam-boat is under repairs and they cannot stop her. I'll send one of our patrol boats from here to cut her off."

"My destroyers must be ready by this time," interposed Helston, "and if you will make out search warrants, I'll catch her before she can get across to the mainland."

"The warrants would take some time," answered the official, "and I should have to see the Governor. The patrol boat shall get away immediately."

But for once Helston made up his mind. "Warrants or no warrants, I'll search every junk under way to-night," he said, and strode impatiently out of the room.

"I don't care what you do, outside the harbour limits," said the Chief of Police to me as I followed Helston; "and it's a very dark night, and no one will be any the wiser."

Ho Ming coming with us, we went down to the Victoria Hotel, and after some difficulty—for all we knew of the Englishman was that he walked with a limp—found that he had not returned in time for dinner, as was his custom.

Coming back from the hotel, I several times thought I could hear the pattering of soft feet behind me, though I could see no one. To reach Murray Pier, however, we had to go round the cricket ground, and as we passed along the front of it I saw two shadowy figures dart across to the trees which bordered the road at the side, and it struck me immediately that, if they meant any mischief, they might head us off there.

With a sudden inspiration, I sang out to Helston, who was ahead of me, "Race you to the pier for a dollar, old chap!" and called to my coolie, "Fi tee, fi tee! You beatee him fellow lickshaw, half dollah can do."

This was enough for the sporting coolies, and they raced like mad things round the corner and down the dark road.

It was lucky we were going so fast, because as we came abreast the one electric light in the road, two pistol shots rang out from the shadows under the trees and then a third. One splintered through the woodwork of Helston's rickshaw, and both our rickshaw coolies, with a yell of fright, dropped their handles, and fled for their lives. Helston tumbled head-foremost into the road at the sudden stop, though I was just able to save myself, and turning, saw a Chinaman within two yards of me levelling a pistol straight at Helston. I struck at him with my heavy malacca stick, and caught him on the wrist just as he fired again, the pistol rolling into the mud.

[image]

I STRUCK AT HIM WITH MY HEAVY MALACCA STICK

I grabbed at it, and the Chinaman fled into the shadows.

Helston scrambled to his feet, and we both jumped behind trees, the policeman on duty at the pier rushing towards us with his revolver in his hand and blowing his whistle lustily.

Ho Ming, whose rickshaw man had dropped him twenty yards behind, crawled out from behind another tree, and soon we had quite an army of policemen running up from different directions, one of them dragging my own wretched coolie after him into the electric light.

Then came some of our boat's crew with boat's stretchers in their hands, and just as they reached us Helston suddenly fell in a heap on the road.

They carried Helston down to the pier, and there he regained consciousness and struggled to his feet. I saw his left arm was broken. I supported him down to the boat, got him safely aboard, and ripped his clothes off to examine him. "Beastly ashamed of myself, old chap," he kept saying, "but they've got me in the chest too."

The bone was smashed five inches above the elbow. The flattened bullet had then torn a deep groove through his chest muscles, and he had lost a great quantity of blood. His wrist and forearm were also paralysed, so it was a pretty bad job, and took me and my surgeon, young Richardson, an hour and a half before we had him ship-shape again.

We ought to have given him chloroform and tried to sew up the damaged nerve, but he would not hear of it, because he was anxious to get the destroyers away and look after a hundred details, when once Cummins had reported their departure; and all the time we were busy with him, putting on splints and sewing up the wound in his chest, messengers and signalmen kept coming and going incessantly. He feared that one or other of the junks would drift down alongside and blow up, and worked himself into a tremendous pitch of excitement when the *Strong Arm* delayed reporting "all water-tight doors closed". Then he thought it would be advisable for the steam-boats of the two ships to patrol round and round till daylight, and it took a long time to get steam up in them, all of which excited him still more.

Of course I knew that Cummins would "carry on" without him perfectly well, and I am certain he knew that too, and the knowledge only made him the more determined to superintend everything personally.

Finally he wanted to go aboard the *Strong Arm* to see for himself that she was prepared for any emergency; but that was too much for me, and he eventually was satisfied with sending for her captain, Hunter, to report personally.

I made him eat some dinner—he had had nothing since lunch-time—and urged him to take a sleeping-draught. Not a bit of it. He was going to stay on deck till sunrise. "I'm no baby, old chap; it's all right, now you've fixed it up;"

and he had a chair placed on the quarter-deck and sat there. However, I put half a grain of opium in his cup of coffee, and what with that and with the strain of the last few hours, he was soon sound asleep, and we moved him, chair and all, into the navigator's cabin, much to the relief of everyone, and especially of Cummins.

Personally I did not believe in the blowing-up theory, nor did I feel any intense interest either in old Ping Sang's fate or in the effects his disappearance would have on the expedition. As a matter of fact, I was pretty well bored with the whole affair, and would have "chucked it" willingly, but for my chum Helston. I turned in and slept soundly, as, thank Heaven! I generally do.

As I conjectured, nothing happened during the night, and at daybreak the destroyers had not returned.

Helston had slept fairly well, but, what with the pain in his arm and chest, a bad headache from the effects of the opium, and the disappointment of not recovering Ping Sang, was almost unbearable.

He had a great number of official calls to pay on shore, and was also very anxious to "carry on" aboard his ships, but I had at last to come definitely to an understanding with him and tell him very plainly—and he knew that I meant it—that I would not remain in the ship any longer unless he went on the sick list and did exactly what he was told to do. If he continued to play the fool, I swore that I would invalid myself home, and—perhaps most powerful argument of all, though I do believe he would not have had me desert him for anything—I assured him that if he persisted in refusing to act on my advice his health would most certainly break down, he would be obliged to give up the command, and then what hope would he ever have of winning that fickle little jade Milly.

Eventually we got him to bed—I was horrified to see how thin he had become—and I gave him another sleeping-draught, darkened his cabin, roped off the quarter-deck to prevent any trampling of feet over his head, and presently he went to sleep again, sleeping soundly till the afternoon.

He looked much less haggard when he woke, but I kept him in bed.

"How long are you going to keep me here, old chap?" he asked piteously.

"Two days more at the very least," I told him.

The destroyers had returned that afternoon without having been successful in their search.

During the next few days the police searched, without result, every junk in the harbour and every place where the Englishman could have concealed himself or Ping Sang. The second Amoy junk was found to contain no suspicious cargo, but, for all that, it was carefully watched, to give early warning lest she should attempt any treachery, because Cummins was still doubtful about her, and did not relax any precautions during those long nights.

Christmas-day went by, and Helston was able to walk round the gaudily

decorated mess-decks, headed by our amateur band playing those atrocious tunes, "The Roast Beef of Old England" and "For he's a jolly good fellow", and everyone gorged as usual at lunch and slept like boa constrictors afterwards in their cabins.

I suppose I am too old for sea life, because Christmas so-called festivities on board ship bore me to distraction. At night the midshipmen had what they called a sing-song in the gun-room, to which the *Strong Arm's* gun-room had been invited. They made the most disgusting noise—it makes me angry to think of it even now—and had the confounded impudence to ask me down, as they all wanted to drink my health.

The yarn had got about that but for me Helston would have been killed.

Perfect rot! but there it was; and the Sub and senior midshipman came to my cabin after I had turned in and pressed me to go down, even for five minutes.

I was reading a favourite chapter of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*—what a biting cynic that man was!—and hate being disturbed, so told them to go to Jericho, and wished I had the power to send them there, the whole bag of tricks.

No news of Ping Sang had arrived, and though Helston naturally worried himself, Cummins was still convinced that, as he had been kidnapped solely to be exchanged for Hopkins, we should shortly hear of him.

And so it turned out, for a letter came one morning, apparently written by the lame Englishman and posted from Macao, the Portuguese town at the mouth of the West river.

He signed himself Chas. R. Hamilton, and suggested an exchange of prisoners. I quote an extract from his letter as showing his unbounded impudence and his evident knowledge that we were bound hand and foot whilst Ping Sang was in his power.

"... In conducting war against the Chinese Government at Peking (war he called it, not piracy!) we little imagined that we should have the honour of meeting ships manned by my own countrymen.... Ping Sang, you may be glad to hear, is in robust health, but is anxious to return to you, as, I understand, your further proceedings are practically dependent upon his financial assistance.

"As he is of such great importance, I am naturally loth to part with him; but unfortunately I hear you have on board your ship an old friend of mine, Reginald Hopkins, and if you could deprive yourself of his society we might, in short, exchange our two unwilling guests ...

"In arranging the details of such exchange I must first ask you to give me your word of honour that you will not attempt any treachery during the transfer, nor endeavour, once the exchange has been made, to follow or interfere with Hopkins.

"I suggest that you send a destroyer to Macao with your reply. On her

arrival a man giving my name will board her and receive the letter. If favourable, I will then write you again, and only regret that my distance from Macao will cause much delay.

"Failing a reply I shall, of course, retain possession of Ping Sang...."

We had a council of war after dinner that night, that is, Cummins and Helston had, for I myself only sat near the fire and smoked, and refused to give any advice even when they asked me.

I am paid to come this fool's jaunt as a doctor, and I'll see them hanged first before I interfere with their job. I certainly would not let them meddle with mine. If they did follow any advice I happened to give and it was unsuccessful, I should never hear the last of it, or, if it by chance were successful, they would pat each other on the back and pretend and believe too that it was their plan all along; so it was much better to smoke my pipe and keep my own ideas to myself.

Eventually they decided to arrange the exchange, although Cummins seemed personally averse to such a proceeding, thinking it much beneath our dignity to treat with such a man.

CHAPTER X
Destroyer "No. 1" Meets her Fate

To Release Ping Sang—Trapped—"No. 1" Disabled—A Gallant Deed—Sinking—Poor "No. 1" Disappears

Mr. Glover's Narrative is now continued

The three days after Captain Helston had been shot (his coxswain told me he probably would have been killed but for Dr. Fox) were most exciting. Then things calmed down and became rather monotonous. We were not allowed ashore after sunset, however. Captain Helston did not want anything to happen to us midshipmen, and that was a nuisance, for we missed any amount of fun—dances and things.

Our gun-room people played the *Strong Arm's* gun-room at Socker in the

Happy Valley, and knocked "the hide and hair" off them; and this was some consolation, for they had been rather uppish. We also had a picnic in the sailing pinnace to Deep Bay, which was jolly good fun, although we all got wet through coming back, and that ass Dumpling dropped the bread into the water whilst he was wading ashore with it.

I had been sent back to the *Laird* from "No. 3", and Tommy Foote (Toddles) from "No. 1", and on New Year's eve we were having a bit of a jamberee in the gun-room—we had asked for half an hour's extra lights—when Jeffreys, our Sub-Lieutenant, was sent for by the Commander.

We thought it was because of the row we were making, but he came back and told Tommy to get his things ready and stand by to go aboard "No. 1" at daybreak.

"No. 1" went off in the morning, but was back again in time for seven-bell tea. Tommy hadn't much to tell. They'd run over to Macao, and Mr. Pattison, the Skipper, had given a letter to a Chinaman who had come alongside as soon as they anchored.

That was all, and nothing more happened for seven or eight days, whilst we had to grind at school, mathematics and torpedo theoretical rot and other things.

But then there were more rumours, and one day we heard that all Hopkins's gear was being packed—you remember him, the Yankee secretary who had been under arrest ever since leaving Colombo—we often wondered why.

Tommy Foote was sent again to "No. 1", and when next morning Mr. Pattison came aboard for final orders, he was evidently to take Hopkins with him.

You bet your life I was dead keen to go with Tommy and see the fun, for there was evidently something in the wind; so I asked Mr. Pattison to take me too. You see I had rather a pull over him, for he was very sweet on my cousin Milly; so he asked the Commander and off I went.

We steamed out through the West Channel, and Tommy and I thought we were bound to Macao again, but we were wrong, and it turned out that our destination was a small island about sixty miles away, at least I should think it was that distance, for we were doing about fifteen knots, and it took us four hours before we ran into a narrow little harbour between high cliffs, anchoring some ten cables from shore.

There wasn't a sign of a living thing, and we waited and waited, whilst Mr. Pattison kept on looking at his watch. He told us then that we were going to exchange Hopkins for the old Chinese gentleman who had been kidnapped.

"Why! is Hopkins one of the pirates?" we both asked, somewhat disappointedly, for he was hardly our idea of a pirate, and we rather liked him, he was so amusing.

"I only knew it myself this morning," Mr. Pattison told us.

Well, presently a *sampan* came wriggling out from behind a small headland, and when it arrived alongside there was a fat little man sitting in it gorgeously dressed.

I didn't tell you that we had brought a man named A Tsi with us; but this man recognized him immediately as Ping Sang. The fat old chap climbed nimbly over the side and shook hands all round, so pleased was he to be safe again.

Hopkins was brought on deck, and apparently he and Ping Sang knew each other, though they only glared like two cats, and he climbed down into the *sampan*, Mr. Pattison taking no notice of him whatever.

However, Tommy and I stepped forward and shook him by the hand. I don't quite know why, but expect it was because we wanted to say that we had shaken hands with a real pirate. He seemed quite pleased.

His bags and boxes were so numerous that the *sampan* had to make two trips, and this delayed us nearly an hour, Mr. Pattison fuming with impatience, and steam blowing off from the escape pipes.

Directly the *sampan* had shoved off with its last load, we weighed and secured the anchor and were off back to Hong-Kong.

We thought our work was over for the day, but were mightily mistaken, for as we came to the mouth of the harbour, there, to our dismay, steaming gently towards us, were the three Patagonian destroyers, and behind them a cruiser painted dark green from mast-head to water-line, very much like the *Strong Arm*, only not so big. And they were, all of them, between us and Hong-Kong.

I never felt so scared in my life. Tommy went as white as a sheet, and even Mr. Pattison turned a bit yellow.

He swore terribly and cursed them for treacherous hounds—it was just about the neatest trap you ever saw in your life—and ordered the helm hard a-port.

Round we went, clear of the harbour mouth, and heading south as if we were going to run away; but if the people in the Patagonians thought we were going to do so they were jolly well mistaken; it was only to get up full speed and clear to quarters, which we did in a brace of shakes, the men as keen as mustard.

Tommy had to go down on deck and take charge of the two for'ard 6-pounders, but Mr. Pattison ordered me to stay on the bridge with him. The helm was put hard a-starb'd, we swung round like a top, and headed straight for them.

The destroyers seemed at first to be making straight for us too, but almost immediately turned off to starboard and ran into the little harbour we had just left. The signalman sang out, as they showed their sides to us, that they had no guns aboard, so that explained their flight.

We were now rushing down on the cruiser, going at quite twenty knots, and wondered whether she would open fire. We were not long left in doubt, for we were not more than eight hundred yards from her when we saw two little spurts of flame from under her bows, and then more from her fore-top, and the little shells whistled past and burst in the sea behind us.

I know I ducked my head, and rather thought Mr. Pattison did so too.

Then we began firing from the 12-pounder on the bridge and from Tommy's 6-pounders as fast as we could, and what with the noise of the guns going off so close to me and the whistling of the enemy's shells, I felt quite dazed, and it was no use to bob or duck, because the air seemed full of them.

Mr. Pattison startled me to life again by sending me aft with a message to the Sub. As I ran down the ladder two holes suddenly appeared in the after funnel, and a cloud of smoke burst out with a roar close to the after steering-shield. I must confess I stopped running, absolutely in a funk, and my legs would hardly hold me up. It was only for a second, though, and I ran aft just as hard as I could. The shelter screen was all bent and twisted, and in front of it were two of the after 6-pounder gun's crew lying on their faces, and blood was oozing from under them and running along the deck. I just managed to give the message to the Sub, who was bending over them, and then I was horribly sick.

I don't remember how I got back to the bridge, but just as I did so—and now we were not a hundred yards from the cruiser—a shell burst on the fo'c'stle close to the port anchor, and pieces came tearing through the canvas screen round the bridge with a horrid shrieking noise. Looking down I saw that one of the securing chains had been smashed, and that the anchor was now half over the side, hanging by one small chain.

Mr. Pattison saw it too, and tumbled down to the fo'c'stle, shouting to me, "Keep her as she is, and run along her starboard side as close as you can go."

I knew what he was going to do. If that last securing chain carried away, the anchor would go overboard, and even if the cable held at the stopper and did not run out, we might swerve right across the cruiser's bows and be cut in half.

We were right up to her now, and through her bow-gun ports I could see the men round the small quick-firers, but the mere fact of having a job to do prevented me from feeling frightened. Another second and we were alongside her fo'c'stle, not twenty feet away, and their small guns fired point-blank at us as we rushed past her side. I remember dimly noticing Mr. Pattison lying on his stomach on the fo'c'stle lashing the anchor for dear life. My ears were ringing and painful, my head seemed to be splitting, but I had enough common sense left to see that the stern of the cruiser seemed to be swinging into us.

She must have put her helm over, and meant to crush us as her stern swung round.

I yelled to the quarter-master at the wheel to "hard a-starboard", for she would be into us before we could clear her. I could just see his face as he stood on the steering platform below, and he heard me, but shook his head grimly and put the helm over to port. Our bows were already flying past her quarter-deck, and I saw at once that he was right and I was wrong, for our stern immediately began to swerve outwards.

It was a terrible moment, for she was swinging into us faster than we were swinging away from her.

She must strike us and I thought all was over, and gripped hold of the bridge rails, waiting for the bump.

Another second—there was a crash! We heeled right over to port till I saw the lee gunwale a-wash, and, oh horrors! the two men lying on the deck aft slipped overboard with shrieks of agony and fear. I saw our stern crumple like tissue-paper. We grated along, separated, righted ourselves, and were flying away.

Mr. Pattison jumped up to the bridge, yelling to "'midships the helm", but it would not move, and was jammed hard over.

All the men aft had been knocked off their feet, and I saw them scrambling up again as Mr. Pattison rushed aft, and all crowded round the crumpled stern.

We were now steaming in a circle, and our broadside was exposed to the cruiser, which commenced firing very rapidly again.

Then I saw the men aft jump clear of the rudder chain, the rudder swung amidships, and, thank God! we darted away; but something must have happened to the engines, for we were not going nearly so fast.

This has taken a long time to write, but probably did not last fifty seconds. It seemed a lifetime.

Directly we were clear Mr. Pattison came for'ard and took charge.

They had unshackled the steering chain, he told me, and the rudder had swung amidships. The starboard propeller had been smashed in the collision, and, with only the port screw working and the helm almost useless, we struggled along in a very erratic manner, our bows now going round to starboard and now falling off to port.

Shells were shrieking all round us, but going wild, probably because we were swerving so much from side to side.

To avoid exposing the men, Mr. Pattison ordered all those on deck to take shelter under the fo'c'stle, leaving only himself on the bridge and the quarter-master at the wheel.

I was sent with the necessary orders, and for the first time noticed Ping Sang and A Tsi standing on deck near the for'ard torpedo-tube quite unconcerned; but I hustled them for'ard, and everybody, even the Sub, Tommy, and

I, had to crowd down below, and did not see what happened during the next five minutes, though they were evidently making better shooting, for we heard several small explosions where shells must have struck.

All at once there was a muffled roar and the hissing noise of escaping steam.

We three jumped on deck and saw a great hole in the deck near the base of the foremost funnel, and clouds of steam and smoke pouring from it.

We opened the manhole cover to the for'ard boiler compartment, more steam and smoke came swishing out, and in the middle of it crawled out a stoker, with his face and arms terribly scalded. He just managed to pull himself out, and, yelling with pain, would have thrown himself overboard, had not the Sub caught him and hurled him to the deck, where he lay writhing and shrieking.

Tommy and I peered through the manhole to see if anyone else was alive, but the Sub shoved us aside, and, with a heaving-line lashed round him, and holding an old oilskin in front of his face, crawled down. His name was Harrington—I must tell you it, because this was the pluckiest thing Tommy and I ever saw.

We took charge of the heaving-line, and he half-stumbled or was half-lowered down into the steam.

When he got down the ladder and put his feet into the water we could hear swishing about, he gave a great cry of pain—it must have been nearly boiling—but he did not hesitate, and we could dimly see him groping about on the bottom plates, and could also see that the water was rapidly rising, and was quickly over his knees.

He called out in a squeaky voice for another rope, and lashed it to something, which we two and some men who came to help hoisted up.

It was another of the stokers, but such a sight as I shall never forget. He was quite dead, and half the flesh was torn from one shoulder and from one side of the face.

As we hauled him on deck his skin seemed to come away with his clothes wherever we touched him.

Oh, it was a most fearful sight!

Tommy and I were roughly pushed away by an old petty officer, and the body was covered with a tarpaulin.

We could not keep our eyes off that heap, and should have fainted in another second had not Harrington himself appeared out of the manhole with his face just like beef and bleeding, and his hands like turkeys' claws.

He fell down on the deck, and as I knelt down he said in a hoarse whisper; "My feet, my feet! For God's sake undo my boots!"

We unlaced them, and oh, the terrible pain it was to him to take them off! and though we cut his socks with a knife, the skin all came off with them. He had fainted by that time.

Then I heard Mr. Pattison's voice, and Tommy rushed aft and brought some brandy and a pillow, and we propped his head up and poured a little brandy down his throat, though it was difficult to do it, because his tongue was so swollen.

They covered him with a blanket, but he was a huge man, and his two raw feet stuck out at the end. I shall never forget them.

All this terrible time I had noticed nothing else, but now, looking over the side, I saw that the destroyer was only going very slowly, and that there was a big hole at the water-line, where that last shell had come aboard, and water was pouring in.

No shells seemed to be coming our way now, and looking towards the island I saw the cruiser steaming away from us without firing, and, hurrah! hurrah! two great splashes of water leapt up, one after the other, close to her stern, and boom! boom! came the reports of heavy guns from the north.

"Hurrah! hurrah!" shouted Tommy, "there's the *Strong Arm*."

You can imagine what a relief it was and what we felt.

We yelled and shouted like mad things, and even Harrington had strength enough to raise his head and wave his arm, though he could not make as much noise as a mouse.

It was indeed the *Strong Arm* firing her foremost guns, and making a great bow wave as she steamed towards us.

"Out collision mat!" shouted Mr. Pattison, and the order was yelled down the fo'c'stle and everyone came rushing out, got a line round the destroyer's bottom, made it fast to the collision mat, and hauled it over the great rent in the side.

It took three or four minutes to do this, and by that time the deck seemed quite close to the water, and the stern seemed even lower. The *Strong Arm* was now drawing up rapidly.

Then I was sent with a couple of men to screw down the hatch covers leading to Mr. Pattison's cabin and the ward-room, and by the time we had done it the deck was a-wash.

The starboard engine had stopped by now, and we lay wallowing with a horrid log-like jerky motion whilst the men tried to get a tarpaulin over the hole in the stern, but did not seem to do any good.

The boats were next got into the water. They were full of holes, but by stuffing their jumpers into the shot holes in the whaler and by bailing hard, they just managed to keep her afloat. The collapsable Berthon boats were quite useless, being pierced in half a dozen places, and the dinghy was smashed to smithereens.

There was only the whaler for fifty men. This meant that most of us would have to take our chance of hanging on to an oar or wooden grating till the *Strong Arm* could pick us up.

By the time we had lowered Mr. Harrington (the Sub) and the scalded stokers into the whaler our stern was quite under the water, and we were heeling over to starboard, till fittings, not secured to the deck, began sliding down, and the sea came over the foot of our deck stanchions. We could actually feel poor old "No. 1" sinking under us—a horrid sensation.

"Scramble on deck, boys! All up from below!" was shouted down the engine-room and stokehold hatches, and everybody began taking off their boots and jumpers.

This gave me a very creepy feeling.

Steam was roaring out of the escape-pipe, and we all anxiously looked first at Mr. Pattison, expecting him to give the order to jump, and then towards the *Strong Arm*, wishing she would come along faster.

Mr. Pattison was hanging on to the bridge rails—the bridge had a tremendous slant—to keep himself upright, and the signalman hoisted a signal that we were sinking.

The *Strong Arm* came rushing up, firing fast from her bow guns, and for one horrid second I thought she would not see our signal in the excitement of chasing the cruiser.

Tommy and I were hanging on to the torpedo-tube aft with our feet in water, and I heard him gasp, with a very white face, "She's going on"; but a moment later we saw her boats' crews clambering over the nettings into their boats, and raised a mighty cheer of relief as she slowed down abreast of us. Her boats were lowered with a run and a splash, and came pulling over to us as hard as men could pull, and as they arrived alongside our men were ordered to scramble on board them.

We had a row as to who should jump first, for Tommy said that he *belonged* to the destroyer and I was only a passenger, so that he ought to be the last to leave; but I said that as I was senior to him—I was two places above him passing out of the *Britannia*—it was my duty to see him get into the boat first.

We had to cling to the torpedo-tube to argue it out, for the deck was now so steep we couldn't stand on it.

"Get into the boats you young idiots!" shouted Mr. Pattison. "Why are you keeping the boats waiting, you lop-eared sons of Ham?"

So we settled the matter by both jumping at the same time. I was jolly glad that I did not let him have his own way.

Just as we had all shoved off, Mr. Pattison being the test to leave, we heard a cracking noise—a bulk-head must have given way—"No. 1" almost righted herself—her bows came out of water and pointed higher and higher, till they were almost upright. There she stayed while you could have counted fifteen or sixteen, and then slowly slipped down out of sight.

There was just a little swish as the sea rushed in to cover her, two of her capstan bars came shooting out of the water, and poor old "No. 1" had disappeared. I felt rather snuffy, and I knew Tommy did too. We soon were aboard the *Strong Arm*, and down in the gun-room they all crowded round and asked questions. It was not till then that I discovered that my cap was missing, and found too that my hair was all matted together with blood.

Tommy searched and found a cut about an inch long, and felt rather annoyed, I think, that he himself hadn't anything to show.

You can imagine I felt jolly proud to have been wounded, though it did rather take the gilt off the ginger-bread not to have known it at the time. It was probably a piece of the shell that smashed the anchor-securing chain.

It must have delayed the *Strong Arm* nearly an hour, to stop her engines alongside "No. 1" and to get all of us aboard, and by that time the pirate cruiser was only a cloud of black smoke on the horizon, with the three little destroyers which had again come out of the bay steaming after her at full speed.

CHAPTER XI
The Action off Sin Ling

The Action Commences—Casualties

The Report submitted by Commander Richard Hunter, R.N.,
Captain of the "Strong Arm".

The report of the proceedings which Commander Richard Hunter, R.N., the Captain of the *Strong Arm*, subsequently submitted to Captain Helston, is so terse and yet so graphic, that it is inserted here.

* * * * *

"H.I.M.S. ***Strong Arm***, "Hong-Kong, 9th Jan.

"SIR,

"I have the honour to report that, in accordance with your signal received at 8.30 A.M. on 8th Jan., I immediately raised steam in fifteen boilers. One hour later I was able to slip from the buoy, and proceeded southwards to the rendezvous indicated in your orders.

"By 10 A.M. I was making fourteen knots, and at 11 nearly nineteen, which speed was gradually increased to twenty as the remainder of my boilers raised steam.

"At 12.35 P.M. the island then being in sight, the mast-head look-out sighted a cruiser and three destroyers steaming towards it from the west, and almost immediately afterwards sighted destroyer 'No. 1' leaving the island.

"The cruiser was apparently heading to cut off 'No. 1', whilst the three destroyers disappeared under the land.

"We then saw 'No. 1' head straight for the cruiser, which thereupon opened a vigorous fire from her small guns. 'No. 1' disappeared behind her and apparently fouled her stern, for she came away steaming but slowly and steering in a very erratic manner.

"She was now under a very severe fire, and a considerable explosion occurred nearly amidships at 12.45.

"Being now 10,000 yards from the cruiser, I opened fire on her from my foremost guns, and in a couple of minutes caused her to cease firing on the crippled destroyer and steam off to the southward. At this range I did not hit her.

"I followed at my utmost speed, and was rapidly closing, but as 'No. 1' signalled that she was unable to keep afloat I stopped alongside her and removed her crew. I regret to report that she sank immediately afterwards.

"I also regret that five men of her crew are missing, including two wounded men who fell overboard, and that ten are injured—Sub-lieutenant Harrington, suffering from severe burns and scalds, Midshipman Glover, slightly wounded, and one man badly burnt (since dead).

"Having re-hoisted my boats, I renewed the pursuit, and at 2 was overhauling her fast. Meanwhile the three destroyers had scattered and I disregarded them.

"At 3.25 we made our distance 6000 yards by range-finder, and I again opened fire from my forecastle 6-inch and the two foremost upper deck 6-inch.

"The enemy replied vigorously from two or three guns and continued her flight.

"Though we made one or two hits at this range, it was not till we had drawn up to within 4000 yards that our shooting became good, and at 4.32—the island of Sin Ling being five miles to leeward—she caught fire astern, steered wildly, and exposed her broadside.

"We now hit her time after time, and her fire became slow and very inac-

curate.

"At 4.56 she hauled down her flag (the Chinese imperial colours, with a black instead of a red dragon and ball) and ceased firing.

"I too ceased firing and lay to about 2000 yards distant, unwilling to go within torpedo range. I then ordered my First Lieutenant (C. W. Smith) to board her, and gave him sixty men to form a prize crew and navigate her to Hong-Kong.

"When my boats were half-way across she suddenly opened fire on them, gathered way, and steamed towards me with the evident intention of ramming, an evolution which I managed to avoid by going full steam astern.

"She also discharged a torpedo whilst passing, which struck me on the port bow, and, though failing to explode, stove in one plate. Some water entered through rivet holes.

"At the same time she opened a very rapid and sustained fire, which caused many casualties on the open deck, where the men had crowded to see her.

"Thereupon I renewed the action, and quickly cleared her upper works and subdued her fire, my 6-inch shells doing very evident destruction.

"She was repeatedly hulled, flames burst out in several places, and at 5.15 made for Sin Ling at full speed, beaching herself in a sinking condition at 5.42.

"Daylight was now failing.

"I took the *Strong Arm* as far inshore as I dared, after picking up my boats' crews (they had been fired upon in the most wanton manner), and shelled her at point-blank range. In ten minutes I had the satisfaction of seeing a large explosion aft; a great gap was made in her side, she heeled to port till the water reached the base of her funnels, and half her deck was submerged. She was evidently too badly damaged to be floated.

"This being done, I returned to Hong-Kong and moored to my buoy at 9.25 P.M.

"Very little damage has been sustained by this ship, and it can be repaired without assistance from the shore.

"I regret, however, to report the following casualties:—

"Killed: One petty officer and five men.

"Wounded: Three officers, two petty officers, and thirty-five men.

"I have the honour to be, &c.,

"**RICHARD HUNTER, Commander R.N.,** "Captain of H.I.M.S. *Strong Arm.*"

CHAPTER XII
A Council of War

The "Strong Arm" Returns—Boarding the "*Hai Yen*"—Jenkins—The Council of War—Ping Sang's Chart—Cummins has a Plan—Ping Sang Remembers

Captain Helston, with his left arm bandaged to his side, and one empty sleeve of his monkey jacket flapping in the wind, was on deck to see "No. 1" slip from her buoy and start on her fatal voyage. No sooner had her dark hull disappeared in the morning mist than he began to regret having sent her. A fit of his old irresolution returned, and he would have recalled her had she been within signalling distance.

He sent for Cummins—a grotesque-looking object in the early morning, unshaven and wearing a pair of huge sea-boots.

"You know, Cummins," he began, "I have a feeling that something will happen to her. There is no knowing but that she will poke her nose into some trouble. What induced me to trust to their word of honour I don't know, and it may simply be a trap to recapture Hopkins."

"Ha! ha! ha!" chuckled Cummins, chewing his toothpick, "it's too late now, sir; we can't communicate with her."

"Well, don't you think it might be advisable to get up steam and follow her."

"Can't manage it, sir. They are refitting the starboard low-pressure piston-ring, and it won't be ready for another twenty-four hours. You might send the *Strong Arm*, though. I was always averse to trusting that Englishman's word."

Helston, to tell the truth, was somewhat nettled at Cummins's influence on board and his somewhat arbitrary manner, and the implied "I told you so" irritated him to a degree. So, saying sharply, "Very well, we'll let her go alone," went down to his breakfast.

But ten minutes later he again changed his mind, and made a signal which resulted in the *Strong Arm's* rapid departure.

He expected both ships back by four o'clock at the latest, and as the hours went by and there was no sign of either, he became extremely nervous and restless, pacing up and down his after-cabin all that afternoon. At dinner he scarcely touched anything, and was just on the point of going out himself aboard "No. 2" or "No. 3", when the signal midshipman reported that the *Strong Arm* was entering the harbour and making her number.

He ran up on deck to see for himself, and quickly a signal blinked across from the *Strong Arm's* mast-head lamp that she had driven a strange cruiser ashore, and rescued the crew of "No. 1", which had been sunk.

The news rushed like wildfire round the ship, and officers and men crowded on deck to see her slowly creeping to her buoy and signalling for medical assistance.

Helston went aboard her immediately, and Dr. Fox and the other doctors of the squadron worked all night with the wounded, many of whom had to be sent to the Naval Hospital next morning, including Harrington, whose condition was very grave.

Helston obtained a rapid report of the day's happenings from Hunter, and congratulated Ping Sang on his escape.

The identity of the strange cruiser was unknown, and even Ping Sang, who had more information than anyone else as to the resources of the pirates, had been unable to recognize her. However, it was a great achievement to have destroyed so powerful a vessel at the cost of one destroyer, though the loss of life was much to be regretted.

"You can't make an omelet without breaking eggs, I believe," was Ping Sang's comment, as he calmly puffed his cigar on the sacred quarter-deck.

The loss of life evidently did not worry him in the slightest degree.

Helston was most severe with Pattison, for, though praising his intrepidity and personal behaviour, he censured him strongly for his manoeuvring of "No. 1".

"What induced you to run straight at her instead of taking to your heels and escaping, I cannot think, and to leave the bridge in charge of a midshipman at the most critical moment seems to me to show a great want of judgment. You had no torpedoes on board, and it was impossible for you to damage her."

Except for the fact that his action delayed the cruiser, and ultimately led to her destruction, Helston would have sent him home forthwith.

This was not his hasty judgment, for he made no remarks at the time, but was given two days later when all the circumstances had been investigated more closely. In fact Harrington, the Sub, who had been so badly injured in his attempt to rescue people from the stokehold, was the only one belonging to "No. 1" who came in for any praise, and he was too ill in hospital to appreciate it.

This opinion was general throughout the squadron, and poor Pattison, who was sent to the *Sylvia* for duty, more or less in disgrace, felt it very keenly.

"I did the first thing that came into my head," he said, "and it wasn't till we were right on top of her that I remembered we had no torpedoes on board."

The morning after the return of the *Strong Arm*, this ship, with Helston aboard, and the two remaining destroyers in company, steamed to Sin Ling Island.

The strange cruiser was found still lying on the rocks—a melancholy-looking object. Her after magazine had evidently blown up, and she was a total wreck aft of her main-mast—a mass of warped and twisted plates and deck beams.

On her twisted stern was her name *Hai Yen* in Chinese characters, the gilt scorched by fire; but this name did not identify her, and her origin and history were still a mystery.

No complaint could be made of the *Strong Arm's* captains of guns, for their shooting had been marvellously effective, and her upper works were riddled with shell holes. Two guns had been dismounted, and her funnels were pierced in a hundred places.

Helston and Hunter had come to the conclusion that she had been escorting the three destroyers from the south, chiefly from the certain fact that they had neither guns nor torpedo-tubes aboard when first seen by "No. 1". These spare tubes and guns might still be aboard the *Hai Yen.* So a thorough search was made through the whole ship, and, though none of these things were found, it was discovered that the ship had been pretty thoroughly stripped of everything movable, and that the upper deck was covered with coal-dust. The coal must have been brought up after the action, because in places it covered great smears of blood, and the only inference was that the three destroyers had coaled from her bunkers during the night, removed all her remaining portable stores—even her small quick-firers had disappeared—and also taken her crew aboard them.

To make certain that the crew were not still on the island, Helston landed two hundred men and thoroughly explored it. It was but a small rocky outcrop from the Chinese coast, not a mile long, but by the time this had been done daylight was beginning to fail. No traces of the crew were discovered.

During this time the midshipmen had been allowed to inspect the ship, and, needless to say, returned with much spoil. One of them had an undamaged chronometer, another actually brought off the steering-wheel from the conning tower, two of them lowered the ship's bell into their cutter, whilst a daring youngster swarmed up to the foremast-head and secured her gilt weather-vane.

They were all vastly pleased with themselves and their trophies.

Everybody being aboard again, the *Strong Arm* steered to the north, and, on passing the island where "No. 1" had exchanged Hopkins for Ping Sang, sent the two destroyers inshore to reconnoitre; but though they entered the little bay where "No. 1" had been so neatly trapped, and explored the whole of the coast with their searchlights, no sign of any ship or junk could be found.

The three ships then returned to Hong-Kong, Helston taking Ping Sang back to the *Laird* with him.

Ping Sang and Dr. Fox dined that night with Helston, and that merry old Chinese gentleman, vastly pleased to be sitting once again in front of a good

dinner, was amusing in the extreme.

He made even the surly Doctor smile at his adventures, and very droll were the descriptions of himself sweating along the main road to Aberdeen loaded down with sugar-canes ("Beastly stuff! I can't think why they eat it. Never knew what it was to earn a living of ten cents a day"); of being hauled along by his pig-tail through a malodorous crowd of his countrymen to the police station ("Never knew I hated them before, till they began kicking me in the back"); of his struggles and protestations when the Englishman withdrew the charge and took him back to the junk; of his voyage to the island, shut down below in the stinking hold ("They didn't go across that night, but hid round a corner till the next"), and of his imprisonment on the island, where he was a guest of the same Englishman ("That man is a precious scoundrel, I tell you, and his food was worse; but he did give me some decent clothes, I'll say that for him").

The only one without a smile on his face was Jenkins, Helston's marine servant, who had persisted in accompanying his master; but this was due, as Dr. Fox well knew, to the fact that he had been ashore that afternoon, and was now assuming an air of extreme sobriety only to be accounted for by a too liberal consumption of beer.

He was an extraordinary man, this old soldier. He never went ashore without coming off half-drunk, and, as Helston often said, "he's always most drunk when he's most sober", and it was only by his preternatural solemness, or by noticing that he occasionally carried the dishes round the table at the double, that one knew that he had been making a brute of himself ashore.

Time after time Helston had dismissed him and sent him for'ard to rejoin the Marine Detachment, but always, next morning, he was stealthily creeping about Helston's cabin, folding up and brushing his clothes, and waking him at exactly the same time with "Six bells just gone, sir", and "'Ere's your cup of tea".

He had once managed to get rid of him by giving him "five days' cells", but before he had finished this punishment Helston's hair required cutting. No one could do this so well, so he was brought aft to do it, and, the job being satisfactorily concluded, Helston gave him one of his cigars, and twenty minutes to smoke it, before he was locked up again.

On the sixth morning it was "Six bells, sir, just gone, sir, and 'ere's your cup of tea", and he was now as much a permanent institution as the ship's bell or the ship's cat.

Ping Sang had gained much interesting but no valuable information from the Englishman.

"Hamilton is his name. I knew him well several years ago, before he disappeared, and he was always up to some devilment or other. If he could not manage to work for his living, he could certainly live by his wits.

"He gave me a very interesting account of his whole scheme. He, Hopkins, and the German, Schmidt—the 'Mysterious Three' of Tientsin—had put in fifty thousand dollars apiece, and many wealthy Chinese had subscribed very large sums in what he called 'our venture'. 'We've done pretty well. We have quite a respectable little fleet, and have captured thirty million dollars' worth of ships and cargoes, to say nothing of the ransoms some of our prisoners have paid for their freedom. We have friends throughout the country, and our prisoners know that if they talk too much when they get back, they will get their throats cut one fine night. We have had to do it to several already—just as a warning.'

"I asked him if he did not fear capture.

"'Capture!' he laughed, highly amused. 'You will never see any of us again, unless you happen to come as paying guests. Hopkins made a fool of himself, but he won't be caught napping again, and ten times your little fleet could not get into our island.'

"I asked him what became of all the crews of the many ships he had captured. Had he hanged them?

"'Hang them? Rather not!' he told me. 'One or two of the first few, perhaps, but ever since, directly they see what a fine life we are having there, they volunteer to join us, and make splendid recruits.'"

"Did you discover how he was going to get back to his precious island?" asked Helston.

"No, I did not. I asked him several times, and kept my eyes and ears open, but not a thing could I discover. He had nothing there except the junk, as far as I could see, and they gave me complete liberty to go about the island as much as I liked."

"How did you spend your time?" asked Dr. Fox.

"Playing cards with him, like a fool," said Ping Sang, wreathed in smiles; "and I lost nearly ten thousand dollars, and have promised to send them ashore directly we reach his island. He is going to send a junk for them as soon as we get there, and he had the cheek, too, to ask me to bring up all the things he had left behind him in the Victoria Hotel.

"Oh yes, I promised," laughed Ping Sang; "he amused me so, I couldn't help promising him."

Dinner being over, Hunter and the Captain of the *Sylvia*, Commander Bannerman, came across in their galleys, and they and Cummins of the *Laird* joined a council of war, to determine the future plan of operations.

It was a curiously impressive little scene in Captain Helston's fore-cabin that night—the polished table littered with documents and lighted by the hanging crimson-shaded electric lamps; the grey clouds of tobacco smoke eddying among the steel deck-beams overhead and curling through the after 12-pounder gun-

ports; the glitter of the polished brass-work of the gun-mountings, one on each side of the cabin—a grim reminder of war; and the serious, eager faces of Helston and his three Commanders as they bent over the various papers and argued their plans and proposals.

The last time they had all met together round that table they had drunk success to the squadron, and gaily hoped that the pirates would give them a chance of "doing something".

Now they had done something—one of their three destroyers was at the bottom, and five of her men had gone down with her; nine of the *Strong Arm's* men were dead (three had died of their wounds), and thirty or more were wounded—and though they had destroyed a cruiser, still she had not previously entered into their calculations, and her appearance on the scene rudely interfered with their plans and expectations of only meeting old, half-repaired Chinese men-of-war. There might be more like her, acquired secretly, and with the memory of those nine bodies waiting to be buried in the quiet cemetery in the Happy Valley next morning, and the unknown strength of the enemy they were now going to meet, the council took their places round Helston's table with a certain solemnity.

Captain Helston himself, gaunt and thin, sat at the head, his long, thin face haggard in the electric light, his right hand nervously fidgeting with some papers in front of him, and his left arm still bandaged to his side, his empty sleeve sewn across his chest.

At the other end of the table sat Hunter of the *Strong Arm*, a man with a great red face and great red hands, a clumsy-looking giant, more grieved at the loss of his men than elated at the destruction of the pirate cruiser. A typical bluff, good-hearted sailor was he, not devoid of brains, but seldom troubling to use them. To see him in a football "scrum", and to hear his lusty roars of encouragement to his side, did one good, and one knew immediately what kind of man he was.

Use his brains! Why? God had given him a great body which never knew fatigue, a mind which never knew fear, and he was one of the "range-up-alongside-and-blow- the-beggar-out-of-water-and-if-he-won't-sink-ram-him" school of naval officer.

Antiquated in his ideas he may have been, but he was possessed, as are most men like him, of an enormous personal magnetism, and every man Jack of his crew would follow him to the death.

On Helston's right sat Ping Sang, bubbling over with humorous details of his escapade, red in the face, his eyes twinkling with appreciation of his good dinner. As he was beautifully dressed in his favourite colour of dark claret silk, and had a gold-knobbed skull-cap of the same colour on his head, his gay attire

contrasted strangely with the more sober mess jackets of the others.

As usual, he was smoking a cigar, and had in front of him a big despatch box, from which he drew rolls of papers, spreading them in front of him with a due sense of their importance.

No one who had seen him on board "No. 1" the day before, standing calmly near the after funnel under a heavy fire, could help but praise his contempt for danger; but his first remark when he was taken off in the *Strong Arm's* boat and saw the destroyer slide under the sea was, "There goes four hundred thousand dollars", and when it was discovered that she had carried three men down with her, in addition to the two who had been knocked overboard, all he said was, "Men very cheap; plenty more to take their places".

It was very evident that everything was precious to him except the lives of the people whom he was paying to risk their lives for the protection of his vast trade. Already Helston and the others had lost some of their first admiration for the good-natured, plucky little man, and could not feel in sympathy with a nature so completely indifferent to death and suffering. Still, he was not a European, and allowance had to be made for the stoicism and callousness of the Celestial.

Next to him sat Cummins, an odd little figure, his tie up round his ears, smoking a stale old pipe, and chuckling to himself as some humorous fancy passed through his active brain. Nothing, however solemn or tragic, but had its amusing side for him.

Opposite him, and on Helston's left, was Bannerman of the *Sylvia*, a tall, restless man, with light tawny hair and cleanly-trimmed beard. He had employed all his social and service influence to be appointed to Helston's squadron, and always had a grievance that the *Sylvia* was only a store-ship. The other Commanders chaffed him unmercifully about his four little 12-pounders—the only guns she carried—and to ask him how much coal he had for them was always sufficient to get a "rise" out of him.

He was not popular, and when in a bad temper nagged his officers and men till they in turn were white-hot with silent rage. It was always with him: "My ship moored very smartly this morning, Cummins", or "Beat you yesterday unmooring, Hunter", or some other of the two or three evolutions the store-ship could take part in.

He did not disguise his knowledge that if anything happened to Cummins or Hunter he would get the vacancy, and, though he naturally never said so in so many words, it was quite plain he looked forward to such an event occurring.

His one idea was promotion, and he would stick at nothing to obtain it, caring not at all who suffered in the process.

Dr. Fox was there too, reading the *Hong-Kong Evening Mail* in an easy-chair by the side of the fire, and making some caustic remark from time to time.

A strange little group of fighting men it was: Helston, broken in health, and only eager for promotion because promotion meant his marriage to little Miss Milly; Bannerman craving for it for the power in its train; big-hearted Hunter caring not a jot, so long as he got plenty of fighting; and little Cummins, caring little for anything, so long as he could work out practically his scientific theories of modern warfare.

The island occupied by the pirates was called Hong Lu—merely a small dot on the Admiralty chart, lying in the middle of the Straits of Formosa, half-way between the Pescadores and Amoy. Ping Sang had had copies made of the rough map, drawn by the English merchant captain a year ago, and passed them round.

From these it appeared that Hong Lu was about five miles long, shaped somewhat like a horse-shoe, and that the harbour, inside the loop, was connected with the sea by a narrow passage between high cliffs, formed by the curved-in ends of the island.

At the loop end there was also another outlet to the sea even more narrow than the first.

The English captain had roughly marked the places, on each side of the entrance, where he had seen them mounting guns, and Ping Sang knew that, among the cargoes of the three steamers captured outside Nagasaki eighteen months ago, there were six 6-inch modern guns and many smaller quick-firers. As these had been intended for a new Chinese fort on the Min river, and as all their mountings and ammunition had also been on board, it would be an easy matter to mount them efficiently.

"They'll give us some trouble," smiled Hunter, gleefully rubbing his big red hands together; "take any amount of hammering if the beggars only fight 'em properly."

"I only hope they won't," muttered Dr. Fox from his easy-chair. "We've had quite enough poor fellows killed already, and I don't want any more work patching up the wounded."

"And here is the list of ships," continued Ping Sang.

This was the list of Chinese men-of-war which had been run ashore after the battle of the Yalu, and had apparently been salved by some Europeans—the "Mysterious Three".

It included the *Yao Yuen* and the *Mao Yuen*, sister ships, ten years old, and of about three thousand tons. Each carried two Krupp 8-inch and six 4.7-inch guns. Then there was the *Tu Ping*, somewhat larger and still older, carrying a 10-inch Krupp in the bows and nine 6-inch besides—all of them old-fashioned guns.

These were probably the three sighted by the English gun-boat whilst cruising in the Chusan Archipelago a few months previously.

In addition, two or three corvettes belonging formerly to the Yangtze

squadron had disappeared. These, however, could never be made serviceable against modern ships.

"That little lot ought not to give us much trouble," said Hunter rather sadly; "they dare not come out and fight us in the open."

"They have ten or twelve torpedo-boats," interposed Cummins, who was a devoted believer in the possibilities of the torpedo, "and if those three destroyers, which must have been handed over by the Patagonian Government since we left them at Colombo, reach this precious island of theirs, they will give us no end of trouble."

"Yes, perhaps they will," said Hunter cheerfully. "It will add to the excitement, won't it? Make a more level game, eh? 'No. 2' and 'No. 3' ought to be pretty busy with that little lot. Almost wish I was in command of one myself."

"I should think it would make a more level game," came from behind Dr. Fox's newspaper satirically—"much more level."

"Well, what shall we do?" asked Helston. "Those three destroyers have at least twelve hours' start of us, and I don't suppose it will be possible to catch them, for, of course, we cannot leave until after the funeral of your men, Hunter. Directly the funeral parties have returned we will weigh and proceed north."

"Certainly, sir, we shall be ready," replied Bannerman and Hunter, the latter, adding, "Of course, sir, I could not leave till I had buried my men."

"Excuse me, sir," interposed Cummins, chuckling in his nervous manner; "those destroyers could not take all the crew of the *Hai Yen* and her stores without being unseaworthy. They must have had some other ship there, and if she had been a man-of-war we should have seen something of her. Don't you think that must have been so, sir?"

"Certainly; I half suspected it myself."

"Well then, sir, they must have had a merchant steamer, and a pretty small one at that, otherwise they could not have got her in close enough to transfer all those stores in one night, the water is so shallow."

"Certainly, certainly," nodded the others.

"Therefore, if she was small, there are but few such steamers that can steam more than ten knots, and this, or more probably less, will be her speed to Hong Lu, and the destroyers would be pretty certain to convoy her, and so we might catch them as well."

"You want us to start immediately?" asked Helston.

"Certainly, sir, and at your highest speed, sending 'No. 2' and 'No. 3' ahead, if possible, and with luck we might bag them and Hopkins, and the lame Englishman in addition."

"But," interposed Bannerman, "your whole plan is based on mere conjecture, Cummins, and you must remember that my ship cannot steam faster than

ten knots herself."

"You can come on afterwards," replied Cummins, adding maliciously, for he loved to goad Bannerman, "You won't want an escort, I suppose. Haugh! haugh! haugh!"

"Well, well," Helston interfered, seeing that Bannerman was rapidly losing his temper, "the conjecture may turn out to be incorrect, but it is better to act upon it than upon nothing at all."

"What time can you get your funeral parties on board again, Hunter?"

"Not before noon, sir; their mess-mates would never forgive me if they could not do this."

"When I turn up my toes," said Bannerman snappishly, "I don't mind what happens to me; they can chuck me overboard if they like."

"Well, old fellow," answered Hunter, "when my turn comes, I should like to know that my own men looked after me."

"Very good, gentlemen," concluded Helston. "The *Strong Arm* will follow the squadron, the remainder of which will leave at daybreak."

Before Hunter went back to the *Strong Arm* he drew Captain Helston aside and put in a good word for Pattison of the ill-fated "No. 1", but the latter shook his head: "Plucky, of course, he was, but a man in command of a destroyer wants more than pluck—brains and common sense."

"Those two midshipmen, sir, Glover and Foote, behaved with great coolness for youngsters under fire for the first time, and Harrington, who I hear is doing well in hospital, did magnificently.

"Could you manage to send Foote to 'No. 3', sir? The two boys are great chums and he deserves another chance."

"All right, Hunter, I will not forget him; good-night."

Shaking hands with Helston the little council of war broke up, the Commanders going back to their ships, leaving him and Dr. Fox alone. Ping Sang was by this time sound asleep, unable to withstand the influence of his good dinner, so they left him where he sat, and the two old friends had a last pipe together before turning in. Going through the fore-cabin again before saying "good-night" they woke Ping Sang, who was still asleep with his head on the table.

He sat up with a start, and with a yell of triumph banged at the table till the tumblers rattled.

"Ho Ming's butler, the butler himself, I'll have his liver torn out if ever I can get him across to the mainland!"

"Whatever's the matter?" they both asked, thinking his dinner had had too much effect on him.

"He's that brute who betrayed me to the lame Englishman Hamilton. I felt sure that I had somewhere before seen the man who went aboard those junks so

hurriedly, and that's the man—Ho Ming's butler, the white-livered scoundrel!"

He was in a frantic rage, and wanted to go ashore immediately and tell Ho Ming; but Captain Helston and Dr. Fox managed finally to calm him, and induced him to go to bed.

CHAPTER XIII
The Avenging of Destroyer "No. 1"

Off in Pursuit—Horribly Sea-sick—A Neck-and-Neck Race—Commence Firing!—Running into Danger—"No. 1" Avenged—The Dinghy Capsizes—Plucky Little Ogston

The Narrative is continued by Mr. Glover

We had had a jolly good day at Sin Ling Island, and Mr. Parker let me go aboard the *Hai Yen* with the other midshipmen, and a grand time we had scrambling about her. I brought back a scraggy cat—half-witted I think he was, for he walked about with his head on one side in the funniest manner possible, "meaowing" from morning to night. His fur was burnt off one side, but we got some ointment stuff from the medicine chest aft, and with some bandages made him ship-shape—a comical sight he looked, I can tell you.

We didn't get much sleep that night, because, after coming back, we had to fill up with coal again, get in fresh provisions, and then bring our torpedoes over from the *Sylvia*. It was not till three o'clock that I crept into the Gunner's bunk (he was on watch), and got a couple of hours' sleep.

Then we all unmoored, and whilst I was busy seeing everything secured aft, who should come alongside but Tommy Toddles in one of the *Laird's* cutters. He was wildly excited, I could see, and, after reporting himself to Mr. Parker, came dancing along the deck and told me that Captain Helston had sent him to join "No. 3". We got his chest out of the boat, but there was very little room for it anywhere, and Mr. Parker, who swore very loudly when he saw it, made him take out the things he wanted most and then sent it back to the *Laird*.

"You two youngsters will have to share the same chest," he said. But we didn't mind in the least, it was so jolly to have Tommy.

Well, "No. 2" and we shoved off and left the *Strong Arm* behind, looking very forlorn in the half daylight with her ensign at half-mast. It seemed quite strange, too, without "No. 1", and, when we were running past the *Sylvia*, we saw Mr. Pattison on the bridge, looking, we thought, very down on his luck.

Directly we were clear of Hong-Kong and were on our proper course, we were sent ahead at full speed, and then had not much time to think of anything else, for there was a big loppy sea and a strong breeze on our starboard bow.

We were doing twenty-five knots and began to get very lively.

I thought that nothing would ever make me sea-sick, but this did, and as I had nothing to do on deck, and neither Tommy nor I wanted to yarn, I crept into the Gunner's bunk again; but the Sub came down a few minutes after to get his oil-skins and found me there. He turned me out, ordered me on deck, and made me take the wheel from the quarter-master and steer.

We were pitching tremendously, our bows burying themselves up to the conning tower. Down, down they would go till I thought, with an awfully empty feeling inside me, that they would never stop. Up they would come again, tons of water pouring off them, and the wave catching her amidships would roll her over to leeward.

Roll! Why, several times I thought she would go right over, and once or twice, as we heeled, I caught hold of the edge of the bridge to steady myself; but Collins had his eye on me all the time, and cursed me pretty hard.

"Keep her into it, you young ass! Don't let her pay off like that," he said. And another time: "If you let her swing more than two points off her course again, I'll give you half a dozen over the ward-room table."

I would do my best, and would put the helm over to steady her, feeling horribly sick and dreadfully miserable, for I was wet through and very cold.

Mr. Parker came up presently in his oil-skins to relieve Collins, smoking a pipe, the very sight of which made me feel green, and after looking cheerily at "No. 2", which was on our beam, and having as bad a time as ourselves, said, with his body jammed securely between the chart-table and the 12-pounder; "We shall break the old girl's back if we keep at this much longer, Collins. Give me a light, old chap; all my matches are wet through."

I devoutly wished she would break her back, and actually looked aft to see if there were any sign of such good fortune.

We slowed down shortly afterwards and fell back to the *Laird*; but she must have been doing nearly twenty knots, and though she did give us somewhat of a lee, we had a horrible time of it.

Mr. Parker sent me down below, and I had to hold on pretty hard to get

safely aft, and I found poor Tommy lying on the after 6-pounder gratings in a worse state even than I was.

This cheered me a little.

The night was almost as bad, and though I was dead tired and wet through to the skin and longed to die, it was impossible to lie in a bunk. I was thrown out of the Sub's bunk twice—you see there were not enough bunks for all, so I had to use the one belonging to the man on watch—and spent most of the night on the deck of the ward-room, clinging to the legs of the ward-room table, till even these gave way at one extra heavy lurch. We went clattering to leeward and woke the Engineer, who kicked me out and wanted to know "What I meant by choosing that time of night to play musical chairs?"

Then I crept up on deck and held on to the after steering screen, really too frightened to go below again, we were rolling so horribly. I tell you all this just to let you know what it is like to be in a destroyer in heavy weather for the first time. People see destroyers dashing in and out of harbour, and think what a jolly life it must be on board; and so it is, too, when once you are used to it, and have learnt that they can stand on their heads one moment, roll till the sea comes half-way up to their funnels the next, and be none the worse for it.

But doesn't it want a lot of hanging on?

Tommy joined me behind the screen presently, and a miserable pair we were, I can tell you, and wished ourselves back again in the *Laird*, swinging in our hammocks.

In the middle watch Jones, one of our petty officers and the captain of the 12-pounder, came aft to take the log and found us there.

"'Ello, sir! what be you two young gen'lemen a-doing of there?" he said.

We gulped out that we were too scared to go below, and felt better in the fresh air.

He held up his flickering lantern. "Eh! ye be sea-sick, be ye?" he said. "Well, ye do look powerful green, and be as wet as water. Just come along o' me; I'll stow you away out of 'arm."

He made us climb into the dinghy, which was in her crutches amidships, told us to lie down on some coils of rope and old canvas deck-cloths, and covered us with a tarpaulin.

We huddled up together and presently got warm again, and once we were warm and steamy we soon went to sleep.

It did not seem ten minutes later before we were roughly shaken by the shoulders, and there was Jones again.

"Turn out, you young gents; just show a leg there. It's gone seven bells (half-past seven), and it's time ye were rousing yourselves."

"Looking better the noo, ye are," he said, as we scrambled out from under

the tarpaulin, feeling stiff all over but the sea-sickness gone; "and 'ere's a drop of hot cocoa for you and a bit of ship's biscuit—make men of you agin."

The sea had gone down considerably and it was broad daylight, the sun shining brightly, and Jones was smiling in a fatherly manner at us, with a couple of ship's biscuits in one hand and a bowl of steaming cocoa in the other.

Well, I should never have believed it possible. A few hours before I thought I should never want to touch a bit of food again, and now we both felt famished, and would have gulped down the lot between us, but Jones made us eat a bit of hard biscuit first, and then sandwich in a little cocoa, and so on till there was no more left of either.

"No, there ain't no more," said Jones, "and the Captain, 'e wants to see you both as soon as you've made yourselves respectable."

He was on the bridge; and after we had brushed each other down we went for'ard, feeling awfully cheap and disreputable.

"Now, you two youngsters must understand," he began. "I'll let you off this time, but don't let me ever catch you shirking your work again, whether you are sea-sick or not. Now, go below (I think I saw a twinkle in his eye) and get some breakfast. The *Laird* has sighted those pirate destroyers and we are chasing them, but I shall not want either of you for half an hour, so make the best of your time."

"Where are they, sir?" we asked eagerly.

"Right ahead, but we can't see them yet. They've only just sighted them from the *Laird*."

The range of view from a destroyer is very limited, and it was the *Laird's* mast-head look-out who had discovered them.

"Couldn't we stay, sir?" we asked, forgetting all about our hunger in the excitement.

"No. Go down below; and you're not to come up again for half an hour."

Even with our excitement we managed to tuck in pretty well when at last the officers' cook did send us down something to eat—some eggs and bacon—from the galley, and we made a loaf of bread and a pot of jam look precious small before we had finished.

We waited impatiently for the thirty minutes to go by and then ran up to the bridge, and by this time could see a cloud of smoke on the horizon ahead of us.

We were tearing along with a vengeance, "No. 2" coming up astern, and the *Laird* several miles behind us.

A lovely morning it was, for the gale of yesterday had blown itself out, and the sea was now a beautiful glittering green, with a long, quiet swell, crested here and there with "white horses", which every now and then dashed against our bows, leapt into the air, and fell in thousands of sparkling drops over the

fo'c'stle.

"No. 2" kept gradually coming up, and eventually, do what we could, she drew level, and neck and neck we raced, not fifty yards apart.

Tommy and I could hardly keep still with excitement, and I felt as if I was tingling all over. Neither Mr. Parker nor Mr. Lang of "No. 2" had as yet been under fire, and now was their chance to avenge poor "No. 1"; and they were going to do it, too, if only the engines did their best.

And splendidly they whizzed round, and we were going even faster than when we chased the destroyer outside Colombo.

We now could see that there was a small merchant steamer with the pirates, almost hidden in smoke, but she seemed to be lagging behind, and presently we saw that the destroyers were steaming away from her.

"They're leaving her to her fate," said Mr. Parker, and half an hour later we caught her up, and went flying past near enough to see one stolid-looking man on her bridge staring solemnly at us. She was only an old tub of a merchantman, very deep in the water, wallowing along like a porpoise, and showing her bottom covered with barnacles and green growth as she rolled.

"She probably has the crew of the *Hai Yen* aboard," Mr. Parker told us, "and the *Laird* will catch her in an hour."

We left her as if she had been at anchor, "No. 2" forging ahead a little, whilst Mr. Lang roared insulting remarks to Mr. Parker through the megaphone, and the Sub dangled the end of their grass hawser over the stern and asked if we wanted a tow—the most deadly insult they could give.

We were now coming up to the three pirates, one of which seemed unable to keep up with the others and was falling back rapidly, whilst the other two, like huge porpoises, went rushing on.

By this time we had gone to quarters, and were standing by our guns. Tommy had to do doggy to Mr. Parker and run messages; I had to look after the for'ard 6-pounders, one on each side under the bridge.

The men took off their boots so that they could grip the deck more firmly with their bare feet, stripped off their jumpers, and stood to their guns, eagerly waiting, with rows of cartridges in the racks behind them.

Down where I was, with "No. 2" right ahead, I could not see the pirates, but almost immediately the signalman above me shouted: "They've fired, sir!" and in the twinkling of a second a shell, missing "No. 2", fell into the water close under our bows, and, bursting, covered one gun's crew with spray.

"Me mither told me niver to git wet," said the funny man of the crew, ruefully shaking himself.

"Put your big feet up, then, and keep it off, Bill," shouted one, and "Take off your 'at, 'twill make yer 'air grow", shouted another.

"Shall we load, sir?" asked the Captain of the gun, a little grey-eyed man named Clarke.

I told him to wait for orders, and so we hung on, and as plenty more shells came whistling past, the men became rather restless, the ammunition numbers picking up the cartridges and waiting for the signal to load.

The order seemed a tremendously long time coming, but "No. 2", sheering across our bows to port, gave us a good view of the pirate, and commenced firing herself.

At last Tommy, putting his head over the bridge screen, shouted down; "Stand by!" "Close up!" I yelled to the two guns' crews, and the captains of the guns, with their chin-stays gripped between their teeth, jumped to their shoulder-pieces, pressing well home, glued their eyes to the sights, and, with feet wide apart, stood ready, keeping their sights on the destroyer.

Down went the breech-blocks with a snap, in rattled the cartridges, up went the blocks again, and "Ready!" yelled the breech numbers.

"Range 1500 yards!" yelled Tommy from the bridge overhead in a funny, squeaky, excited voice, and directly afterwards I heard Mr. Parker give the order "Commence!" to Jones of the 12-pounder gun.

Tommy passed the order down to us, and with a whoop of joy the men jumped to their guns.

My aunt, what a row there was!

Destroyer "No. 2" was now well ahead of us, and as she gradually drew abreast of the pirate destroyer she got four guns to bear—the 12-pounder on the bridge, the 6-pounder just beneath it on the starboard side, the 6-pounder on the beam amidships, and the 6-pounder on the platform aft.

We could see the fierce little spurts of flames darting out, and thought she hit the pirate several times.

We too were firing very fast, and were trying to rake her stern, hoping to be able to knock away some of her rudder gear.

The pirate was dividing her attention between us, but was shooting very wildly and could not touch us; and no wonder, for presently "No. 2" had even forged ahead of her, and we could every now and then see shells bursting against her funnels and cowls and under her bridge. We all yelled with delight.

Her shooting became very feeble, and we could see the guns' crews trying to sneak away down below; but a big man, with a great black beard, and dressed as an officer, kept on driving them back, exposing himself with great bravery.

It was wonderful that he was not hit, and really, if we had been superstitious we should have thought that he bore a charmed life. But now "No. 2" had forged right ahead and was settling down after the other two destroyers, leaving this one entirely to us.

Was not that a gentlemanly thing for Mr. Lang to do?

Now that they were no longer under a cross fire, the pirates took courage again, and their shells began whistling past us in dozens. We did work hard at our guns, I can tell you, and hit her many times, but never seemed able to reach a vital spot, for we were plunging and shaking into the long swell, and it was awfully difficult to keep our sights steady.

Just then there was a faint cheer from the pirate, and we could see those still left on deck waving their arms and pointing ahead.

Tommy came jumping down the ladder in a tremendous state of excitement.

"The island of Hong Lu is in sight," he said, "and a cruiser is coming out to their rescue. Mr. Parker says we can't possibly carry on for more than ten minutes longer, and he's going to steer in more closely. You have to fire at her water-line between her funnels and try and disable her boilers."

All our guns were turned on this part, and we gradually edged in till we were not fifty yards away; but encouraged to renewed exertions by the chance of a rescue, they fired still more vigorously, and at that distance could not help hitting us. One shell bursting nearly amidships, wounded two men standing there, another pierced our foremost funnel, tearing a great rent in it, and a third burst against the conning tower, within ten feet of where I was standing, and though it stunned us for the moment, smothered us with smoke, and little pieces of it went flying round, no one was hit.

That was about their last shot, for they could take no more punishment. Ten or twelve had already been knocked over, and we could see them lying in huddled heaps on the deck. The rest took shelter below, crowding down the small hatchways, till we could see no one except the big officer.

"That cruiser is getting jolly close," said Tommy, who had been sent down to see what damage that last shell had done, "and 'No. 2' is coming back as fast as she can."

I could just see the big cruiser coming along under a dense cloud of smoke, not more than 6000 yards off, firing at "No. 2" as she flew back towards us.

I thought that Mr. Lang had had enough of it and was running away, and wondered how Mr. Parker dare carry on, but not a bit of it. Round came "No. 2", and circling about our stern, she stationed herself just astern of the pirate destroyer, on her other quarter, plugging at her for all she was worth, and then I saw that we were both safe for the next few minutes. You see we were all three in a bunch, and the cruiser could not fire without risk of hitting her own destroyer.

We ran like this, firing into her as hard as we could—we on one side, "No. 2" on the other—and now our shooting began to take effect. The pirate began to slacken speed; we could see wide rents in her side and water pouring in.

"Keep at it, men, for another minute," shouted Mr. Parker, and we poured in a regular stream of shells.

One or two of these just did the trick (we never found out which fired it, but Jones claimed it for his 12-pounder, and "No. 2" was equally certain it was her shot), for suddenly a great volume of smoke and steam rushed up from her deck, her mast and foremost funnel went over the side, and her deck opened in a great gap, as if she had broken her back.

We gave a great cheer, and heard "No. 2" cheering wildly too.

It was just about time, for the cruiser was now not two thousand yards off, and began blazing at us, apparently not caring whether she hit her own destroyer or not, now that she could not possibly get away.

One shell fell into the water just between us, and went ricocheting away with a loud hissing noise.

We had to leave her, and quickly too; so wheeling round we steered to pick up the *Laird* again, which now was out of sight, firing a parting broadside, which made Mr. Parker sing out, "Cease firing, men, cease firing; she's had enough, she's sinking!"

Didn't the cruiser give it to us then! Big shot came pitching all round us with the noise of an express train, and little ones went past with a "flipping" sound. How it was we were never hit I cannot imagine to this day, for she was really making splendid practice in that first five minutes, and I don't think I have ever felt in so much of a funk since, for, you see, if but one of those big shells had come aboard, it would have been death for everybody, and we should have sunk before we could have said "Jack Robinson".

But our great speed soon took us out of accurate range, and then we were practically safe, except from any chance shot.

The cruiser must have seen the *Laird* before we did, for she soon gave up the chase and left us alone; and mighty glad we were, too, I can tell you, and went to "clean guns" and cleared up the deck. It was littered with empty cartridge cases, in spite of many which had rolled or been thrown overboard. The two wounded men had been attended to long before this, but there was nothing very serious wrong with them, just flesh wounds from small bits of shell.

Looking back we saw that the other two destroyers had returned, and were standing by the one we had crippled; but they could not save her, for suddenly she turned turtle and disappeared, our men breaking out into cheers again.

"I hope they managed to save that big chap," Tommy said, and Mr. Parker, hearing him, added, "I hope so too; I should jolly well like to shake hands with that man."

We ran back safely to the *Laird*, and found her standing by the little merchant steamer, which was rolling heavily in the long swell, had a great list to

port, and was apparently sinking.

We had heard no guns fired, so could not make out quite what had happened; but the *Laird* had evidently boarded the steamer, for, as we came in sight of her, she was hoisting her two life-boats (cutters), and it turned out that directly she had heard the report of heavy guns in our direction, she had recalled the boats which she had sent across and was coming to our rescue, judging that we had been attacked by something bigger than a destroyer.

We went as near the *Laird* as was safe, and sent across the two wounded men, much against their will, I must say, for they thought that once they were sent to the *Laird* they would never get a chance of rejoining "No. 3", and everyone expected that the destroyers would see most of the fighting.

Tommy took them over in the whaler, and as he got alongside the *Laird's* after accommodation-ladder, her crew came crowding to the side and gave three cheers, for by this time they had heard that we had sunk one of the pirates.

Whilst Tommy was away the little steamer gave one or two heavy lurches to port, lifted her bows out of the water, just as if she had been alive, and was struggling to keep her head up, and then sank.

Poor little thing! She had probably been thumping her way up and down the Chinese coast for years till she had fallen into the hands of the pirates, and you could not help feeling sorry for her.

By this time the *Laird* had lowered her boats again, and they pulled over to where we could see a lot of heads bobbing about in the water, and were evidently trying to save some of the struggling wretches.

A signal was semaphored across to us, and we had to get out our dinghy and go to their assistance as well. I went in charge with a volunteer crew, consisting of Jones, our petty officer, and another man, and hard work it was in that clumsy boat, nearly as broad as she was long, to pull across to where the steamer had sunk.

We could do no good either, for the Chinese would not let us save them, and it was dangerous work in that cranky boat getting hold of them with a boat-hook and trying to haul them over the gunwale against their will. They probably thought that we should torture them, and preferred a quick death by drowning to mutilation, of which a Chinaman has a terrible dread.

One we had nearly dragged on board, and all three of us were tugging at him, when a wave lopped in over the gunwale. We filled with water, and before we knew what had happened we were all struggling in the water, still gripping hold of the wretched Chinaman.

"Let the brute go!" I shouted, as soon as I got my head above water, and we swam to the dinghy and clung on to her keel. It was a jolly uncomfortable position, for the water was very cold, and the waves kept washing over us, and

it was mighty hard work clinging to that three inches of wood keel.

With all my clothes on, and my boots too, I seemed to weigh a ton, and but for Jones catching hold of me every now and then whenever a wave came along I should have been washed away.

We were not left there long, though, for one of the *Laird's* cutters was quite close and came alongside, dropping down from wind'ard, Mellins—good old Mellins—with a grin of delight, standing up in the stern and taking care that we were not struck by the oars.

They hauled us aboard, and then we got hold of the dinghy's painter and towed her back to "No. 3". Mellins, being a chum of mine, and an awfully good chap, first hunted round and fished all her bottom boards and her sculls and boat-hook out of the water, for I dare not go back without them, because Mr. Parker would have been so angry.

We all were horribly cold by the time we scrambled up the side of "No. 3", and, never thinking of anything else except to change into dry things, I was just going to dive down below, when Mr. Parker hallooed out to me; "Hoist your boat immediately, you young idiot! I'll teach you to capsize my dinghy!"

We got it inboard presently, working at the little derrick winch till we were almost warm again, and then I ran down to Mr. Parker's cabin to report "all correct". "He really ought to be rather pleased", I thought, for we had lost none of the boat's gear; but I had forgotten that I was still dripping with water, and wherever I stood a puddle of water formed immediately.

Mr. Parker, seeing the mess I was making on his cabin deck, flew into a great rage, and ordered me to go on deck, take all my things off, and then report to him. "What the dickens do you mean by making my cabin in such a state?"

It didn't take a minute to slip off all my sloppy clothes, and I went down again with nothing on but my cap, which somehow or other had stuck on my head all the time I was in the water.

"You've lost everything out of her, I suppose?" he said angrily, though he seemed rather amused at my appearance. "Here I send you away to pick up people, and you have the cheek to capsize my boat and make yourself and 'No. 3' a laughing-stock!"

"I'm very sorry, sir," I told him, "but they did struggle so, and we didn't lose anything out of her, sir, not even her stern grating; we picked them all up."

"All right, Glover, don't do it again."

You can imagine that, as I stood there shivering, with my cap in my hand and not a stitch of clothes on, I wasn't very anxious to repeat the experiment.

"I didn't intend you to report to me like that," he added, smiling again. "Now, dry yourself," and he threw me one of his big bath-towels, "and when you are dry, climb into my bunk and get warm."

He went on deck, and it was glorious rubbing myself dry till my skin glowed, and Tommy came down with my pyjamas and a bucket of red-hot pea soup he had got from the men's galley.

It wasn't long before I was jolly snug under Mr. Parker's blankets, and then Tommy told me of a very plucky thing that had happened. They had told him about it when he went aboard the *Laird* with our wounded men.

It seems that when the *Laird* had overhauled the steamer, many of the crew jumped overboard and were drowned, nor would she stop her engines till the *Laird* had sent a shot across her bows and then another into her bridge.

This brought her to, and a couple of boats, with their crews armed, were sent across to take charge of her.

They found, as had been imagined, that the crew of the *Hai Yen* were aboard, but they made no resistance, and our people signalled over for some stokers and engine-room hands to work the engines.

Little Ogston, the assistant engineer—I told you before what a jolly little chap he is, and how clever—went over in charge of them, and by the time they got aboard something had evidently gone wrong with the steamer, for she seemed to be sinking.

They found that the Chinese captain had opened all his flooding valves and under-water openings, and that the engine-room and stokehold were half-full of water.

They could not close them, for the fittings were now below the water, but little Ogston made one of the Chinese stokers show him more or less where the opening and closing gear was, and what did he do but strip off his things and dive under the water, which had now risen almost as high as the cylinders, and was finding its way into the other compartments of the ship, fore and aft.

The engine-room was quite dark, Tommy told me, and there was fifteen feet of water swishing about among the machinery as she lurched from side to side, and all the grease and filth from the bilges was floating about in it.

Just fancy having the pluck to dive into that in the dark, knowing that it was only a question of a few minutes before the ship would sink!

Of course it was useless, and Ogston was jolly well exhausted after he had made three attempts. They had to carry him on deck and do the artificial respiration dodge before he came round.

He then wanted the diving apparatus sent across from the *Laird*, and he would have gone down again in the diver's dress had not they all been recalled to the *Laird*. That was when she heard the pirate cruiser's heavy guns, guessed we'd run up against something big, and was coming along after us.

"So you see," Tommy finished up dolefully, "they had to leave the steamer, which was chock-full of stores, ammunition, and the *Hai Yen's* small guns, and

now everything has gone to the bottom. But wasn't it jolly plucky of Ogston? They're awfully proud of him down in the gun-room, and are going to give him a mess dinner to-night and a sing-song afterwards. Don't you wish we could go?"

"Rather!" I said; but it turned out that there was something to do that night much more exciting than a sing-song.

CHAPTER XIV
Night Operations

Cooky has a Grumble—A Pirate Junk—"Hup, Hoff, and Hout of it"—Creeping Inshore—Four Pirate Torpedo-boats—A Dangerous Job—A Cunning Trap—The Fourth Torpedo-boat

Told by Pat Jones, Petty Officer, First Class, Captain of the 12-pounder, Destroyer "No. 3"

I ain't no blooming scholard, an' writin' ain't much in my line.

I writes to my ole missus once in a way, and to the kiddies when their birthdays come along, having got a list of 'em all written down proper inside the lid o' my "ditty-box"[#], 'cause I can't never remember 'em, but that's all the writin' I ever does, excep' writin' up the rough log when I'm on watch. And sometimes, when I'm a bit flush of the dollars, I sends 'em a curio, for the ole woman just 'ankers arter things from furrin' parts, and shows 'em to all 'er pals in the village—living down Dorchester way, she does. I've knowed her just puff 'erself like a hen what 'as the dandiest lot of chicks in the farm-yard, just becos' I gives 'er a real Chinee dollar when I goes home from this 'ere station three years ago come next Michaelmas, and they all peers over it and 'andles it, and says "I'm blessed! I'm jiggered! Well, my never! and them there 'eathen savidges made that all along 'emselves," and I larfs to myself (and 'as to take me pipe out o' my mouth, I larf so 'earty), for all along I knowed it was made up to Birmingham in the mint there. But that's jest like wimmin folk, they's so blooming simple in some things, though you can't get round 'em in others.

[#] "*Ditty-box*", small wooden box in which men keep their letters and small personal effects.

But that ain't nothin' to do with this 'ere story, so I'll jest start right away.

We'd 'ad a pretty 'ard time of it a-punchin' up from 'Ong-Kong and then a-fightin' most of the forenoon with them pirates, the which was just a bit of a picnic, and makes us all the more 'earty for our meals and pipe o' baccy.

Mr. Parker, says 'e, "That was your shot did the trick", 'e says, when the pirate we'd been worrying all the morning, like my little dawg at 'ome worries the rats over to Farmer Gilroy's corn-bins, busts up; but I ain't taking all the credit, because "No. 2" was firing furious-like all the time, and maybe she did it, though, mind you, that 12-pounder of mine don't make bad shooting when we ain't jumpin' into a 'ead sea.

Then we runs back to the flag-ship, an' I has to go away in the dinghy an' try to save some o' them Chinese savidges. We gets upset, an' that 'ere midshipman, Mr. Glover, ain't very 'andy at 'anging on, an' I have to look arter 'im pretty close.

He's a rare plucked un, 'e is, an' as cheerful and bright-like as a nigger a-basking on the coral strand, with the sun a-shining in the hazure skies above 'im and bernarnas a-growing all around 'im in plenty.

It does one good to see 'is merry face, and all of us on the lower deck have just made up our minds to look arter 'im, come what may.

When you've dropped your last pipe overboard, and there ain't no more spuds to be 'ad, or ain't got no terbacco, an' no matches if you 'ad, and there ain't a dry spot anywhere, and everything is just dolesome, along 'e comes as cheerful as a blooming cricket, and it do your 'eart good just for to see 'im.

We all says when they send Mr. Foote ("Toddles", the Orficers call 'im) to "No. 3": "Now, these two young gen'l'men will be 'appy", for, you see, they be great pals, and afore 'e came Mr. Glover 'ad no one to fight.

Well, I must 'urry on with this yarn. We gets to the pirate island about six bells (three o'clock) in the afternoon, 'aving had a stand easy after dinner and a lay off the land, or forty winks, as you calls it ashore.

We was a-punchin' along easy-like astern of the *Laird*, "No. 2" being just a'ead, and the *Sylvia* a-coming up from the southward, fifty miles astern by this time, an' I was standing outside o' the galley a-passing the time o' day with Cooky, who was a-drying my wet things and Mr. Glover's, the things what we had on when the dinghy capshuted, and grumbling like ole 'Arry that a shell had bust in his galley and made a 'ole in his best saucepan and smashed a lot of the Orficers' crockery. "'Ow can I do mysel' justice," he says, "with all 'em things a-busted up. I does my best, s'elp me, for them Orficers, but, there, they

always be grumbling—the spuds ain't cooked, or the entray is cold, or the blooming aigs is 'ard boiled or ain't boiled enough. And the lower deck be just as bad. Bill Williams of No. 3 mess comes a-rushing along with a meat-pie as big as a 'ouse, covered with twisted bits o' pastry, and though there ain't room on top o' the galley for a aig-cup, I shoves it on top o' somethin' else; and Nobby Hewitt of No. 5—them stokers be always the most partickler—comes an' 'e wants 'is mess's bits o' meat roasted; and, lor' love me, what with one toff wantin' 'em stooed, and another roast, an' another sings out as cheerful as if the 'ole ship was a galley, 'Boiled for us, Cooky', 'Old Fatty', or 'Carrots', or some o' their 'air-raising impertinences, why, strike me pink! there be hardly room to cook a blooming sparrah, and they all egspecs me to go on a-basting with one 'and, a-turning a joint with another, an' stirring a stoo with another, and pokin' the fire, and pitchin' on coals, and fetching water all in the same breath; an' 'ere you comes and fills me doll's-'ouse with yer dripping clothes.

"Is it any wonder," Cooky continued, wiping 'is 'ands on 'is apron, "that my countenance ain't always a-smiling like a green bay-tree, or skipping like a young ram; now, is it, I awsks you?"

He was a very religious man was Cooky, secre-tary to the Naval Temperance Society aboard us, and he played the 'armonium at church on Sunday.

"So long as we don't go a-fightin' when the galley is chuck-full o' the men's grub a-cooking, I'll come out on top,", he says patient-like; "and when I plays the 'armonium they'll join in the hymns more 'earty, and maybe sign the pledge.

"I've a great scheme," he continued, "for makin' 'em sign the pledge. I knows exactly 'ow many men in each mess are temperance men, and the more as 'ave signed on in any one mess, the more I looks arter that there mess's food be cooked proper, an', so you see, they'll all sign on afore this commission's out, just to get their food to their likin'. I tried that plan in the ole *Thunderer*."

"But you got yourself into trouble," I said, larfing.

"Well, I did get my leave stopped for six weeks once, and lost a badge another time, but it was all took cheerful-like. We all 'ave our burdens to bear, Jones."

An' 'e says, "I was a-watchin' o' your shootin' that 12-pounder of yours this morning, Pat Jones, and says I to mysel', "E ain't a bad fellow is Jones, an' if 'e took up savings[#] for 'is rum 'e might 'it what 'e aimed at—sometimes'".

[#] Men who do not want their rum are allowed a little more than the actual value of it. This is called "taking up savings".

"Never you mind about that 12-pounder o' mine, Mister Cooky. I don't come 'ere telling you 'ow to cook," said I to him, and was going to put it much more plainer, for he riles me, does Cooky, when along comes the Orficers' domestic a-singing out: "'Ave you got the 'ot water for the Orficers' arternoon tea?" and Cooky, grumbling "'E can't work no blooming miracles, 'e can't", goes off to draw some water, what 'e might have done all the time he'd been jawing to me, so I saunters off with them clothes, which are pretty near dry by this time.

Well, we ar'n't getting much way on this yarn, but we'd got to the island we'd come all this way to see, a middlin'-sized piece o' land, and going in closer, according to a signal from the flag-ship, we sees a bit of a channel running into the middle of it between high cliffs on each side. A nasty-looking coast it was, as ever I saw, without no beach where you could land in comfort, but ugly great black rocks a-sticking out all round, with the big seas a-pounding themselves to pieces on 'em. "If there's to be any boat-work in this 'ere place, look out for trouble, Pat Jones," says I to myself.

We steamed close in, ginger-like, and spied a lumbering junk a-sailing clumsily out towards us, and when she gets nearer we sees her flying the white flag at the peak of her great sail made of matting; and then, strike me pink! if she didn't 'oist the "wish to communicate" flags at her mast-head. If a polar bear came up to you in the street o' Portsmouth and said, "Beg pardon, but can you tell me where I can get a ice", you wouldn't 'ave been more struck aback than we were to see that dirty junk a-'oisting signals all regular-like.

"Bless my rags," I 'eard Mr. Parker say, "but that about takes the currant biscuit for cheek;" and after a bit of rummaging in the signal-book we hoisted "Send a boat", and they answered it from the junk and sent a boat across to us, a man-of-war's whaler which they had tied up at the stern, with a crew of Chinese dressed as bluejackets—stolid-looking ruffians they were, too, as they squinted up at us from their wicked little eyes. They brought a letter for Mister Ping Sang, the fat old gent who, they tell me, forks out the dollars to keep this show going, and has come along o' Captain Helston to see the fun.

Back we goes to the *Laird*, and Mr. Parker takes it across in the dinghy and comes back, 'alf larfing an' 'alf swearing, with a couple of big portmanties and ten bags of dollars sealed up, and all 'eavy as you could make 'em.

We shoves off back to that junk and 'ands 'em all over to her; but it was all a mystery to me till Mr. Glover tells me afterwards that the fat Chinese gent 'ad been a-playing cards with the pirate chief when he was kept a prisoner and lost all that mint of money, an' 'ad been juggins enough to promise to pay it up and bring the luggage what that Englishman who nabbed him had left be'ind 'im at 'Ong-Kong.

Blister my heels! if it didn't fairly give me the knock-out! And that junk

just 'oisted 'er boat aboard and sailed 'ome again with all those dollars, the crew maybe a-cocking snooks at us over the stern.

An', just as her big sail disappears under them cliffs, blest if the pirates didn't fire a big gun at us from the top of 'em, though we were five miles off if we were a yard. It didn't fetch up by a couple o' hundred yards, but splashed into the sea and racochied over'ead, playing ducks-and-drakes a mile the other side.

When they see'd that one go short they fires another, an' the signalman sings out that it is comin' straight for us, and lays down on 'is belly; he never done this since—we chaffed 'im so immerciful—and a good many of the youngsters would 'ave done the same if they'd had the moral courage, what they hadn't.

It did come mighty close and struck the water not fifty yards away, buzzing off again like a hive of bees out for a airing.

Well, you bet we didn't wait for any more o' them "kind enquiries and 'ow are you", but were hup, hoff, an' hout of it, hout of range.

"No. 2" came along more gently after us, for nothing short of a mad dawg would make Mr. Lang move 'urriedly unless 'e wanted to partickler, an', bless my 'eart! 'e wouldn't 'urry out of range for no pirates, though the *Laird* 'oisted "close on the flag-ship" and fired a small gun to make 'im pay attention.

And all the time we watched them getting his range and dropping shell, first on one side and then on the other, first a'ead and then astern, a-holding our breath, sometimes they was going so close, though they never hit 'im.

When he did get out o' range an' they ceased firing, we rather got the hump that we'd run away so fast.

"I'm taking no chances," I 'eard Mr. Parker say to the Sub-lootenant, as 'e keeps his eye on "No. 2" with great spouts of water splashin' hup all round her, and p'raps 'e was right.

It was pretty well dark afore we got back to the *Laird*, and both Mr. Parker and Mr. Lang had to go aboard for more orders, whilst we went to supper.

Cooky was in a great state o' mind. "That second shot," says 'e, putting 'is 'ead out, "was comin' straight for my galley. If the pirate what fired it 'ad lowered 'is sights a 'ands turn, and been a temp'rance man, it would 'ave been all U.P. with your blooming tea water, an' there wouldn't 'ave been no more cooking aboard this 'ere ship, an' no more Cooky to cook vittles an' play the 'armonium."

The Skipper comes back from the *Laird*, and she an' the *Sylvia* steam slowly away into the darkness, showin' not a single light, though we could trace them for about a mile, when they just seemed to disappear, leaving us alone for the night a-feelin' lonesome-like.

Mr. Glover came round to see every scuttle along the sides closed and the dead-lights screwed down, so that not a light should be seen, an' even Cooky's galley fire had to be raked out, for it made a tidy glow amidships.

It turns out that Captain Helston expected them pirate torpedo-boats to come out during the night, and we and "No. 2" were to go close in, at each side of the entrance, an' try an' cut some of 'em hoff.

We'd lost sight of "No. 2" by this time, as she sheered off in the dark to take up her station, and, as light after light was put out aboard us, even the engine-room 'atchways being covered hup, it seemed to make the night darker and darker, till it was just like pitch, and we put our 'ands out in front to feel where we were going, and spoke in whispers.

It was getting cold, too, and Mr. Parker goes past me on 'is way to the bridge with 'is greatcoat buttoned up round 'is neck. "More work to-night, Jones. See that your night sights are in good order, and get up plenty of ammunition," 'e says, an' I answers, "Very good, sir," and goes hoff to overhaul the gun gear, and 'ears the engine-room gong soundin' down below and them engines, with a 'ollow grating sound like a giant a-snoring, goes a'ead slow, and, though we can't see five feet in front of us, I knows by the lapping of the water against our bows that we are moving slowly in under those big guns ashore.

"If they've got search-lights ashore, they'll spot us and give it us 'ot," said one of the youngsters of my gun's crew, whispering like a fool.

"When you're awsked for your opinion you just give it," says I, speaking in my natural voice, which is rayther loud, and kicking 'im none too gentle, for all this whispering rayther gives you the fair jumps.

We was a pretty chilly crowd up on the bridge, a-standing nervous-like round the 12-pounder and staring a'ead into the darkness. Joe Smith (the signalman) and Mr. Parker had their night-glasses jammed to their eyes, and all of us egspected to feel the rocks a-crunching and grating under our bows every minute. An' not a sound 'cept the grating row down in the engine-room, which seemed to swallow everything else, and we 'ardly thought them Dagos of pirates could help 'earing of it if they had their ears shipped on proper-like.

Then someone whispers, "'Ear that, Bill", and shortly we could 'ear the booming of the swell breaking itself on the rocks; and Mr. Parker, 'e turns to the engine-room telegraph and we stops our engines, and the grating noise stopped all of a sudden and left us all more lonesome than ever, till the moaning and roaring on the rocks a'ead of us got louder, and seemed a jolly sight too close to be comfortable. The wind had dropped by this 'ere time, and the long swell just slid under us and rolled away into the night, as we listened for it to break itself with a crash and a roar. It seemed not two 'undred yards hoff of us.

There was nothing to do, that was the worst of it. Mr. Parker orders us all below, 'cept 'imself and the Sub-lootenant and the quarter-master, whose watch it was, so I just made them all eat a bit of something we 'ad left over from our suppers, and we got some pickles and sardines out o' the canteen, and felt better;

but, bless you! we couldn't sleep, what with the encitement and the noise of them breakers, which we could 'ear even more loudly down below, for it seemed to come right up through her bottom. We'd got a good deal of sea-water down below, too—took it in when we were punching into those 'ead seas outside 'Ong-kong—and that fo'c'stle mess-deck war'n't the most comfortable place that night; and, as no one could catch a blessed wink of sleep, I just told the men to light their pipes, which was mighty comforting, though, by the way, 'twas strictly agin' orders, an' I got a wiggin' from Mr. Parker arfterwards for doing it.

Then I 'eard that there Cooky a-jawing to some of the youngsters about "'oping they was all prepared to die sudden-like, if so it was necessary and they got the call".

So I told 'im to let 'em go to sleep, and do 'is own dooty first and get 'em some 'ot ship's cocoa.

"'Ow can I make bricks without straw," said he, sad-like, and he had the pull of me on that, for, in course, the galley fire had been drawn.

I had the middle watch that night, from midnight to four in the morning, as you'd call it on shore, and nothing 'appened for the first two hours, 'cept that Mr. Parker and myself took it in turns to peer through the night-glass towards where we knew the island was, and stamped up and down to keep ourselves warm, for the night was most partickler cold, an' once or twice we had to move the engines to keep her from getting too close to them rocks.

Then the fun began. It was still as black as ink, you must remember, and we was supposed to be lying just off the narrow channel which zigzagged between the rocks into the big anchorage inside the island, we being on one side and "No. 2" on the other, though we could not see her, and could only guess she was there.

"If their torpedo-boats or destroyers do come out," said Mr. Parker, "they could no more find the *Laird* on a night like this than a needle in a 'aystack, so we can do just what we like—follow 'em and try and sink 'em in the dark, or wait till they come back in the morning and cut 'em off then."

Well, we was watching and blinking like owls through the glasses, when suddenly, down by the water edge, out blinked two little white lights, some distance apart they were, and steady as anything.

"They're lighting the channel," Mr. Parker said 'urriedly; "something will be coming out directly. Get the men on deck."

They scrambled up in no time, and by the time I'd got back to the bridge the engines were working us round with our bows pointing out to sea.

Mr. Parker was just chuckling to 'imself, "I've got a scheme, Jones, a ripping scheme. If they do come out they sha'n't get back to-night," 'e said.

Then 'e stopped talking, for, as we watched, something dark glided in front of the farther light, and shut it out for 'alf a minute. Then it shone again, and

another dark thing shut it out, and so on till it disappeared four times, and then it burnt brightly again.

"Four of them," muttered Mr. Parker, and 'is voice sounded like a blooming earthquake, we was all so still and silent and excited.

It's no use telling me you can judge distances at night, for you can't, and though we thought we'd been no more than a couple o' 'undred yards from the beach, it must 'ave been nearer 'alf a mile, for we saw nothing more for, may be, three or four minutes, when someone down on deck hissed "Ah", and looking shorewards we saw some sparks come flying up. You can't imagine what the excitement was like; all the worse becos' we dursn't make a sound, and we could 'ear our 'earts a-thumping inside of us.

Another minute an' we could 'ear the noise of their engines just gently, slowly "'Ere we are, 'ere we are" they was a-saying, but getting more flurried, and, all of a sudden, with a white splashing under her bows, a long, black torpedo-boat just walked past us, and another and another and a fourth, and were swallowed up to seaward, leaving nothing but some oily smoke, which swept back into our faces.

They hadn't seen us, that seemed pretty certain, but "No. 2" had spotted them, for on the other side of the channel we saw a torrent of sparks flying up into the darkness, and knew she was going after them.

"Mr. Lang is after them, sir; shall we chase?" asked the Sub-lootenant.

But not a bit of it.

"Hard a-starboard, slow ahead starboard, half-speed astern port," were Mr. Parker's orders, and we turned in again towards the little light at the entrance.

I 'eard Mr. Parker say to the Sub-lootenant, "If you'd seen those lights when I did, both of them shining up simultaneously, you'd feel pretty sure that they must be electric and on the same circuit, too. They probably have a cable running out to those outer rocks, and I want you to take the whaler ashore with a 'destruction' party and try and cut the cable or smash the lamps."

Then I understood what we were going to do, and if so be that we doused their glim for them, those torpedo-boats could never get back till daybreak, and we could make mincemeat of 'em.

Nothing seemed moving on shore, not another light could be seen, just those two little lights down by the edge of the water.

The swell was going down fast, too, so we lowered the whaler, an' the Sub chose the five strongest men on board to pull her, and that didn't leave me on board, you may bet your bottom dollar, and we took a torpedo instructor and grapnels and axes and shoved off in the dark, the swell lifting us along towards them lights.

We lost sight of "No. 3" in a brace of shakes, the last thing I saw being Mr.

Glover a-looking sad and mournful for once, because Mr. Parker wouldn't let 'im go with us.

Lonely, were we? Why, I never felt so blooming lonely in all my life; not a sound but the oars creaking and the booming of the sea a'ead of us.

"Oars! Hold water, men," whispered the Sub, an' we 'ad time to look round, and there we were, right in between the two little twinkling lights. They were electric, too, as Mr. Parker had guessed, an' they was just light enough to make the rocks they was fixed to look darker than the night itself, and with just a glimmer in the sea which boiled up agin' them below.

There was no going near 'em to wind'ard, that was plain as a pikestaff, and after we had a look at both, shoving our nose as close as we dared, the Sub tried what we could do round the back of 'em, to leeward, where the swell wouldn't trouble us so.

It might have been all right in daylight, but this was just the horridest job as ever I took on.

We did get close in once, and the bowman, as plucky a little fellow as was ever invented, got a hold on it with 'is boat-'ook, but swish swirl came the swell, lifting us up and breaking an oar, and as we dropped again and tried to keep the boat off he lost 'is 'old, for it was only seaweed 'e'd 'ooked 'is boat-'ook in.

"Back hard, men, back hard!" came from the Sub, and we all backed as if the devil was after us, and scraped our keel along another ugly piece of rock, just being lifted over it and not stove in by the next swell that came.

My! but that was a close squeak, I can tell you, and we didn't breathe freely till we had backed out between the two lights once more.

We hadn't been there a minute before we 'eard firing, a long way out to sea. "That's 'No. 2,'" the Sub said, "and we'll have to just be quick about this job before she drives those torpedo-boats home again."

Then we tried edging in as close as we could and throwing a grapnel over the rock, but that wouldn't 'old, nor could we get near the light with it, and once or twice we were nearly stove in and pretty nearly swamped by the end of it.

"It's no good, men," said the Sub-lootenant, when we'd backed out for the last time; "I'm not going to run any more risk. We must try and get hold of the cable running between these two rocks."

That meant that we 'ad to creep for it by dragging the grapnel along the bottom between the two rocks, a mighty slow job at the best, and 'orrid at night. There wasn't no 'elp for it, so we dropped the grapnel to the bottom, with a good stout rope secured to it, and slowly backed the whaler in between the two lights.

Every now and again it would catch something, and we'd get in a state of 'oly joy and 'aul at it, but, offener than not, it was only a piece of seaweed, or it had just caught a rock—you could tell that by the sudden way it gave. We went

at it, 'auling the grapnel across where the cable might be, then putting to sea and backing again, for mayhaps 'alf an hour.

Rogers, the torpedo instructor, was 'andling the grapnel line, for the Sub, he says to 'im, "You've had more experience 'unting for lost torpedoes, so you take it, Rogers," which made us laugh, on the quiet, as it 'it the little man rather 'ard, 'e being mighty sore about anything going wrong with 'is torpedoes.

There was not a sound from shore, and not another light could we see. Pretty eerie it was, with every now and again the noise of guns a-firing out to sea, and we went backwards and forwards till we were well-nigh sick of it, and every moment thought one or all of them torpedo-boats would come dashing through, and probably cut us down.

Just as we were about to chuck up the business, Rogers sings out softly that he'd got 'old of something, and sure enough, as another man clapped on the grapnel rope, it came in with a steady pull, and Rogers, leaning over, with his arm in up to the shoulder, as it comes to the surface, says in a muffled voice, "I've got it, sir; right it is, sir."

We passed the grapnel aft. The Sub lashed a rope round the cable and 'auled it over the stern, Rogers coming gingerly stepping between us to cut it in 'alf, and we could just see 'im raise 'is axe, down it came, and out went both the lights.

We could do nothing but chuckle inwardly; we dursn't make a sound, and it 'urt somewhat.

The Sub-lootenant 'ad got one end in his hand, and he hung on to it like grim death, and hauled away till he'd got a couple of fathoms on board, and Rogers cut this hoff, and we dropped the rest of it in the water.

"Back to 'No. 3'," sings out the Sub, and we pulls away as cheerily as mud-larks, and then came the 'unt for her.

We'd got a signal lantern in the boat, and was just a-going to light it, when the Sub-lootenant caught sight of her and 'ailed her softly.

We were aboard in a jiffy and 'oisted the whaler in again, everyone a-patting us on the back.

They'd got some 'ot cocoa made down in the stokehold, too, and served us out some all round, which we needed pretty bad.

There was more firing just about this time, and when we'd got on deck again, after our 'ot cocoa, we were romping along in that direction. But we weren't off to 'elp "No. 2", not by a long chalk, for Mr. Parker or the Sub-lootenant, or both of them, gets another idea (real artistic, too, I called it), and he stops, and we gets out the two collapsable boats and the whaler, and we soon sees what 'is little game is, for he lashes a lantern in each of the small boats and sends the Sub inshore again. We were still, you see, quite close to the rocks, but 'alf a mile farther along.

"Take some fire-bars to moor them with, and leave them as close in as you can," he told the Sub. "Light the lanterns, and come back as fast as you can."

My! wasn't that a pretty little game? and weren't those torpedo-boats a-going to get a sur-prise?

It took pretty near a 'alf-'our to do this, and every now and agin we could 'ear shots—sometimes closer and sometimes seemingly farther off; but at last the lamps shone out, and though they did look a trifle unsteady in the swell, still they was good enough to deceive them Chinese.

When the Sub had got back we went off to where we'd heard the firing.

It was getting less dark now, and a few stars were coming out, and in a few minutes a long dark thing, with flames sputtering from the funnels, went flying past us—one of the Chinamen a-going 'ome—and another followed her, and we just laid low and let them go, chuckling to ourselves and thinking of the trap we'd laid for 'em.

"No. 2" had got hold of something now with a vengeance, for she was firing pretty fast, and, as we hurried over to her, we could see the flames of her guns and sometimes the flash of a busting shell; coming towards us too, she was.

We got our search-light cleared away, and when we were quite close we found "No. 2" a-hanging on to a poor unfortunate torpedo-boat and banging away at it; so we just slewed round her stern and turned our light on the wretched thing—an old torpedo-boat just struggling along at about twelve knots—to make it a respectable target.

That just did the trick, for she got hit by one of "No. 2's" 12-pounders, in the boiler most likely, and seemed just to double up, open out amidships, and go slithering under.

[image]

THE SINKING OF THE PIRATE TORPEDO-BOAT.

Poor wretches! an' we 'adn't the 'eart to cheer; 'twas so one-sided a show.

We stopped and tried to pick up some of her men, and did save a couple of Chinamen, more dead than alive with fright. They turned out jolly useful, as you shall 'ear afterwards.

"No. 2" hadn't seen the fourth boat, so we pushed on back to the entrance to look for her in case she tried to get in. The two lights we had left were still burning, but we couldn't see what had become of the two torpedo-boats which had passed us.

The people on shore must a 'eard that torpedo-boat blow up, for now a

couple of search-lights shot out from somewhere high up on the cliff near the entrance, and began hunting round to see what all the fuss was about.

It just happened that where we'd moored the boats was a bit round the corner and out of sight of them searchlights, so we stayed abreast of them and watched the two beams a-travelling from side to side, and presently saw the missing torpedo-boat coming sneaking in. She must have gone right around the island.

Mr. Lang rushed out from behind our safe corner, and tried to wing her afore she could get into safety, and we followed 'im and tried a few long shots from the 12-pounder; but even I couldn't 'it anything under them conditions, especially as they glared their search-lights in our faces and commenced firing pretty briskly at us with small guns from the shore.

So we goes back round our corner, more quickly than we came out, and whilst we were turning they 'it us once or twice, smashing our whaler, and a splinter of shell or wood knocked over poor Rogers, who was standing by. We thought 'e was only stunned, but 'e was dead as a door-nail, and it 'urt us to think we'd chaffed 'im so unmerciful, and we covered 'im up and put 'im down below.

We waited about till it was light enough to see what 'ad 'appened with our little trap, and then went close inshore again.

Well, there was a 'orrid sight, or joyful sight, whichever way you takes it, for them two torpedo-boats were piled up against the rocks all battered to pieces, one in 'alf and the other bottom up, a-smashing up agin the bottom of the cliff. There wasn't a soul to be seen; and it was well-nigh hopeless, for the cliffs rose straight up from the sea, and no monkey could 'ave climbed them, let alone a Chinaman, so we knew they must have all been drowned. Poor old Rogers would have a lot of them heathen to keep him company.

The two lanterns we'd left in the boats were still burning as innercent as you like, looking yellow in the hazy light of morning.

CHAPTER XV

Mr. Midshipman Glover Tells how he was Wounded

Lang to the Rescue—In Disgrace—We Hate Dr. Fox

Pat Jones, the quarter-master, has told you all the exciting things that happened the night we reached the island, and how we had bagged three of the four torpedo-boats which came out, with only the loss of poor Rogers.

Both Tommy Toddles and myself were jolly down in our luck at not being allowed to go away in the whaler, and, like the silly idiots we were, we did not take the opportunity of getting a little sleep. The result was, that when daylight came we were both so sleepy, we could hardly stand upright or keep our eyes open.

Mr. Lang had brought "No. 2" close in abreast of the wreck of the Chinese torpedo-boats, and ordered Mr. Parker to recover his two Berthon boats.

As you know, our whaler had been smashed by the same shell that had killed poor Rogers, so she was useless, and suddenly I heard Mr. Parker singing out to me to clear away the dinghy and get her into the water.

"Take four hands with you; put one in each of the Berthon boats, and then tow them back," were his orders, "and take care you don't capsize this time, or back you go to the *Laird*."

We pulled in towards the nearest boat—close inshore she was—and just beyond her, right under the towering cliffs, were the two battered torpedo-boats, with some dead Chinamen washing about among the wreckage—a nasty sight, I can tell you.

We hauled in the moorings of the first boat, one of my four men jumping into her, and we had just commenced to tow her across to where the second bobbed up and down in the water, when ping! ping! came something past my head. A bullet took a splinter out of an oar, and we heard the noise of a rifle high up on the cliffs above us.

Then came a regular hail-storm of them—whip! crack! whip! crack! they went singing past, and throwing up little spurts of water all round us.

You may bet that we pulled hard and tried to make ourselves small.

Suddenly I saw Tomlinson, an A.B., who was pulling stroke oar, get white in the face and drop his oar.

Pat Jones, who had come with me, seized it before it could fall overboard, and Tomlinson tumbled down into the bottom of the boat with both his arms shot through, and helpless.

Then there was a loud boom from "No. 2" or "No. 3", and one of our 12-pounder shells burst against the cliff just below where they were firing at us; another and another followed, the noise rolling from cliff to cliff and making a hideous roar, whilst stones and rock came rolling down and splashing into the sea.

The pirates—Chinamen probably they were, for they shot miserably—left off firing, but before we could weigh the second boat's moorings they began

again, firing from the top of the cliffs, a little farther away.

Pat Jones was steadying the dinghy with the oars, whilst Stevens, a Plymouth seaman, and I were hauling in the rope, and hauling, too, for all we were worth, when suddenly Stevens gave a gasp and fell forward, knocking me over, and would have fallen overboard himself had not Jones jumped aft and pulled him aboard. He was dead. I could see that by the way his head hung sideways as he was hauled into the boat, and Jones laid him down alongside Tomlinson, who was groaning horribly.

The rope, too, had slipped through my hands, and the moorings had to be hauled up again. Jones and I seized hold of them, and it was then that I felt something hit me in the leg. It felt just as if somebody had struck me hard with a ruler or the flat of one of our dirks.

I can't really remember accurately what happened after that till I found myself pulling the stroke-oar and towing the two Berthon boats away from those horrid cliffs. I felt terribly sick, and it was all I could do to keep my foot from hurting Tomlinson and to keep the other away from the dead man.

I seemed to wake up quite suddenly with my wrists feeling like hot irons, and with hardly strength to lift the clumsy oar out of the water. All the time, just as if it was in a dream, Jones behind me kept on saying, "Steady, sir, steady!"

Little spurts of water were still jumping up close to us, but I was too utterly tired to worry about them. My leg, the one that had been hit, began to feel like lead, and I know that I lurched over the loom of my oar once or twice, and could hardly pull it through the water.

"You'll do more good steering, sir," said Jones, and he got hold of my oar, shifted the crutch, and pulled both oars himself, working like a machine. I managed to scramble aft and get hold of the tiller, and just remember seeing "No. 2's" whaler, with Mr. Lang in her, coming down towards us.

* * * * *

I opened my eyes to find myself in Mr. Parker's bunk, and the propellers whizzing round and shaking the whole stern of the destroyer.

Looking over the edge of the bunk I saw Tommy Toddles in a chair fast asleep, with his head hanging over to one side in a most comical manner.

I guessed what had happened. I had simply fallen asleep in the boat, and had been put in Mr. Parker's bunk, with Tommy to watch over me, and he, too, had gone to sleep. I felt frightfully ashamed of myself for being such a baby, and crawled out, found my trousers, which someone had taken off in order to bandage my leg, and dressed myself rather gingerly, because the leg was very stiff, and smarted a good deal when I moved it. There were two neat little holes

in the trouser leg, where a bullet had gone through, and a patch of blood, which stiffened the cloth all round them. I did feel proud!

What a joke it would be, I thought, to leave Tommy sleeping there and guarding the empty bunk; but then it struck me that Mr. Parker would only be the more angry, so I shook him, and a big job I had to wake him.

He did look silly when at last he opened his eyes and mumbled something about it not being his watch, and we both scrambled on deck and made our way for'ard.

It was a lovely warm, bright morning, and right astern was the island which had been so horribly close to us all night. Oh, we were so sleepy, and all over the deck men were lying sound asleep curled up in corners out of the breeze. Just abaft the after funnel was a heap covered with our best ensign, and we hardly cared to pass it, for we knew that poor Rogers and Stevens were underneath.

We clambered up the bridge ladder, passing Pat Jones at the wheel, who smiled grimly, with a warning look at Mr. Parker. He, with his back turned to us, and dressed in oil-skins and sou'wester, stood, gripping the bridge rails, as rigid as a statue.

You should have seen him jump when I said, "Please, sir, I'm all right now, sir," and Tommy, saluting, sleepily added, "Please, sir, Glover's woke up."

He looked ten years older: his eyes, sunk deep in their sockets, stared at us in a dull way, his cheeks were sunken, and his whole face was furrowed with deep lines. He had practically not left the bridge for forty-eight hours, and it was wonderful how he could stand the strain.

He swore angrily at us—at me for coming on deck without leave, and at Tommy for letting me get up.

"But please, sir," I began, "Tommy did not——"

I just stopped in time, for I was going to tell him that Tommy had been asleep.

Tommy, however, looking very ashamed, blurted out, "I went to sleep, sir, and Glover got up without waking me."

That made Mr. Parker all the more angry, and he sent us both below.

"Both of you will go back to the *Laird*. Have your chest ready in half an hour!" he said, snapping our heads off.

We saw the *Laird* steaming to meet us, and went below again, feeling absolutely wretched, and commenced slowly to stow our things away in the chest which Tommy shared with me.

The next thing we knew was that we were being roughly shaken by Pat Jones, and we woke to find that we had both been asleep. Tommy was sprawled right across the chest, face downwards, with a pair of boots in his hand.

We could have cried, we were so angry with ourselves.

A cutter from the *Laird* was alongside, and we two and Tomlinson, the wounded man, were pulled across to her, Mr. Parker coming too to make his report.

As we went up the gangway we could hardly face all the midshipmen who crowded round us—Mellins, and Dumpling, and all the others—we felt so much in disgrace, and I had not even the heart to tell them that I'd been wounded.

I had to hobble for'ard to the sick-bay, and the bandage was taken off my leg.

"Just a skin wound, Glover," Dr. Fox said, and put in some stitches, which didn't pain me half as much as I expected.

"I needn't go on the sick-list, sir, need I?"

The Fleet Surgeon smiled in his nasty way, and then fastened a long splint to the leg, and, of course, that made it certain that I could not go back to "No. 3".

How I did wish that I had not gone to sleep in the boat, and then no one would have known that my leg had been hit, and I might still have been aboard her. What a fool I had been! All my chances were gone, and, feeling utterly wretched, I couldn't manage to keep back a tear, and Dr. Fox saw it before I could brush it away.

"Pain you, youngster?" he asked, and then he must have understood, for he laughed and called me a young fire-eater, and wanted to know if I wasn't content with having been wounded twice, which made me get red and uncomfortable, and made me hate him.

It was impossible to walk with the beastly splint, so they carried me aft and put me in the Captain's spare cabin.

Tommy came along, too, and spread his hammock on deck, the sentry outside shut the door, and we slept soundly for nearly ten hours. Wasn't that a sleep? and weren't we hungry, too, when we did wake up?

Tommy went off to the gun-room, and the mess-man sent us in any amount of food. What a time we did have! And all the midshipmen crowded in and talked thirteen to the dozen, and wanted to hear all about our adventures, and to see the scratch in my leg. You can imagine how important I felt, especially when Captain Helston, with his arm still bandaged to his side, came to see me, and said some awfully jolly things. What I wanted, though, and what we both wanted, was to know whether we could go back to "No. 3", and I managed awkwardly, and getting very red in the face, to ask him.

He smiled grimly, and said, "I'll see what I can do when you come off the sick-list," and left us happy again.

It turned out that Mr. Parker himself had fallen asleep in Captain Helston's cabin after he had reported to him, and that, as everybody in both destroyers had been practically forty-eight hours without rest, people had been sent to them

from the *Laird* just to keep up steam and keep a look-out during the day.

This news made Tommy and myself quite contented, for, at any rate, we were not the only ones who couldn't keep awake.

Mellins and Dumpling had, however, both been sent to "No. 3" to take our place—temporarily we hoped.

"You haven't missed much," added Ogston, the Assistant Engineer, who had been so plucky in the sinking steamer, "for the *Strong Arm* has not joined us, and we've been doing nothing all day."

They had buried both Rogers and Stevens. Poor fellows! they lay in a hundred fathoms, and brought our list of killed up to fourteen already.

Dr. Fox came in then, cleared everybody out of the cabin, gave orders to the sentry that no one was to be allowed in, turned out the light, and left me. Just like him, was it not? But I had a pencil and paper, turned up the light again, and wrote a tremendous letter home, just to spite him.

CHAPTER XVI
Captain Helston's Indecision

A Weary Blockade—Getting Impatient—The Prisoner's Story—A Willing Prisoner—The Pirates' Cunning—Ping Sang Excited—News from Home—Helston's Ill Health—Cummins Indispensable—A Gun-room Scrap—Now to Business

The few days which followed after the events narrated in the last chapter were days of peace and devoid of excitement. Well, they were needed, too, to allow the crews of the destroyers to recuperate after their exertions and want of sleep, and to repair the minor damages incurred by the fast steaming of the squadron from Hong-Kong.

The two poor fellows who had been killed were buried at sea with all the solemnity possible under the circumstances, all the ships stopping their engines and lowering their ensigns to half-mast, the crews standing bareheaded whilst the service was being read, and remaining "at attention" till, sewn up each in his hammock, the two bodies plunged overboard and sank out of sight.

The *Strong Arm* rejoined from Hong-Kong after having buried her men in the Happy Valley cemetery, and she, too, added to Captain Helston's anxieties by developing considerable engine-room defects, and by having eaten up half her coal.

Hunter, eager to arrive at the scene of action and not to miss any of the fighting, had pressed her through head seas at the greatest speed he could get out of her, with the result that for six days she was practically useless, with every artificer in the squadron tinkering away at her bearings and condensers.

Fortunately the weather held fair, and by repairing only one main engine at a time she was able to crawl away from the island each night and crawl back in the morning, lying most of the day utterly unable to assist in a fight if the pirates had come out.

Each night the destroyers "No. 2" and "No. 3" crept inshore to cut off any issuing torpedo-boats, but, after their first fatal attempt, none attempted a sortie, and, save that on occasions when Mr. Lang or Mr. Parker ventured within gunshot during daylight and drew a sulky warning fire from the batteries on each side of the entrance, there were no signs of life and nothing to remind them that, hidden behind those rocks and wooded slopes, hundreds of cunning, slit-like eyes were keeping watch.

With the weather fair and the sea calm the destroyers coaled without difficulty from the little *Sylvia*, and in four days of arduous work the *Laird* and the *Strong Arm* also filled up their bunkers.

It can easily be imagined how difficult, how dangerous, and how slow was this operation in an open sea, with the chance of the pirates coming out at any time to interrupt it, or the wind and sea rising and making it impossible.

However, Captain Helston's luck held, and in six days' time he had all his bunkers full, and the *Strong Arm* repaired sufficiently well to rely upon getting sixteen or seventeen knots out of her.

But he had no definite plans to act upon.

After seven months' hard work, during which he had overcome a thousand difficulties, he had brought his little squadron to the scene of action, but, once having reached his goal, he seemed to lose his power of initiative, and instead of making the first move himself, he waited for the enemy to do so.

Day succeeded day and nothing was done.

Each night, with lights out, the *Laird*, *Strong Arm*, and *Sylvia* vanished into the darkness, rejoined each other at a given rendezvous next morning at earliest daybreak, and moved in towards the island.

The destroyers sleepily would join them after their night's watching, and there the squadron would lie till sunset came, and the same routine commenced again.

To the Commander of the squadron and to all his officers, to say nothing of the men, it became very apparent that events had reached an impasse.

If the enemy chose but to lie quiet in their island stronghold and wait, a time would surely come when the blockading squadron would have to depart. No ships, however stoutly built, can stand constant work for any length of time in those stormy seas without a refuge in which occasionally to shelter, coal, revictual, and give their crews a "run ashore". Men and officers, too, become "stale", dispirited, and discontented with the monotony of blockade-work and the monotony of an unvarying and not too palatable diet.

Once this "staleness" develops, the sick-list grows apace, and general slackness makes itself felt.

There was no doubt whatever that the clever schemers in that little island had laid their plans accordingly, and were quite content to allow Captain Helston and his ships to wear themselves out in a wearisome blockade, probably conjecturing that, with the dislike of prolonged inaction, the Englishmen would throw their cards on the table and make a combined attack on the island, which they considered—and justly, as events turned out—was impregnable to sea attack.

Nor were they wrong in their supposition, for at the end of ten days' monotony, ten days during which not a sail nor the smoke of a steamer had broken the empty circle of the horizon, everyone became impatient, and no one more so than the nervous, highly-strung Helston.

He knew well enough that every day which elapsed meant a further encroachment on the funds of the China Defence Association, and if he had perchance forgotten this fact, Ping Sang was there at his elbow to jog his memory and counsel a more active policy.

"My dear Captain," he would say, patting Helston's still empty sleeve, "we can't remain here for the remainder of our lives. I've already spent nearly a million and a half, and we seem as far off as ever from securing these pirates. With all your guns and with all your fine English sailor men, you surely ought to be able to knock the pirate syndicate and their Chinese bandits on the head."

Nothing that Helston or anyone else could tell him would make him understand the rashness of opposing ships to forts, especially ships with but scanty reserves of ammunition (in the hold of the stout little *Sylvia*), and with no place of refuge in case of damage.

Hunter, the lion-hearted, was also for trying the weight of his metal against the shore guns.

"As a preliminary to what?" Helston would ask.

"Well, you see, sir, we'd batter their forts to pieces, and then we'd land and secure them, and possibly might be able to turn any guns left in them on the blackguards down below."

Helston's own ideas, if he could have put them in definite form, were probably to try and starve the pirates into making a desperate sortie, and, if this should happen, he was perfectly confident of the result. This may have been the soundest scheme, but success depended on so many factors. First, it meant time—possibly a considerable time—and time meant money, and Ping Sang was already inclined to draw tight the purse-strings. Secondly, it meant a sufficient force to blockade, and that, Helston ruefully confessed, he did not possess; and thirdly, and most important of all, was the question whether the island could be starved out in, say, two months, or possibly three at the most.

On this last point the two Chinese captured from the sunken torpedo-boat were able to give information which effectually dispelled this hope. For the first day or two after their capture they had preserved a sullen silence, and expected instant death. As day after day went by, and they received food and blankets to sleep in, it dawned upon them that they were not being reserved even for torture, and they gradually became more communicative.

A Tsi, the silent, inscrutable, right-hand man of Ho Ming, interviewed them every day, at first with no success, but eventually he was able to bring them into a more amiable frame of mind, and they promised to give what information they possessed.

When their leg-irons were removed, and they were marched up on deck and taken aft between a file of marines, their thoughts again flew to death, and their terror was great, in spite of A Tsi's assurances that did they but speak the truth they need fear nothing.

Each one was separately examined in Captain Helston's cabin before the Captain, Dr. Fox, and Ping Sang.

The first, a tall Tartar of fine physique, was only held upright by the vigorous support of A Tsi, who bundled him into the cabin, his knees bending and knocking together under his huge body. Looking from one to another like a hunted animal at bay, he salaamed, with both hands to his forehead, to each one in turn, and a second time to Captain Helston.

His story, drawn out of him with difficulty, was this. He had been a sailor aboard a merchant ship captured by the pirates, and, on the promise of his life, had taken service with them, being sent aboard one of the old torpedo-boats on account of his knowledge of seamanship.

He had no complaint of his masters' conduct towards him, and they paid him two or three dollars a month, with which to buy tobacco and sweetmeats.

"He looks half starved. Ask him if they get enough to eat," asked Helston.

"He says they get plenty," answered A Tsi, smiling, "but North Chinaman he never gets fat."

"What does he know about the store of provisions on the island?"

He seemed to know a good deal about these. He had formed one of a working-party a fortnight ago to unload a captured ship laden with tinned meat and flour, and they had to leave a large part of it in the open, covered with tarpaulins, because the go-downs were already full.

"At the end of the time each man was allowed to take away what he wanted," finished A Tsi, whilst the Chinaman spread his hands apart and tried to express a vast quantity.

At each question there would be a rapid flow of queries and answers in Chinese between A Tsi and the prisoner, the latter gesticulating excitedly to explain his answers, and, whilst the former was interpreting, he would try to follow him with pantomimic gesture and alterations of expression, looking from one to another in an imploring manner.

He was asked the number of men on the island. He could not tell.

"Many?"

"Yes, a great many."

"A thousand?"

"Yes, more than a thousand."

"Two thousand?"

He screwed up his face and evidently did his best to calculate.

No, he could not tell; a thousand, yes; but two thousand he could not say, and solemnly shook his head long after A Tsi had finished.

Being a sailor, he could give more definite information about the ships. There were four cruisers and eight or nine torpedo-boats, not counting the one to which he had belonged nor the two that were wrecked.

"Has he seen the two destroyers, and are they damaged?"

Yes, he had seen them come into the harbour, and many men had been sent aboard them, but he did not know whether they were damaged.

The names of three of the cruisers were *Yao Yuen*, *Mao Yuen*, and *Tu Ping*. These were the three of which Ping Sang had originally informed Helston. Another he mentioned, the *Hong Lu*, was evidently the cruiser which had beaten off "No. 2" and "No. 3".

"Ask him if they are very fast."

"*Yao Yuen, Mao Yuen*?" and he shook his head. "*Tu Ping*?" he shook his head still more vigorously. "*Hong Lu*?" and he opened his hands quickly and nodded, nodding so fast that Cummins, who had just entered the cabin, with the inevitable toothpick in his mouth, chuckled "He! he! he! you'll lose your pigtail, old chap, if you aren't more careful."

"What speed can she go?"

No; he did not know.

"As fast as a torpedo-boat?"

He drew in his breath with a whistling noise, and tried to show by gestures her extreme speed.

"What size is she?"

He did not know, nor what guns she carried. He was taken on deck to look at the *Strong Arm*, lying quietly half a mile away, and then brought down again.

No; she was not so large, but how large he could not say.

As to the forts, all that could be got out of him was that there was one on each side of the entrance, and, as far as he knew, none anywhere else.

He did not even know how many guns they had.

"Have they done much practice firing from them?"

Yes; he had heard them many times lately, but his knowledge on all these points was vague in the extreme.

He could rattle off the names of all the merchant ships there, and seemed to have a sneaking regard for his old ship, for he plucked A Tsi nervously by the sleeve and talked excitedly to him, pointing to the Captain.

"What does he want?" asked Helston.

"He says, sir, that if you recapture the *Tsli Yamen*, the ship he belonged to formerly, he wants you to say a good word for him to the owners."

"Tell him that if he answers all our questions truthfully we will not forget him."

When this was explained to him he salaamed very vigorously, bending his long body three times to Helston.

"How many white men are there on the island?" asked Cummins.

He could not say. "Three?"

No, there were more than three—four, five, or six, maybe, but he could not say.

Asked as to the events just previous to the arrival of the squadron, he did not know much. Some two or three ships had been captured lately, no big ones, and the *Hong Lu* had come in the same day as the destroyers, only early in the morning, from the south, he knew, for a friend of his was aboard her and had told him.

She had brought two white men with her.

"Could he describe them?"

He pretended to limp. Evidently one was Hamilton, the lame Englishman, and the other, from his description, might have been Hopkins.

"Are there any white men prisoners on the island?" It was Cummins who asked this, and he, in fact, had asked most of the questions since he had come down to the cabin, Captain Helston almost unconsciously giving way to him.

"No prisoners, only engineers and soldiers. One white man in charge of the forts, two others in charge of all the ships' engines.

"They keep no white men prisoners. If they find one aboard a captured steamer they send him to the mainland in a junk."

"Are there any white women on the island?"

"No. Once there were two, but he thinks the white men began to quarrel amongst themselves, so they sent them away very quickly."

"No chance of winning a wife here, sir," added Cummins, chuckling.

"I'm not so certain about that," replied Helston, the hard lines on his care-worn face softening.

"Still thinking of that little minx Milly," growled Dr. Fox to himself.

Cummins then showed the prisoner a rough plan of the island, copied from Ping Sang's original chart, and, after A Tsi had explained it, the Chinaman roughly indicated the position of the forts, go-downs (warehouses), the white mens' houses, the anchorage of the men-of-war and the captured merchant ships.

"I think that we have obtained all we want to know from this man," Helston concluded. "Except about the amount of food on the island, he does not seem to know much. Does anyone want to ask him any further questions?"

Cummins wanted to know what stock of coal there was on the island.

As far as the man knew, there were enormous stacks of it on shore, and several ships laden with coal.

"Does any ship ever leave the harbour by the small channel at the back of the island?"

"Only small steam-boats and junks," the prisoner said.

"I've nothing more to ask him," said Cummins, so the man was marched away and given a cigar to smoke as a reward.

"We shall not starve them out, sir," was Cummins's only comment.

Helston shrugged his shoulders.

The second man was brought in, a cunning-looking rascal with unshaven head, his repulsive face made still more hideous by several scars. More scars were visible on his sunken-in chest, and altogether he was a most disagreeable-looking specimen of the human race.

He talked more freely than the other man, and told his story very volubly.

He had been a "boss" workman in the engine works at the Foochow Arsenal, and had been recruited with many others by the German Schmidt, and shipped to Hong Lu without any knowledge of the character of the employment.

"Does he complain?"

"Oh no, rather not!" He was paid well, spent nothing except a little on tobacco, and had not much work to do. After working for some months on board the merchant steamers, he was put in charge of the engines of the ill-fated torpedo-boat, and that was why he was aboard her that night.

"What did he do aboard the merchant ships?"

He seemed to have been a leading hand of shipwrights, and had had many men under his orders. He quite warmed to the subject, and told of all the jobs he had done for the last six months.

He had lengthened the funnel of one steamer, added a fo'c'stle to another, altered the bows of a third, and the masts of a fourth.

"My aunt!" chuckled Cummins, as A Tsi interpreted this, "I see now how these people make their fortune. They capture a steamer, bring her in here, alter her so that her own builders would not recognize her, and then take her down to some quiet port on the mainland and sell her. Ask him, A Tsi, if that is so."

Yes, that was so; and the Chinaman looked surprised at their ignorance.

The syndicate, it appeared from what he said, had constructed a ship-repairing yard, and kept it most of the time working at high pressure. Sometimes they kept a ship as long as six months, but whenever a ship did leave, no one could possibly recognize her as the one which had been brought in.

On all other points this prisoner corroborated the first, and dotted down on another rough plan of the island the positions of the forts, ships, &c., very much as he had done it.

As to food and coal, they had enough to last "many moons".

"Mountains of coal" was his description.

Asked by Cummins why the other torpedo-boats had not come out, he promptly replied that their engines were unfit for any speed, and that their crews were probably frightened.

Directly Ping Sang heard the man's statement about reconstructing steamers captured and altering their appearance, he went away to his cabin, and returned carrying some papers.

At the first opportunity he asked the prisoner, speaking in Chinese, and with very unusual excitement, if ever he remembered the capture of a ship named the *Fi Ting*.

He remembered her quite well; had worked aboard her. "She had one funnel and three masts ('Yes,' nodded Ping Sang), and they built a covered-in fo'c'stle, took out one mast, and shortened the other two."

"Yes, yes," nodded Ping Sang excitedly; "anything else?"

"We altered the bridge, built it ten or twelve feet farther forward, and put up several cabins between it and the funnel."

"You did! you did! And what name did you give her?" shrieked Ping Sang.

The man thought a little and shook his head, evidently in some fear of the fat little merchant.

"He won't say, sir; says that he cannot remember; he only did what he was told; it was not his fault," said A Tsi, to whom the man had turned.

Another flow of language came from Ping Sang, before which the wretched

Chinaman flinched, and eventually he gave the name *Ling Lu Ming*.

"I knew it! I knew it!" roared Ping Sang, rolling from side to side, and getting red in the face with indignation, which just as suddenly turned to a broad smile, and with a twinkle of his eyes he told Captain Helston that he had bought the *Fi Ting* for £150,000, lost her six months later, and then bought the *Ping Lu Ming* cheaply for £120,000 in Amoy.

"I always suspected she was the same," he added cheerfully.

It was one of the amusing characteristics of this little man that his wrath always vanished as quickly as it grew, and was followed by envy of the "cuteness" which had got the better of him, and he bore not the least malice, only looking forward to a future opportunity of "squaring the account".

The prisoner, seeing Ping Sang's benign, amused expression, took courage and ventured a smile too—a cunning, treacherous enough smile; but it quickly died away, and the colour fled from his yellow skin, for Ping Sang, catching sight of it, jumped from his chair, and shaking a fat little finger at him, let flow a torrent of words which left him speechless with anger, only to recover his usual urbanity a moment later when Captain Helston asked him what he had said.

"Nothing, nothing, Captain; only assured him that I would have his liver torn out and make him eat it if he did not stop grinning."

He meant it, too, for, if half the stories which were told of Ping Sang were to be credited, although he was as gentle as possible under the British flag, yet woe to anyone who crossed his path when not under that protection.

At this moment the signal midshipman came running down from the bridge in a state of great excitement, and reported smoke on the horizon coming from the south-east.

The prisoners were sent away, and everyone immediately went on deck.

On deck all was animation. It was about half-past four—the men's supper-hour—all being below except the watch-keepers; but directly the word had flown round the mess-decks that a steamer had been sighted, every man Jack poured up to see and hear news of the approaching stranger.

Already signals had been made to "No. 2" to steam to meet her, and leisurely she gathered way, though by the little puffs of black smoke that came from her funnels quickly, one after another, one knew that her stokers were shovelling coal on her furnace gratings for all they were worth.

Gradually the column of smoke mounted up over the horizon, and from the foremast-head a sharp-eyed signalman sang out that she was a man-of-war with fighting-tops, and was making straight for the island.

If she was a man-of-war she might be yet another of the pirate ships, and there was the welcome chance of a "scrap"; but even if this did not turn out to be true, there was something else almost as welcome: she might bring a mail, and

it is only those who "go down to the sea in ships" who know what that means.

Then "No. 2" began to signal, and the yeoman of signals, saluting, reported to Captain Helston "The *Undaunted*, sir!" (The *Undaunted* was one of the armoured cruisers of the British China Squadron.)

"Can't capture her, I suppose?" suggested Ping Sang, with a smile.

"She may be coming up here to capture us, though," answered Helston, looking worried. "The Admiral would hardly have sent her out of her way unless he had important communications to make. I trust sincerely that she brings no bad news."

"Cheer up, old croaker!" said Dr. Fox; "we'll get some mails at any rate."

By this time the naked eye could easily identify her white side and yellow funnels and cowls glistening in the setting sun, and the white ensign flying at her gaff, as fair a sight as any British naval man ever wants to see.

"No. 2" was following her towards the squadron, looking like some disreputable little terrier keeping a respectful distance from a stately St. Bernard. More signals flew backward and forward, presently the semaphores began to jerk their arms up and down, and the *Undaunted* slowed as she came abreast the *Laird*, and stopped her engines.

"Away first cutter! Away galley!" yelled the bos'n's mate, and rapidly these boats were lowered, and in a couple of minutes Captain Helston was being pulled across to the *Undaunted* by six strong pairs of arms, whilst the cutter, with that signal flying from the *Undaunted*, "Send boat for mails", was not much behindhand. In half an hour both boats were back again, and the bulky mail-bags hauled aboard by willing hands. Then letters for home, already written and only waiting for closing up, were sent across, and the *Undaunted* slowly began to move away.

As she steadied on her course her crew "manned and cheered ship", three ringing cheers coming across the water, and one cheer more for luck.

The *Laird's* were not slow to answer, and the crew ran aloft, crowded along the port side, and, taking time from little Cummins, who, with his cap in his hand, yelled as best he could with a toothpick in his mouth, sent back cheer for cheer.

The *Strong Arm* sent her cheers, too, and the *Sylvia*, "No. 2", and "No. 3" joined in with their more feeble shouts.

Down they poured out of the rigging, eager to get their mail, which the Master-at-Arms was already distributing, the *Undaunted* slipped away on her errand to the north (a mission-house had been burnt down somewhere or other, somebody or other had to suffer for the deed, and she was away to see that somebody or other did suffer for it), and the little squadron was left alone again with its pirate island—a lonely-looking island and a rather lonely little squadron after its fleeting glimpse of its own white ensign, reading its letters from home in the failing daylight, with a job to do which seemed too big for it.

As Dr. Fox rather vulgarly expressed it to Helston, "You've bitten off a bigger piece than you can chew, old chap."

"Well, perhaps so, Fox; we'll see."

Captain Helston's letters—his official ones, at any rate—were certainly a worry to him. He had hardly finished reading them when sunset was reported, and up he had to go to superintend the scattering of the squadron for the night, and to make the rendezvous for the early morning.

He came down to dinner, but let it go untouched.

"Come up on deck, Fox, and get some exercise on the quarter-deck," he said at length. "I want a yarn with you." (Dr. Fox usually dined with him.)

"Never take a man away from his food to tell him bad news," growled the Doctor, after they had paced the quarter-deck twenty times without saying a word. "Let me know the worst."

"My arm's hurting me, Doc. Can't you ease it?" exclaimed Helston in his most worried expression of voice.

"Well, well, stay still, and I'll just rearrange it, old chap. Now, that's more comfortable, eh? Hand a bit too low; blood too much in the fingers, eh? Have it in the sleeve in another week. Feel better now?" And Dr. Fox made him more comfortable, speaking as if his patient were a little petulant child. "Now, tell me all about it."

"It comes to this," began Helston, wheeling round and rapidly walking up and down. "The Admiral is going to communicate with me in one month from this date, and, in case I cannot report any material progress, he has orders from home to assist me.

"You know very well what that means. My chance of promotion is gone unless I manage to capture the island in four weeks."

Dr. Fox was well aware that a month was all too short a time. He knew only too well Helston's limitations as a commander, and his inability to formulate or to adhere to any plans involving grave issues. He knew, too, the bad effect of this mental indecision and anxiety on his health, his growing inability to sleep, and his increasing irritability of temper, yet he could not, merely as senior doctor of the expedition and old friend of its commander, accept the responsibility of making any suggestion either for further delay or for immediate action.

"It is not my job, and I will not originate anything."

But one thing he did know, and that was that if anybody could do the work it was Cummins, and to Cummins the decision should and must be left.

"Send for Cummins, Helston; tell him what you have told me; give him twenty-four hours to arrange a course of action; don't attempt to influence him in any way, and act upon his advice. On no account ask either Bannerman, who is a mere talker and a braggart, or Hunter, who is a magnificent, a splendid man,

but a fool."

Now, as has been said before, Captain Helston was jealous of his Commander. He would have been the first to resent the imputation; but there it was, call it what you may, the necessary sequence of a feeble will hardly yet conscious of its weakness in the presence of the strong and overmastering will of a junior officer.

"You're right, Fox, I know you're right. I'll send for him and see what he suggests."

"That is not enough, Helston, you must decide to act upon his suggestions." And Dr. Fox argued with him for half an hour or more as they paced that deck. At last Helston agreed, and Cummins was sent for.

He came shuffling aft, a queer, grotesque little figure in the darkness (no lights were burnt or shown at night-time), took a glowing cigar from his mouth, and saluted.

Helston told him of the admiral's letter.

"That means all U.P. with us, unless we do the trick in a month; eh, sir?" he chuckled. "They are not any too liberal at home, are they?"

"I have sent for you," continued Helston, and Dr. Fox noticed a constrained tone in his voice, "to ask you for your advice as to what is to be done."

"Do you intend only to consider my suggestions, or do you intend to act upon them, sir?" replied Cummins, and Dr. Fox saw his figure stiffen to attention, could almost hear his jaws clench together, and saw his cigar go whizzing overboard and extinguish itself in the sea.

"I—I—intend—to—to—follow them," said Helston nervously, "and I'll give you twenty-four hours to formulate them."

"I do not require twenty-four hours, sir. Two days I want to examine the coast-line of the island more thoroughly. If I obtain no accurate information as to the position of the guns and other defences they have, I want you to bombard the entrance on the third day, and at the end of the third day I will give you my further plans, which depend on the result of the information I can gain during that time; that is, sir, if you require them."

"But what then?" asked Helston nervously.

"I cannot say, sir. All depends on what we discover by the end of that time."

"Very good, Cummins; you can make what dispositions you choose."

"It all depends on the weather, sir, and I must have calm days—the first two calm days."

"All right! Come down and look at that chart again."

"Thank you, sir, and I'll have another cigar as well."

* * * * *

The visit of the *Undaunted* and the mail which she had brought were perhaps more welcome to the gun-rooms of the *Laird* and *Strong Arm* than to anyone else, for monotony palls more readily on youngsters than it does on men, and certainly they become more rapidly home-sick.

Dinner that night in the *Laird's* gun-room, though it did consist chiefly of corned meat and sardines, was a joyous meal.

Every one of them had heard from home, everyone had something to talk about, and the gun-room, littered with piles of newly opened newspapers, illustrated weeklies and magazines, was like a bear-garden.

Books, boots, telescopes, school-books and midshipmen's logs, papers, uniform caps, sextant boxes, and oilskins lay in confused heaps on the deck and on the tops of the midshipmen's lockers, where they had been swept off the table during the progress of laying it for dinner.

Several rapid and vigorous passages of arms had already delighted everybody, except, of course, the seniors, who did not appreciate the damage resulting to crockery and glasses, of which they were already running short.

Glover himself, forgetting for a moment his wounded leg (it was now perfectly healed), had thrown himself with unaccustomed vigour into a mêlée at the lower end of the table—the end farthest from where Jeffreys the Sub (the reigning monarch) and the two Assistant Engineers sat—and had disappeared from view under it. Here he was passed from one to another by the gentle process of being kicked from side to side, and his only chance was to hug the first pair of feet he could get hold of and drag the owner down with him.

This he did, and there they lay and struggled as to who should gain the vacant place, whilst their chums joyously drummed on their ribs indiscriminately and laid odds on one or the other appearing first.

Eventually Glover's head did appear first, but a glass of water poured over his head by a chum who was backing the other, and a vigorous pull from below by his opponent made him disappear again, and the table-cloth went with him, dragging with it knives and forks, glasses and plates, in a mighty cataract.

This was too much for the onlookers, and with one accord they disappeared under the table and fought, while the domestics, perfectly accustomed to such a scene, jumped nimbly round, saving plates and glasses as these came to sight amidst the struggling jumble of arms and legs.

Those at the upper end of the table, which fortunately had its own separate cloth, went on with their meal undisturbed—all except Dumpling, who, seizing the mess extras-book, dealt vigorous blows on any undefended portion of anatomy which disclosed itself from beneath the table.

That was Dumpling "all over". Was there a fight or a "scrum", he was always near at hand, whacking indiscriminately, but never venturing a "rough and

tumble" himself.

By this time the uproar was so great that Jeffreys, Ogston, and the other Assistant Engineer could literally not hear themselves speak, and the table, heaving once or twice as the midshipmen fought and struggled beneath it, gave ominous signs of capsizing.

"Stop it, you young idiots!" roared Jeffreys, smiting the table with his open hand and calling the senior midshipman by name.

In a minute they were back in their places, flushed and happy, with collars gone, coats torn, and here and there small gashes on their faces, which their nearest chums wiped affectionately with the crumpled table-cloth.

Order once restored, they fell to with redoubled vigour, and sardines disappeared like magic—sardines, tinned butter and biscuits.

"Well, I can't get over that news from home," said Dumpling for about the fourth time since the mail had come aboard.

"Whatever is it, Dumpling?" they all chorused. "Your old cat had kittens?"

"No, you chaps, didn't I tell you? My sister is engaged to the son of a duke. I simply can't get over it."

"Can't you, really! Then try if that will help you," sang out Mellins, and he heaved a sea-boot at Dumpling's head. Dumpling was much too nimble, and it only crashed into the helpless Mess steward, who was doing his best to serve them all, smashed to smithereens a jug which he was carrying, and caught him fair and square on the chest.

"Awfully sorry, Watson," said Mellins apologetically.

"Put Mr. Dunning down for six jugs, Messman," said Jeffreys—"six for skylarking."

"But I didn't throw it; it wasn't my fault," stammered Dumpling.

"Your fault, be hanged! you deserved it."

"But my sister *is* engaged to the son of a——" he began again.

"Come here, Dunning!" Jeffreys yelled. "Now, stand at my side here; give me your arm. No, I'll be quite gentle with you," as he twisted it slightly and Dumpling winced. "Now, tell us all very nicely about your sister. Whom is she going to marry?"

"The son of a du——" began Dumpling.

"No, no, she isn't, my friend. Just repeat after me: My sister—is—going—to marry—a—broken-down—drunken—cab-driver. Now do as I tell you," as Dumpling became defiant, "or before you know where you are you shall have a dozen of the best across your back." And he twisted his arm till he writhed with pain.

"My sister is—going—to—marry a cabman," he stuttered, red in the face.

"A—broken-down—drunken cab-driver," Jeffreys roared; but Dumpling was

spared the indignity of repeating that, for a messenger put his head in at the door and sang out that the midshipmen of the picket-boat and second cutter were wanted in the Commander's cabin immediately, and as Dumpling had the second cutter, he wriggled himself free and escaped.

Mellins was the proud "owner" of the picket-boat, and, with their recent animosities forgotten, both boys bolted like rabbits to the Commander's cabin.

"Mr. Christie" (Mellins's real name), he began, as they both stood to attention, "you will have your boat ready, with steam up, to hoist out at five o'clock to-morrow morning. See that her tanks and bunkers are full. You, Mr. Dunning, are the duty cutter for to-morrow, I believe. You will also be ready to lower into the water at five o'clock, and be prepared to be taken in tow. You can provide rifles and pistols for your men, and sling the former under the boat's thwarts. Ammunition will be given you in the morning. Both of you will see that your crews' food is prepared overnight, and that your boats' breakers (water-barrels) are full of drinking-water. Go away and make your preparations at once."

Both boys slipped away with eager faces, but with this difference, that whilst Mellins went off to find his coxswain, and was clambering into his boat two minutes afterwards to make certain that all was correct, Dumpling first went down to the gun-room to pose as a hero, specially selected by the Commander, and, with a lot of unnecessary fuss, found his dirk, and took it for'ard to sharpen it on the grindstone.

"That youngster wants kicking badly," said Ogston.

"He shall get it when he comes back," answered Jeffreys nonchalantly.

CHAPTER XVII
Spying Out the Pirates

We go Inshore—In Under the Forts—Helplessly Drifting—We Hide among Rocks—A Terrible Moment—Spying Out the Pirates—Taking Notes—Hopkins Again—How shall we Escape?—Cummins Decides

Mr. Midshipman Glover tells how he visited the island

The wound in my leg healed completely in seven days, and I was as right as rain, but that old brute, Dr. Fox, would not let me go off the sick-list.

You can imagine how wild this made me, for I was dreadfully afraid of losing my billet in "No. 3".

The coming of the *Undaunted* had put new life into everybody, and when Mellins and Dumpling got their orders that night, the wildest rumours went flying round.

I tried my best to make Mellins stow me away in the bows of his picket-boat, but, good chap as he was, he would not hear of it, even though I offered to bring a big home-made cake which had come in the mail.

Poor old Mellins! it *was* hard for him to refuse.

Just think, then, how I felt when at 4.30 next morning the half-deck sentry woke me with, "Commander wants you, sir, immediate!"

Down I climbed—into my clothes—shoved a cap on my head without brushing my hair, and rushed up on deck.

"Eh! Mr. Glover," the Commander chuckled, as he looked at me over a cup of hot ship's cocoa. "Dr. Fox says you are fit for duty, so be prepared to leave the ship at 5 a.m. to report yourself to Mr. Parker."

Hardly knowing whether I was standing on my head or on my heels for joy, I dived down below and started packing my chest; but I need not have been in such a hurry, for the Commander sent his messenger to tell me to take only what I could carry, so I had to be content with Dumpling's leather bag again. He certainly did have jolly good bags. I managed to shove in most of the cake, after chopping off a big chunk, which I hid in Toddles's locker, and another, which I gave the coxswain of the picket-boat as a surprise for Mellins. I saw him hide it among some oily rags, so I guessed that old Mellins would never find it.

It was simply ripping getting back to "No. 3" again—Mr. Parker, Mr. Chapman the Engineer, and Collins the Sub all jolly pleased to see me, and Pat Jones too. The only thing wanting was Toddles, and I had not the heart to say good-bye to him, but left him snoring in his hammock—he'd had the middle watch.

The Commander came across to "No. 3" with me, and when he was aboard we took the picket-boat and second cutter in tow and steamed slowly inshore towards the island, not straight for the entrance, but some way past the place where the two pirate torpedo-boats had run ashore, making a great sweeping circle in order not to come under fire from the forts. We towed the picket-boat in order to save her coal.

As soon as we were close to the land and beyond that projecting corner of which I have told you, and which hid us from the forts, we cast off the boats, the Commander going away in the cutter and the picket-boat taking her in tow. They went as close inshore as possible, creeping slowly along, away from the entrance,

and examining the rocks bit by bit, whilst we kept abreast of them ready to open fire if the Chinese did any rifle-shooting from the cliffs.

It was not particularly exciting work, and as far as we could see from "No. 3", there was not a single place up which a cat could climb. It was not till the afternoon that we saw anything approaching a beach, and even that had perpendicular cliffs behind it covered with brushwood.

They must have been dead tired in the boats, but the Commander still kept at it, standing up in the stern-sheets of the cutter jotting down notes, taking sketches, and reading off angles on his sextant.

Then, however, we got round to the back of the island.

The shore here was low, but too high for us to see over it into the harbour, and just as we caught sight of the little channel running out there, a crowd of ragged ruffians showed up and began peppering away at the boats.

We let into them with our 12-pounder on the bridge, found the range with our second shot, and sent them scurrying like rabbits to cover, followed by a man on a shaggy pony, who cantered slowly after them.

"D' you recognize your friend?" asked Mr. Parker, handing me his telescope. Sure enough, it was the black-bearded man who had fought so splendidly on board that destroyer. I recognized him at once.

"Glad he got safely home," I said.

"I don't think he's got home yet," grinned Mr. Parker. "I don't think he'll find many home comforts in this island. Hurry him up, Jones," turning to the gun's crew, who had ceased firing.

Jones took careful aim, fired, and the shell burst just behind the pony, sending up a cloud of dust and stones. The frightened beast reared and tried to bolt, but the rider calmly quieted it, and, shaking his fist at us, walked it slowly over the crest of the slope.

"That's a fine chap," said Mr. Parker admiringly, and sent me down to his cabin to get him some more tobacco.

Our work for the day was done, and after towing the boats back to the *Laird* we joined "No. 2", and after dark took up the usual position close to the entrance for the night.

As we towed the cutter back to the ship I could see that Dumpling was wildly excited, and wondered what yarns he would spin in the gun-room that night about his experiences under fire.

The Commander did not return to his ship, but came back to "No. 3" and turned in early, dog-tired—too tired even to smoke or make any funny remarks.

I was not allowed on deck, and slept like a log.

Presently—it seemed only ten minutes afterwards—I was roughly shaken and, half dazed, ordered on deck to get the dinghy into the water. It was very

cold, quite dark, and a damp drizzle made everything slippery—as cheerless an outlook as one could imagine.

We got the dinghy out, put a compass into her, and Jones, with the oars wrapped round with cotton-waste to prevent them from making any noise in the rowlocks, took his place in the boat.

Then up came the Commander in his overcoat, and he and I got into her, somebody threw me an oil-skin, and we shoved off into the dark.

I had not the least idea what we were going to do, and, only half awake, felt miserable to a degree.

"Just the morning for it," chuckled the Commander; "a damp mist and a calm sea."

"What are we going to do, sir?" I asked, beginning to wake up, and shivering.

"Right in under the forts, boy. Want you to tell me when we come to the rocks which had those lights on, wait there till it's light enough to see the guns, and slip away again. The tide is flowing strongly now, and will carry us down to the entrance."

"Oh!" was all that I could answer, and felt anything but happy.

Jones was only paddling easily, but for all that we bumped into a rock.

"Get into the bows, Glover, and shove her off," the Commander told me, and I scrambled for'ard. We went on again, keeping along towards the entrance, and occasionally bumping. On the top of one of these rocks was a great sea-bird. It flapped, screeching, into the darkness with a shrill cry of alarm, which I thought would wake the whole island.

How my heart did beat!

It was chilling work, and my teeth were chattering as I leant over the bows, shoving her off any rocks, and trying to find one with a lamp on it. There was a good deal of danger, too, for though the sea was calm, the swell was quite noticeable directly we got close in under the cliffs, and though the boat was a strongly built old tub, her sides once or twice creaked and groaned as they ground up against the rocks.

"Oars," whispered the Commander.

Jones stopped pulling, and I noticed that we did not seem to lose way; in fact, we glided quite rapidly past a great dark mass of boulders.

"We must be near the entrance now; look how we are being set in with the current," said the Commander softly.

"H'st!" he hissed, and we heard the regular noise of oar in rowlock. It was coming towards us, coming from seaward, every moment louder and clearer—ump-ump! ump-ump! backwards and forwards.

"It's a native boat," the Commander whispered; and then, "Back starboard,

Jones! Back for your life, man!"

Jones jerked his oar violently in the water, and, oh horrors! the rotten wood cracked, gave way, and the blade fell into the sea as a dark shape went splashing past us, with a little glow amidships as from a red-hot charcoal brazier—enough to show the dim blotch of a man swaying to and fro, grunting loudly at each ump-ump of a long sweep over the stern.

We thought that he must see us or hear the noise of the breaking oar, and remained as still as death, whilst the native—a fisherman probably coming back from raising his traps—disappeared into the darkness.

What were we to do?

We had no spare oar in the boat, and Jones vainly tried to scull with the remaining oar over the stern. He could not even bring her bows round against the current, which we could now hear bubbling and sluicing past the rocks, and when at last we managed to get her round by paddling with the bottom boards, our last oar broke off short, Jones nearly tumbling overboard as it gave way.

In desperation he ripped up another bottom board, and we three paddled as if for dear life. We could see nothing, not even each other's faces, but a cold breeze coming from the island told us that we were already inside the entrance channel, and were being sucked in between the two forts which we had come to spy out. Work how we could—and how it did tire my wrists! with a great deal of noise and splashing, which we expected every moment to raise the alarm—we could not make the least headway.

"Make for the side," came from the Commander.

But we could not even do that. The boat was out of our control, and, spinning round and round in the eddies of the current, was drawn through the dark channel towards the pirates' harbour.

I forgot that I was cold and wet and sleepy at the thought of our horrible position, but do not think I was really frightened, for, somehow or other, one never did feel frightened when the Commander was near (people have often told me the same thing since), and Jones too; I felt that he too would be able to find some way out.

Suddenly ahead of us we saw a ruddy glow outlining the sharp edges of the rocks; we swung round a corner, and then in an instant shot into the glare of a camp-fire on a rock twenty feet above us.

Two Chinamen, one of them leaning on a rifle, were standing by it, warming themselves, and we could hear them talking sleepily to one another.

We were in the shadow of the rocks and whirled past, not one of us moving a muscle or making a sound whilst we watched those sentries and expected to be seen.

It seemed ages as we were sucked in by the current.

At last we were past, and then the motions of the boat became more gentle, and we found ourselves in a kind of back eddy, with all sorts of timber and branches and floating leaves going gently round and round in a circle.

"Now paddle, boys, and don't splash," the Commander whispered, steering as best he could. The light of the fire suddenly disappeared.

"Give way, boys, we're round a corner—out of sight of the sentries."

We got the boat under some control and moved slowly towards the darkest part we could see. We had not the least idea what it would be, but pushed on, my heart going like a steam-hammer.

Presently something swept across my face, catching me a stinging blow. In my excitement and nervousness I had to bite my lips to prevent myself from yelling with fright, and clutched at it.

It was a branch of a tree.

I hauled on it, hand over hand, found my face wetted with damp leaves, and, the others helping, we made out way right in among the branches.

The Commander plunged the boat-hook over the side. "Two feet deep," he said, then knelt down, felt for the bottom plug and pulled it out, and the water came gurgling rapidly through.

In a minute it was up to our ankles, and there we had to stand and weigh the boat down as the water crept up, till gradually it was over our knees. Ugh! How cold it was! But there was nothing else to do if we wanted the boat to sink, and we had to do it.

"Crawl ashore," the Commander whispered, as water began to flow in over the gunwale, and Jones and I climbed along the branches, half in and half out of the water. Jones got to land first, stretched out his great hand and hauled me ashore.

In a moment the Commander joined us.

"Push on inland, boys," he whispered, as calmly as anything, "the boat is all right." And we forced and squeezed our way through the clinging bushes and undergrowth, going in single file and keeping close together so as not to lose one another in the darkness.

Presently we burst through to a clear space, and our feet trod on hard ground.

"A path!" the Commander said, and struck softly across it.

Then we came to more thick bushes and briars, ran up against some stumpy trees with rocks in between them, and found ourselves climbing upwards.

In a minute we had to climb hand over hand, very steep it was, and I thought we should never stop, and the noise we made seemed prodigious.

The light of the camp-fire appeared once again. We halted, and could see the two men still listlessly standing over it. They had not heard us yet, and we

scrambled upwards till the light was once more shut out from us.

At last we clambered on to what seemed to be a little ledge among the rocks. I could go no farther, and fell down in a heap.

We lay down on this ledge, huddled close together for warmth, till gradually and slowly the darkness diminished.

First we could distinguish one another's faces and the long grass we were lying in, the thick bushes in front of us, and rock and more bushes behind and on each side.

Gradually we could make out the cold surface of the water below us, and presently, right away over the harbour, some ship struck four bells (six o'clock), another and another repeated, and we could hear the shrill pipes as the hands were turned out,[#] probably on board the pirate cruisers.

[#] Men turned out of their hammocks by the Bos'n's pipe.

From across the water came the throbbing sound of a native gong, one solitary one at first, then two or three more, till it seemed as if hundreds were being beaten, the noise rising and falling till the whole harbour seemed to be filled with it.

Lights flared up as fires were lighted, and we knew that the pirate village was bestirring itself.

As the dawn approached we could realize our position. We were perched on a ledge some sixty feet up the steep face of a rocky uneven cliff, covered with thickset, dwarfed trees and gorse-like bushes, growing wherever they could find foothold.

Beneath us ran the path, along the water's edge, which we had crossed an hour before, and the overhanging tree which concealed the water-logged dinghy, and along whose branches we had scrambled ashore.

"If they don't spot the dinghy or the damage we did clambering up here," chuckled the Commander, "we shall be as safe as in a church, and simply have to lie snug till nightfall."

Then happened what I have recalled since with even more horror than the remainder of that day's dangers, and which absolutely seemed to freeze up the whole of my inside.

It was my own fault, you see, and very nearly placed us all in the most frightful danger.

By pushing aside a tussock of thick grass and looking down I could just see that path, and as it grew light enough to distinguish objects I saw something

dark lying in the middle of it, right in the open. It seemed strangely familiar, and involuntarily I put my hand to my head. My cap was missing, and was lying there right in the path, a path well trodden down and evidently much used.

I can never say how I felt then, or how I managed to make myself understood by the Commander—even thinking of it makes me still shiver now, and, scores of times a year, I see that cap in my dreams lying there with its gilt badge just showing bright—but the Commander, with a cheery smile, pressed me down as I tried to rise, wriggled himself over the edge, and commenced climbing down, branches crackling and swaying, and stones sliding down ahead of him.

I kept my eyes glued on that cap, and waited with the greatest anguish to see his arm pushed out from the tall grass at the side of the road. I expected that he would wriggle himself through that and reach across with his arm, but though no arm appeared the cap disappeared, and in a minute I heard him coming up again.

"How did you do it?" I asked him thankfully, as he sank down beside me.

"With a long briar, my son—a prickly creeper which came in very handy."

Even as he spoke a long string of natives (Koreans, the Commander told me) laden with firewood passed in single file along the path. Fancy what would have happened if they had been but five minutes sooner!

They had hardly disappeared from sight as they followed the path, when suddenly a most tremendous banging of guns commenced from the direction of the entrance to the harbour, and, craning our necks round a corner of rook, we could see clouds of powder smoke floating up.

"'No. 3' come in to look for us," muttered the Commander. "I hope Parker will clear out of it before he gets damaged."

We listened, and tried to hear whether any shots were coming from seaward, but could hear none. The firing from the shore slackened, burst out again with fury, died away, and all became quiet once more.

"Parker's got out of range safely," chuckled the Commander.

* * * * *

After that I must have gone to sleep, and I woke up in broad daylight to find myself very hungry and very cold. Jones was lying coiled up in the grass and sound asleep, the Commander was peering through the bushes with his field-glasses and making little sketches in his note-book in front of him. He heard me stir, smiled cheerfully as he broke off a stalk of grass and began chewing it, and handed me his glasses.

"Start away from your right and tell me what you see."

Sliding into a better position, I had a splendid view of the whole harbour.

On the extreme right I could see the low ground from which the black-bearded man had shaken his fist at us yesterday, and the narrow channel of water marking the outlet. Sweeping the glasses towards the left, I made out some torpedo-boats moored close together in a little bay.

"How many can you count?" the Commander asked me.

I counted seven. Then came three old-fashioned craft, ship-rigged with their to'-gallants and top-masts struck, whilst anchored all round them was a crowd of junks without a sign of life among them. They all seemed deserted.

"Those are the corvettes missing from the Yangtze Squadron," the Commander explained, excitedly for him, and his enthusiasm made one feel quite cheerful and frightfully excited too.

Still farther along to the left were twelve merchant steamers of all sizes and in no regular order—some mere hulks with no masts or boats, one without a funnel. Others, some four or five, had swarms of people on board, and from the clattering and hammering that came from them they seemed to be under repair. I told the Commander what I thought.

"Yes," he said, "they are altering them so that they can sell them without their old owners being able to recognize them."

Inshore I could see quite a busy little town, with large sheds and wooden warehouses, and hundreds of primitive bamboo-matting huts,—the pirate town, I knew, and you can guess that I forgot all about being hungry.

A rough pier jutted out from it, with a big steamer tied up to the end of it, and even as I looked they were lowering a mast into her with the aid of some tall sheer-legs.

Higher up behind the town were some bungalows—one of them was probably Hopkins's house, I thought—and the whole side of the hill was green with cultivation, the steep slopes terraced out in squares like a chess-board. Above these the hill was too steep for even Chinese to cultivate, and finished off in a flat peak much higher than any other point in the island. We all had noticed this hill from the sea.

Still farther towards the left, and under rather high land, were four cruisers moored head and stern. One I thought was very like the cruiser that had driven off "No. 2" and "No. 3" when we sank the destroyer outside the island.

"That is the *Hong Lu*," the Commander told me when I asked him.

"What guns can you make out?"

It was difficult to see accurately, for she was lying bows on towards us, but she seemed to have a gun about the size of a 6-inch on her fo'c'stle, and three on each side in small sponsons.

"Those other three are the *Yao Yuen*, *Mao Yuen*, and the *Tu Ping*," said the Commander, "and they seem to have all their guns aboard. But what do you make

of the funny-looking craft moored right inshore?"

"Why, she's an ironclad, sir," I whispered, "with two turrets!"

"Yes; but has she any guns?"

I looked very carefully but could not see any. From a port in one turret something projected, but only a little way, and it looked ragged at the end.

"No, I don't think so, sir."

"That ship is the old *Ting Yuen*, Glover. They must have raised her from the bottom of Wei-hai-wei harbour, though why on earth they brought her down here if she had no guns fairly beats me."

Close to her were two old friends—the remaining two of the three Patagonians which had caused us so much bother all the way out from Malta, and near them three more torpedo-boats. Huge stacks of coal lined the shore behind them, several more warehouses, and another little pier.

How I did wish that Mellins and Toddles had been with me to see all this! and I forgot altogether that we were in such a helpless plight.

Steam-boats were darting about from one ship to another, and backwards and forwards between the ships and the shore.

Over the little town was a thin cloud of blue smoke, and from what must have been forges or workshops, darker columns of smoke curled upwards into the still air, with here and there a white jet of steam.

They seemed tremendously busy, and the little town fairly hummed with life.

"Carry on to your left and tell me what you see?" the Commander ordered.

First of all the high land, under which the cruisers lay moored, sloped gradually towards the channel through which we had drifted, and then ended abruptly in two terraces, one overlooking the other. A zigzag path cut in the face of the cliff opposite us led up to these terraces, starting from a little landing-place at the water's edge. A steam-boat was lying alongside, having evidently towed a boat-load of stores there, and a long line of coolies were trudging up in pairs with what looked like ammunition boxes suspended between them from bamboo poles across their shoulders. Others were trooping down empty-handed.

Following the zigzag path I made out a gun shield covered with a tarpaulin. That was on the lower platform, and sticking out from the rocks I could see the muzzle of a quick-firer on the upper platform.

"That's one of the forts, sir," I said excitedly.

Below the guns the rocks ran on for thirty or forty yards, and then were hidden behind some higher rocks on our side of the entrance channel. These shut out all view of the sea.

"Now come where I am and look round the corner to the left," said the Commander, rolling out of the way and chuckling to himself with amusement

at my excitement. I did as I was told, and, pushing aside some branches, peered down.

The path below us—the path on which my cap had fallen—ran along the foot of the cliffs, along the water's edge, till it came to a little landing-place made of strong balks of timber. Reckoning in cricket pitches—a dodge the Commander had taught me—I thought that it was almost sixty yards away from where our dinghy was sunk.

The landing-place, like the one opposite it, had a small derrick at one corner, with tackle and blocks rigged for lifting weights out of a boat. Broad irregular steps cut in the rock led up from it to a well-cut path which, running sharply upwards, turned round a corner and was lost to sight.

At this corner a little platform, with a parapet all round it, had been levelled, and on it was a small shelter covered with matting.

In front of the shelter was an old oil-drum with its sides pierced with holes, and a little smoke was even now rising gently from it. This was the fire we had seen as we had drifted in.

Against the parapet two or three rifles were leaning.

Down below, with his legs dangling over the landing-place, a Chinaman, in a sort of uniform, was fishing and keeping up a running conversation with the sailors in the steam-boat alongside the opposite jetty.

Tied up to this landing-place were several small boats.

I told the Commander all I had seen, and then he ordered me to make sketches, showed me how to make them fairly accurately, and lent me his pencil.

I had a pocket-book of my own, and worked hard at it for two hours or more, and I think that I was really too frightened of the Commander to worry about our actual danger, for he was furiously angry at my first few attempts.

"I've never done anything like this before, sir."

"What the dickens were you doing in the *Britannia*?" he muttered. "I'll see that you get plenty of practice when we get back to the *Laird*."

"But please, sir, how are we going to get back?" I ventured to ask him presently. He would not answer me—only chuckled.

Every now and again the man who was fishing would be joined by some comrades, who were apparently on duty as sentries, for presently another steam-launch came swiftly from the town and ran alongside the landing-stage. The fisherman dropped his line and stood to attention; his chums ran up the steps, seized their rifles, and presented arms, whilst two Europeans stepped ashore.

One was the man with the black beard, the second was none other than Hopkins, and you can imagine how excited I was, for I could have hit them with a stone, they were so near, and I could hear Hopkins laughing merrily as he spun some yarn.

They climbed the steps, passed the sentries, and disappeared round the corner.

In about half an hour they came back and crossed to the other jetty. Here they were met by a third European, and all three walked up towards the fort, the coolies making way for them.

They did not stay long there. Hopkins and the black-bearded man came slowly down the zigzag path, jumped into the steam-boat, shoved off, and steamed towards the *Hong Lu*.

We followed them intently, and I noticed that they both kept looking up towards the top of the hill, behind the town, which I have told you was the highest point on the island. They seemed extremely interested in something there, and even stopped the boat and gazed steadily up at it through field-glasses.

They were evidently satisfied, went on again, and we saw them run alongside the *Hong Lu* and climb up her accommodation-ladder.

The Commander had watched them carefully through his glasses, and now I saw him earnestly searching the top of that hill.

"That explains it all," he muttered to himself, and passed them across to me. "Look under those trees."

I could see nothing at first except a great broad track running up the side as if some heavy weights had been roughly hauled up it, but looking more closely under the trees I saw crowds of Chinese working like ants, then I made out the bend of a derrick, like a single boat's davit, showing up against the sky-line.

With this to guide me, and looking very carefully, I made out a great tarpaulin or canvas, covering something. It was a huge gun.

"Now I know why they fished up the old *Ting Yuen*," said the Commander, "and why she has no guns. They've managed to mount one of her 12-inch guns on top of that hill, and there is another on the beach close alongside her waiting to go up too, if I am not mistaken.

"My aunt," he chuckled, "how proud our sappers and gunners would be with a job like that!"

He seemed perfectly cheerful, and chuckled merrily to himself, though, for my part, I only thought that that big gun up there made it all the more impossible to capture the island, and that lying, as we were, right in the middle of the pirate harbour on a little ledge of rock not a hundred yards away from the sentries, with no chance, as far as I could see, of escaping, was not particularly funny.

I was simply frightfully hungry and fearfully thirsty. I had sucked grass and licked wet leaves till I was nearly sick. My legs and body were so stiff that it pained me even to roll over, ever so gently, and the sun was not warm enough to dry me properly. Jones was still sound asleep, and the Commander began making more sketches of the top of the hill, peering hard through his glasses, then adding

a little to the drawing, and correcting the measurements by holding the pencil up against his eyes and moving his thumb along it. He was strangely elated.

A steam hooter sounded in the town, the clatter and hammering died away, the coolies working in the ships were taken ashore, the sentries cooked their dinner in the hot brazier, and everything became still and quiet except the pain inside me.

I felt hungry and miserable and longed for the *Laird's* gun-room fire, and knew they were just beginning lunch aboard, and probably having a good rough-and-tumble fight.

"Pull your belt in, youngster, and buck up," said the Commander cheerily.

"Please, sir, I hav'n't got a belt."

"Well, get a big stone and lie on it."

That did relieve the pain a little.

"We've got eight or nine hours of it, youngster. Move your legs about every now and again to keep them from getting cramp."

Presently he asked me what plans I had made, and really I got quite excited in working out different schemes, and he was so jolly about it and never snubbed me that I forgot to be miserable for quite a long time.

Every now and again we stopped even whispering, whilst some Koreans straggled along the path beneath us, going to or coming from the fort.

At first we were in a horrible funk lest they should see the broken-down bushes and trampled grass, or even the sunken dinghy; but they were much too self-absorbed to notice anything, and gradually we left off fearing that they would discover us.

It seemed pretty evident that none of the Chinese lived anywhere near us, for not one passed during the whole day.

Then we talked of England, and somehow or other I mentioned Fareham.

"That is where your cousin lives, is it not?" he asked.

"Milly? Why, do you know old Milly?" I said.

"Well, just slightly." (I had a faint suspicion that he looked a little red in the face.) "I met her at a dance in Southsea. Don't go often to that kind of thing—make an awful mess of dancing, Glover, so generally stay away—but I had to go to this one, and met your cousin. Had one or two dances with her."

"Isn't she a perfect ripper?"

"She was extremely forbearing with me," he smiled, "and when I trod on her toes did not seem to mind a little bit."

"I should not be here if it had not been for her," I told the Commander.

"I rather think she got her father the Admiral to put in a good word for me too," he replied.

"Do you really?" I said, and remembered that Mr. Pattison had told me the

same.

"She asked me to keep an eye on you and give you a leg up whenever I could. That is why I got you off the sick-list yesterday."

"What did Dr. Fox say when you asked him, sir?"

"Curse the boy! take him away and drown him for all I care."

"What a brute he is!" I said, rather forgetting myself, and wanting to bite my tongue off directly I had said it.

"He's the most kind-hearted man on board the *Laird*, Glover, and don't you forget it," the Commander answered severely.

I felt snubbed, and knew that I deserved it.

* * * * *

The steam hooter sounded again, but the coolies were not taken back to the ships; they seemed to be all collected round one of the sheds, and were making a great clamour. Something unusual seemed to be going on, but we could not make out what.

Half an hour later the Commander passed me the glasses and pointed to the side of the high hill. Looking through them I saw a long file of coolies slowly tramping along a zigzag path, looking like a great snake, and winding up the hill towards the gun. They were in groups of eight, and each group of eight had some very heavy weight between them, going very slowly and frequently stopping.

"They are taking up shell," the Commander said.

I watched that long procession toiling up the hill for a long time, and watching it made me sleepy, and I dropped off to sleep. It was nearly dark when I woke, and I heard Jones and the Commander talking softly.

Jones was saying: "The tide don't ebb till nigh three bells, sir, and it won't be running strong till eight or nine o'clock."

"I've been watching the morning ebb, and it ran very strongly past the end of the landing-stage," replied the Commander, "so that if we creep down in the dark, get hold of one of those boats and cast off, we shall be whisked out in no time. We may have to knock a sentry or two on the head, though," he chuckled. "You'll have to do that part of the show, Jones."

"Right you are, sir. I'm a bit cramped now, but I'll be all right soon."

CHAPTER XVIII

The Escape from the Island

We Scramble Down—We Secure the Sentries—We Capture the Steam-boat—We Run the Gauntlet

Midshipman Glover's Narrative continued

At six o'clock (we could hear the cruisers striking their bells, so knew what time it was), and just as it was getting dusk, a little steam-boat came across from the opposite fort, the European we had seen in the morning landed at the jetty below us, and went up towards the fort, leaving the boat with a coxswain, bowman, and a stoker.

In a few minutes he returned and went back to his own side.

At seven o'clock, or a few minutes afterwards, he came again. It was quite dark, but we heard the bowman make the boat fast by hooking: the bow rope into a ring on the landing-stage. The bowman then lighted a lantern and showed the way up the cliffs to the European, the two sentries who had been crouching in front of their now fiercely blazing fire following him round the corner.

In about ten minutes they returned.

Another hour dragged past—my goodness, how it did drag!—the lights went out in the little town, and just as the *Hong Lu's* bell struck the hour the steam-boat came puffing across again.

The same routine was carried out, and for ten minutes the little steam-boat lay alongside the landing-stage with no one aboard her except the coxswain and the stoker. Evidently this European had to visit the fort every hour, and we noticed as he passed across the glare of the fire that he appeared to be walking unsteadily.

"We must stretch our legs," the Commander whispered. "I can hardly move mine;" and he rose to his feet and began hopping up and down. Jones and I did it after him, one at a time, and though at first our legs were horribly cramped and painful, the blood at last began to flow through them, and we were able to move freely.

"My old rheumatism, sir—the same what I had up the Straits—won't be no better for this, sir, I'm afraid," said Jones.

Then the Commander told us to be prepared to climb down to the path directly the guard-boat came alongside again and the European and the sentries

had gone away.

There was no doubt at all that he was visiting the fort every hour, for as two bells (nine o'clock) rang out away over the harbour, we heard the crew of the steam-boat chattering as they took her alongside the opposite landing-stage.

Then a lantern came down the cliff path swinging jerkily, we heard several rough oaths, a command in Chinese, and the steam-boat shot across into the light of the camp-fire to our jetty.

"Stand by," whispered the Commander as coolly as possible, though my heart was beating tremendously fast; "I will go first, and, when I'm at the bottom, you, Glover, will follow, and Jones will bring up the rear."

We heard the hook-rope catch the ring, the European landed, lurching unsteadily, and disappeared up the path with the bowman and the two sentries.

Instantly the Commander slid over the edge of our ledge and went wriggling down. He made hardly any noise, and gave a low whistle when he had reached the bottom.

With my heart in my mouth I followed, grasping every branch and bit of rock, and lowering myself down. Everything I touched seemed to make an awful noise.

When I was half-way down my foot slipped, I grabbed at a branch, missed it, and went falling headlong, smashing through bushes, dislodging stones, and falling with a crash into a bush at the bottom.

The Commander was at my side in a moment.

"Not hurt, Glover? No. That's all right. Keep absolutely still; the men in the boat heard you, but they are not moving."

We waited a minute; the two men began talking to one another (we could just see their faces in the glow of the sentry's fire above them), and then Jones commenced to climb down, making wonderfully little noise for such a big man as he was. Some stones came rattling down, however, and the men became uneasy again, looking over their shoulders towards us, but not leaving the boat, and, of course, not being able to see us.

As Jones joined us the lantern reappeared, and the European came stumbling down the steps.

The coxswain began excitedly talking to him, pointing in our direction ("Get hold of a big stone, each of you, and hide in the long grass," the Commander whispered), but the European, evidently rather drunk, only cursed him, got into the boat, and still cursing made them shove off.

We breathed freely again and then waited.

"We have to settle those two sentries—Jones and I will do that. You, Glover, cast off one of the boats and get her alongside."

The steam-boat had shot across to the other side, the drunken man had

gone staggering up the path, and then we heard the engines working again and heard the guard-boat going up harbour, the thud of her engines getting fainter and fainter in the night.

"Now wriggle along through the grass till I tell you to stop."

Even as the Commander gave this order he gave a warning hiss, and we sank down in the grass, for the two sentries, more concerned about the noises the coxswain had described than the officer was, or perhaps anxious for something to do to pass the time, lighted a lantern, and, coming down the steps, began walking along the path towards us.

"The Lord hath delivered them into our hands," the Commander muttered piously. "Jones, you seize the one with the lantern—by the throat, mind you—I'll seize the other. You put out the light, Glover, and stand by to help. Not a word and no noise."

Chattering to themselves they came along swinging the lantern unconcernedly. Perhaps they had expected to find that a goat had fallen down and broken his neck, and hoped to make a good supper of its strong meat. At any rate, they were not the least on their guard, and were quite unarmed.

I was much too excited to feel frightened.

They were examining the face of the cliff, holding the lantern up to find the cause of the noises, and as we were lying in the grass on the other side of the path they never even saw us.

As they passed, Jones and the Commander jumped up and sprang at them. One gave a funny hoot like an owl—it was the Commander's man, I think. The man Jones tackled never made a sound except a gurgle, and both went down like stones. I seized the lantern as it fell and blew it out, whilst they dragged the two Chinamen into the long grass.

Jones's man seemed to be giving the most trouble, so I tore up a handful of coarse grass and stuffed it in between his jaws. Then, Jones holding him by the neck all the time, I unwound a long sash or belt he had round his waist and bound his arms. Jones bound his feet together with his knife lanyard, and he lay perfectly still like a log, not making a sound.

[image]

THE COMMANDER AND JONES OVERPOWER THE TWO SENTRIES

Then I crept over to help the Commander, but his man was as limp as a rag, and it was an easy job to gag him and secure his arms and legs.

"Now for the boat, boys," whispered the Commander, and we crawled to the landing-place, keeping well down so as not to show up in the light from the fire. We wriggled along, got hold of the boat's painter, hauled the boat alongside, and slid over the side into her.

There was a pair of oars in the boat and some rude rowlocks, but good enough. I was just going to shove her off into the stream when the Commander gave a chuckle, as if he had had a sudden inspiration, and said softly: "Get her close in to the bank. That's it; now haul her along."

We hauled hand over hand till we came opposite the spot where the two sentries lay gagged and bound. The Commander and Jones sprang ashore, leaving me alone in the boat, and presently reappeared out of the darkness and bundled first one and then the other into the bottom of the boat, both sliding down like sacks of potatoes.

We then let the boat drift down with the ebb tide, which was already setting out strongly, till the Commander with a couple of strokes sent her in under the bank again, where we lay in absolute darkness just above the landing-place.

"What is he going to do?" I thought. He kept chuckling to himself, so I knew that everything was all right; but why did he not get away as quickly as he could? I was tremendously anxious to know, and expected every moment that one of the fellows at the bottom of the boat would commence yelling.

We waited there, crouched down beneath the bank, till we could hear the guard-boat coming back. It ran alongside the other landing-stage, the crew talking sleepily. Presently the light came down the zigzag path again, jerking more than ever, and the steam-boat shot across into the light of the sentry fire and bumped against our jetty. It was hooked on, the bowman helped the European up the steps, and then, of course, the sentries were discovered to be missing.

The flow of language was pretty strong, I can tell you, and the European staggering about in drunken anger round that glowing fire was not a pleasant sight. He called out to the coxswain, and that man jumped ashore. Why he wanted him was very easy to see, for he could hardly stand without support, and leant heavily on him. Like this the three disappeared round the corner, and the boat was left with no one but the stoker in her.

"Now drop alongside and board," chuckled the Commander. "You take the helm, Jones, I'll manage the stoker, and Glover, you cast off the ropes."

In a moment we had shot out from the bank, and were alongside the steam-boat before the scared stoker knew we were there. The Commander laid him out in the bottom of the boat with a crack over the head with a stretcher he had found in the boat. Jones jumped aft, secured the boat's painter, unhooked the stern rope, and got hold of the helm. I sprang across her bows and unhooked the bow rope, the Commander opened the steam-valve, the propeller flew round

(it went astern for a moment, but the Commander found the reversing-lever and threw it over for "ahead"). I shoved her bows off for all I was worth, nearly falling overboard doing it, and by the time I had recovered myself we were away with the boat, and our two gagged sentries, towing behind us.

Jones steered her bows round till we were in the middle, and then I wondered how ever we were going to find our way through the twisting channel.

The tide was sluicing us out as fast as it had borne us in that morning. The glare of the fire was shut out as we rushed round the corner into the channel, into absolute pitch darkness. You could almost feel the intense darkness, and I was horribly scared lest we should smash into a rock, so hung on like grim death for fear of being knocked overboard.

But then the Commander stopped the engines, and we simply drifted between the wall faces of those two forts, only standing by to shove her off if she had hit up against anything. But we were well in the middle, well in the grip of the current which was running like a millstream, swinging us round and round like a cork, and all we could do was to hold our breath and trust to being safely swept out to sea.

The only noise was the bubbling of the current, till suddenly the stoker in the bottom of the boat let fly a most piercing yell which echoed from side to side. The Commander was on top of him in a moment, and must have caught him by the neck. We could see some lights moving overhead. Somebody called out, and I jumped aft to help the Commander.

"Go back, Glover, and stoke; shove a little coal on at a time. I can manage him, and we shall want all our steam when we get outside."

I had never done such a thing before in my life, but it wasn't difficult to find a shovel, and I lifted the furnace door open, and by the light of the furnace saw where the coal was stored. I threw some on, as far back as I could, and shut up the door again, but already the alarm had been given. On each side of us I could hear men shouting and see lights hurrying up and down, and that one flood of light from the open door must have just showed them where we were.

Sentries began letting off rifles, and the shouting redoubled.

We were half-way through by this time. We began to feel the motion of the sea beneath us, and, unless they had a search-light ready, or we ran on a rock, we were almost out of danger.

They *had* not a search-light ready, and we *never* ran into a rock, but in two minutes knew by the dancing of the steam-boat and the wall of blackness that appeared behind us that we were clear of the channel and out at sea.

Suddenly the darkness was lit by vivid flashes and with horrid ear-splitting bangings—the batteries commenced firing at us from both sides of the entrance.

I was horribly frightened at first, for I thought that they must be able to see

us, but I was quite wrong—they were simply firing blindly. One little shell hit the water behind us, and, bursting, showed us up for a second, but nothing else came near, and in a minute or two they ceased firing. The Commander opened out the steam, and the little steam-boat jumped nimbly along, dancing about like a duck, and taking in a lot of spray over her bows as she breasted a tide rip[#].

[#] Tide rip. This is a jumbling sea caused by the wind blowing against a strong tide.

We ran out of the tide rip in a short time, and then the stoker began groaning again, so we bound his legs and arms with rope so that he should not jump overboard. As we were doing this a search-light began sweeping the sea, then another from quite a different quarter, and we knew that Mr. Parker and Mr. Lang were looking for us.

The lights swept past us once or twice, lighting us up sufficiently for us to see each other's faces, but they were too far off for the destroyers to spot us, and presently they switched off and we were in darkness again.

With the danger over I began to feel how frightfully hungry and thirsty I was, and how cold. My feet and legs were warmed by the furnace fires, but the cold spray had soaked me through and through.

Perhaps the Commander was feeling the same, for at length he said, "I'm not going' to stay out here all night," and told Jones to steer towards where we had seen the nearer search-light.

I threw on some more coal. The glow of the fires did not matter now, and we rummaged round and found a lantern, but there was no candle in it.

Then the Commander handed me an oil-can, and I threw some of it through the furnace door, shutting it again very quickly. There was a great rush of smoke, and a flame shot out of the funnel three or four feet high.

It lasted only a few seconds, however, and then I threw in another, and then a third lot of oil.

"They've seen us, sir," Jones sang out. "One of them has hoisted position lights." And, sure enough, two bright little lights, one above the other, shone out.

Jones steered towards them, a search-light began sweeping round, swept past us, came back again, and steadied itself on us for a few seconds. We all yelled as hard as we could and blew the whistle, the light was switched off, and in a couple of minutes the black outline of one of the destroyers appeared as we ran alongside in her lee.

The crew cheered wildly, strong arms helped us on board, and by the light of a lantern I saw the cheery red face of Mr. Parker and Toddles too, of all people,

looking white and scared.

They took us down below into the warm ward-room, got our things off, wrapped us in hot blankets, and gave us food.

Pat Jones was brought down too, much against his will, for there was no fire anywhere else, and we three sat and warmed ourselves and ate, till I slid off my chair, coiled myself in a corner next the stove, too sleepy even to answer Toddles's questions, and went to sleep. What a sleep that was!

CHAPTER XIX
Cummins Captures One Gun Hill

Cummins will Take the Risk—A Landing-Party—Glover Lands as A.D.C.—A Night Landing—Climbing Up-hill—We Rush the Hilltop—The First Mistake—Preparations for Defence—We are Discovered

When the dinghy with Commander Cummins, Glover, and the petty officer Jones had disappeared into the gloom, "No. 3" went back to her usual position for the night.

As dawn was breaking Mr. Parker brought her back opposite the forts, and waited with steam raised for full speed, in order to dash off out of range directly the Commander returned from spying out the forts. As the shadowy, indistinct outlines of the island became clearer, and the low-lying rocks at the entrance gradually took on a definite shape, he and Collins looked anxiously for the return of the dinghy, but could see no sign of it whatever.

He still maintained his position in the hope that the Commander was lurking behind some rock, and therefore was invisible from the destroyer, until the light gradually became so strong that he was himself able to localize the positions of most of the guns, and almost immediately afterwards knew by the running to and fro, and the shouting of men in the batteries, that "No. 3" had been observed from the two forts.

With his hand on the engine-room telegraph, Parker waited in the most keen suspense, and it was not till the forts opened fire and twice nearly struck "No. 3" that he recognized the uselessness of remaining where he was, and the

imminent risk of being sunk, rang for "full speed ahead", and darted out of danger.

It was these shots which the Commander and Glover had heard from the rocky ledge inside the harbour.

To remain anywhere near the entrance was impossible, and Parker knew that the dinghy itself dare not put off from land in daylight, so, trusting that the Commander would find means of concealing himself during the day and of escaping next night, he had steamed to the rendezvous and reported the events of the night to Captain Helston.

Helston's discomfiture was great, and his mind all the more perturbed, because on Cummins he now undisguisedly relied for the successful termination of his schemes, and, in his absence, was unable to suggest any course of immediate action.

Nothing was done, though the squadron, as may be imagined, kept anxious eyes on the entrance to the harbour during the whole day, and vainly hoped to see the little black dinghy shoot out from the land, standing by, with guns trained on the forts, to open fire and cover its escape.

With feelings of the greatest anxiety, anxiety shared by every officer and man in the squadron, the bigger ships drew off again at night and left the two destroyers to return inshore, with extra injunctions to keep a good look-out.

The relief next morning when "No. 3" joined the rendezvous, towing the two pirate boats and signalling that she had the Commander's party on board uninjured, was therefore very great, and when the Commander steamed alongside the *Laird* in the captured steam-boat, her crew, scenting some extraordinary adventure, broke into cheers as the little man complacently climbed the accommodation-ladder and reported himself to Captain Helston, who was nervously awaiting him on the quarterdeck.

They went down below immediately, whilst officers and men crowded round the after gangway and along the side to get a view of the steam-boat—the first trophy they had won from the pirates—and to ask rapid questions from the blue-jackets of "No. 3", who now formed her crew.

"We don't know nothing about it," said the temporary coxswain. "We sees a flare, they having thrown oil on the fires, and turns our search-light on 'em, and in a few minutes alongside she comes as cool as you please—the Commander working the engines 'imself, Mr. Glover adoing stoker, an' Pat Jones a-steering of 'er, with a boat be'ind 'em chock-full o' 'arf-dead Chinamen."

"What has become of the dinghy?" somebody asked.

"It ain't come back, that's all we knows, an' ever since we've been bobbing about in this 'ere craft on our lonesome."

Meanwhile, down in the Captain's cabin, Cummins was giving an account of all that had happened since he had left the *Laird*. Helston's face dropped when

he mentioned the 12-inch gun mounted on the hilltop, but the Commander with a decisive gesture and a glitter in his eyes said: "That is the key of the whole island, sir, and I'm going to capture it to-morrow morning if you will let me. After getting back to 'No. 3' I took a short rest, and, an hour before sunrise this morning, put a crew into the steam-boat, saw that they had plenty of coal and water, left them in charge of the other boat we had captured, and went round in 'No. 3' to the south of the island, to the foot of the hill. The sea was quite calm, and I went inshore in a Berthon boat, discovered a place where I can land, waited till there was enough light for me to make certain that it was possible to scale the hill-slopes, and then came away again, without, as far as I know, being seen. I steamed back, picked up the steam-boat and joined you. That is the reason why I am rather late at the rendezvous. If you give me fifty men, sir, I will scramble up and capture that gun without firing a shot.

"Risk, sir!" he continued as he saw indecision and doubt in Helston's face; "there are no risks. At the worst I can but destroy the gun and come back. At the best I can maintain myself there till you can reinforce me, and then we have the whole island at our mercy. These Chinese are not soldiers, sir, they are mere coolies, and will never face us. The men on board the ships are probably not much better."

Cummins with all his skill had made two mistakes. The gun, as you will learn later, did not effectively command the whole harbour, and the coolies were not by any means to be despised.

The Commander had all his plans cut and dried. Fifty men, with two days' rations in their haversacks, were to go aboard "No. 3" at sunset. Two hours before sunrise next morning he would land them at the foot of the hill, scramble up, and rush the gun. During this time "No. 2" was to demonstrate in front of the entrance, play her search-light on the forts, fire her guns, and distract their attention.

At daybreak the *Sylvia* was to be close in under the foot of the hill and be prepared to land another fifty men from the *Strong Arm*, with the *Sylvia's* two Maxim guns, plenty of ammunition, water, and provisions.

If the first party did not succeed in capturing the gun, or, after having captured it, could not maintain their ground, Cummins would fall back under cover of the guns of the *Sylvia* and "No. 3", destroying the big Chinese gun, if possible, before he left.

If, however, he found himself able to maintain his position on the top of the hill, he would signal for the *Strong Arm's* party to land.

"Once get that gun to bear on their ships and we shall drive them out to you, sir," he concluded, "and I have no fear of the result then."

"With a hundred men away," answered Helston doubtfully, "it may not be

so easy."

"I shall take the marines, sir; none of the big guns are manned by them, either on board here or on board the *Strong Arm.* You know they have complained often enough about that; but I have always had this eventuality in my mind, and they will, therefore, not be so much missed in a general action."

Helston paced nervously up and down his cabin. "What will happen if the weather breaks?"

"It all depends on the weather, sir, I allow that, but such a risk one must face, and personally I am prepared to face it. Remember that you have but a month to capture this island."

"I know it, Cummins, I know it," replied Helston; and then turning suddenly with some of his old fire and animation said, "I tell you what, I'll go myself."

This was the last thing in the world that Cummins wanted.

"There'll be a lot of climbing, sir, and with your disabled arm you will be extremely handicapped; and when I drive these fellows out to sea your place will be aboard your ship in command of your squadron."

"Yes, yes, you are right; you always are, for the matter of that," he added bitterly, and his voice rising as the excitement of coming action elated him. "We shall both get our promotion. I promise you that if I get mine you shall have yours."

Lowering his voice he added, "You said the other day, Cummins, that there was not much chance of winning a wife here. I don't talk about these things, but my promotion would win me a wife."

"I think mine would also, sir—I pray it would," answered Cummins in a grave voice. Both men shook hands for a moment—dropped them—Cummins stuffed his into his pockets—both looked foolish.

"By the way, sir," stammered the Commander confusedly, "I never told you that one of these prisoners was dead when we took him out of the boat last night. It was the man Jones caught around the neck. I rather fancy young Glover, in gagging him, stuffed grass down his throat. We dropped him overboard. Glover does not know the real cause."

"Better not tell him," said Helston.

Jenkins interrupted further conversation by announcing breakfast.

* * * * *

The news that a party was to be landed quickly spread through the squadron, and there was intense excitement on the lower deck and the most extraordinary rumours. The yarn spread that the Commander, Glover, and Jones had cut their way through the whole of the pirates, disabled the guns in the forts, killed any

number of men (sometimes as few as ten were mentioned), and after running the most awful perils had captured the steam-boat from alongside the *Hong Lu* and brought her and a host of prisoners out under fire. When they knew that the Commander himself was going in charge of the party, every man and boy wanted to go with him, and every few minutes men would knock at his cabin door and say, scratching their heads and shuffling their feet uneasily, "Please, sir, begging your pardon, sir, but I'd be much obliged if you'd give me a chance ashore, sir."

All day long the equipment of the party was being prepared, rations stowed, water-bottles and water-breakers filled, leather gear fitted, pouches filled with ammunition, and the thousand and one requirements of a landing-party carefully arranged.

During the forenoon the Commander, accompanied by A Tsi, had gone across to "No. 3" and interviewed the prisoner.

From the sentry whom he had knocked on the head (he had not throttled him as had Jones his man) he learnt that a broad path ran right along the crest of the hill and led straight towards the gun. As far as the man knew—and he seemed quite willing to tell all he knew—there were no earthworks round the gun, and no guard was left there at night.

Before he went back to the *Laird* he asked Glover if he would care to land with him as his "doggy", as they call a commander's A.D.C. in the navy.

"Ra—ther," said Glover, dancing with joy, and went joyfully back with him to the *Laird* to make preparations, and only too delighted to be able to relate to his chums his adventures of the last twenty-four hours.

Later in the day he could be seen, surrounded by his admiring and envious mess-mates, wriggling from side to side to get glimpses of himself in the broken remnants of the looking-glass in his sea-chest cover.

He had his haversack, water-bottle, and field-glasses slung from one shoulder, a rolled-up blanket went round the other, a revolver holster hung from his cartridge-belt, and a carefully sharpened cutlass (in place of a dirk) was at his side.

Quite a formidable object he looked, and he admired what he could see of himself immensely.

Two things marred his perfect happiness. One was, that neither Mellins nor Toddles was going to land; the other was, that he had to leave behind the greater part of his home-made cake.

"An ill wind that blows nobody any good," said Mellins gloomily, as he transferred the remainder to his own chest.

* * * * *

Directly it was dark the landing-party "fell in" on the quarter-deck. Helston made them a little speech, and then they were sent across to "No. 3", the rest of the ship's company crowding aft to see them over the side and wish them luck. Helston did not like the look of the weather, and said so; Cummins did not either, but kept that to himself, and only wanted to get away from the ship before orders were countermanded. For once he was as nervous as a woman. Directly, however, "No. 3" steamed away in the dark and had lost touch with the Flag-ship, all fear and anxiety left him, and he could have whooped for joy.

He called the men aft, said a few words to them, explained exactly what he wanted them to do, and finished by saying: "You have ten hours to get through aboard here. Sleep, boys, sleep all you can; you'll want it before you've finished."

But the marines were all young men—most of them Cockneys; not one had ever been under fire before, and the prospects of a fight at daybreak made sleep impossible for them. In little groups they lay down wherever they could find shelter from the cold night wind, smoking their pipes and talking with subdued excitement.

The officers lay on the ward-room deck and tried to sleep, but even they failed to do so.

Cummins himself was on deck practically the whole night, for the sun had set behind a very angry-looking bank of clouds, and the breeze showed signs of increasing and veering to the south.

A strong southerly breeze would make it almost impossible to land on the southern shore of the island, and it was this tendency of the wind to veer to the south'ard which gave him so much anxiety.

At two o'clock in the morning it was blowing quite fresh from the south-west. It was raining very heavily, with strong gusts of wind, and the outlook was most unpromising.

Parker, in dripping oil-skins, reported the barometer still falling, and for a while Cummins almost decided to abandon the enterprise.

Fortunately the wind, an hour later, went right round to the north-west, the stars came fitfully out, and a young moon, in the intervals of drifting clouds, gave light enough to see occasionally the outlines of the island.

"Carry on, Parker, the elements are with us," chuckled the Commander.

"They won't be for long, sir; the glass is still falling."

The engine-room telegraph clanged down below, the sleepy artificer answered back, "No. 3" slowly forged ahead with two of the *Laird's* cutters in tow, and the marines, starting to life with the movement of the engines, knew that their hour for action was approaching.

An hour later "No. 3" had steamed round to the south of the island and stopped her engines in the shadow of the big hill whose shoulder and flattened

top loomed darkly above her, outlined against a faint moon.

A strong, cold breeze blew down its slopes, but the sea was only gently ruffled by it.

The first to land in the black shadows at its foot were the Commander, Glover, and two signalmen in one of the Berthon boats. With little danger or difficulty they reached the shore and jumped to land as the boat tore her bottom out against the rocky beach.

A few minutes were spent in hurriedly choosing a more suitable landing-place, and then the spot was marked by a signal lantern placed at the water's edge behind a great rock, so that its light could not be seen from shore.

This was the signal for the rest of the party to land, and in a few minutes they heard the regular beat of oars, and the two cutters, appearing out of the dark, grated up the beach. The men with their rifles slung over their shoulders began hastily jumping ashore.

"Keep your feet dry, men, and don't hurry," said Cummins, as he saw them jumping into the water in their excitement to be the first ashore.

The boats were hauled out of the water and then the order was given to "fall in". They "fell in" in three little detachments—twenty Royal Marine Light Infantry under their subaltern, a huge, jovial giant named Saunderson; ten blue-jackets under Pattison, the late skipper of destroyer "No. 1", who to his great joy had been taken out of the *Sylvia* and given another chance; and twenty Royal Marine Artillery under their captain, Williams, a famous cricketer and Rugby player. These artillery or Blue Marines had to bring up the rear. The light infantry or Red Marines had to lead the party.

The blue-jackets consisted of six seamen gunners, two armourers with tools to disable or repair the 12-inch gun, and two torpedo men with explosives to destroy it if necessary. Besides these fifty men and their officers there were two signalmen, Richardson, the "young doctor" of the *Laird*, a sick-berth steward, Glover, and the Commander.

Half the men carried axes, half Wallace entrenching spades, and every six men had a nine-gallon water-breaker to carry up between them.

Cummins went slowly from one group to another as they stood at the foot of that hill casting hurried glances upwards, and told them that it was two hours before sunrise, that they had two hours to get to the top, that there was to be no hurry, and that not a word was to be spoken.

"You have to keep together, men. If any man loses touch with the rest, make uphill; he can't go wrong."

In single file, one after another, Cummins going first, Glover sticking to him like a leech, and the two signalmen close behind, they began to clamber up, hauling themselves hand over hand, forcing their way through bushes, and

always keeping upward.

It was slow work, and Cummins halted, whenever a clear spot was reached, to enable stragglers to close up. At the first halt, a quarter of an hour after the start, the little party was silently mustered. All were present, fifty-three men and six officers.

There had been a great deal of noise of breaking bushes, falling stones, and muttered oaths, but the shrieking of the wind among the trees effectually drowned it.

Presently Cummins found himself faced by an almost perpendicular cliff and called another halt. Ten minutes—it seemed like hours—went by before he found a way up, and the little column, bending to the left, struggled on again.

Now the ground became more open, covered with coarse grass up to the knees and dotted with stunted trees. Progress was more rapid.

A pheasant disturbed from sleep flew off with a "whr! whr!" which made the men's hearts leap to their mouths. Occasionally a frightened wood-pigeon darted from his roosting-place. Most scaring these noises were in the pitch darkness.

Faintly, at intervals, they could now hear the dull sound of distant firing, sometimes fast and furious, dropping again to a few single shots at long intervals, then recurring with renewed vigour. It was Lang in "No. 2" demonstrating outside the entrance and drawing the attention of the forts. These were replying savagely.

Not a sound came from above except the soughing of the cold wind.

At the next halt two marines were missing. One rejoined, bruised from a fall, but they could not wait for the second. "Who is he?" was whispered along the line. "Bolton, a Blue Marine," was passed back from the rear.

At the end of the first hour he was the only man missing. Some of the water in the breakers had been spilt, a helmet or two knocked off and lost in the darkness—that was all.

Another half-hour of slowly pushing upwards—men were breathing hard and panting; another halt was called.

A blue-jacket had sprained his ankle, and after a hurried examination by Dr. Richardson, two men were told off to assist him. Rifle straps were eased, water-breakers changed hands, and leather gear adjusted.

Looking downwards towards the sea Cummins saw the first faint glimmer of approaching dawn—far away in the east. They must push on. Bending again to the left to keep in more open ground, they still steadily pressed upwards.

Another halt; and the wind, lashing more savagely through the trees, drowned any noise, and told them that now they were reaching the crest of the hill.

Cummins went cautiously forward to reconnoitre, and reappeared, Glover panting with excitement behind him. "I've found the path, Saunderson," he chuckled, and the word was passed to move on again.

Four men were now missing besides Gunner Bolton, but there was no time to wait; already objects were becoming more visible, and daylight was fast approaching.

In another two minutes they were in the open, on a broad, well-beaten track, and a subdued "Oh! oh!" of excitement ran along the men.

The column pressed on rapidly, turning to the right uphill, and walking in the grass at the side of the path to make less noise. Every moment the men expected to be fired upon, and were already beginning to unsling their rifles as their excitement and nervousness increased.

As they turned a corner an angry gust of wind, blowing up from the harbour below, dashed cold rain in their faces—still not a sound in front except the weird noises of the wind as it swept through the trees.

Some of the youngsters were beginning to get "jumpy", and one or two began loading their rifles without orders.

Cummins caught the sound of a breech-block closing (the rifles were Martinis, not Lee-Metfords), guessed what was happening, and knew that someone would let off a rifle and give the whole "show" away.

He halted at once, sent Glover back with orders for every man's rifle to be examined, and for the name of every man, found with a cartridge in his rifle, to be taken.

This took time, but steadied the men, and whilst it was being done Cummins crept forward, followed by Glover, and a blurred, indistinct mass he had seen in front of him gradually shaped itself into a clump of trees. The path dropped slightly in front of him, ran across an open space, and then rose abruptly towards the trees.

"Our gun is up there," whispered the Commander joyously, and lay down, coolly munching a stalk of grass, his supply of toothpicks having failed him, and tried to make out whether there was any sign of life under the trees.

As they lay there another gust of wind carried up from the harbour the clattering noise of beating gongs. "Eh, boy! that's the second time we've heard that noise," he chuckled. "Run back and bring up the men. We are not a hundred yards from the gun."

As the men came up they were rapidly extended from left to right.

"Fix bayonets, men; not a sound—no cheering—no shooting," the order went in whispers from man to man.

The subdued rattle of fixing bayonets ran along the line, and Glover afterwards said it gave him the "shivers" to hear it.

He was lying watching the Commander, and thought he would never give the order to charge.

He could see the indistinct outline of the gun among the trees covered with a huge tarpaulin, and just then somebody near him whispered, "There are people moving about there, sir," and he could actually feel the men bracing themselves for a rush.

At last the Commander was "up", and trotting down the slope with a bit of grass between his teeth. Glover followed, vainly trying to draw his cutlass. The men sprang after them, breasted the rise, swept over some level ground, and with a final rush leaped over a parapet of sand-bags, swarmed around the gun, and found—Gunner Bolton doing "sentry-go" backwards and forwards in rear of the gun! There was not a Chinaman to be seen.

Some of the men simply sat down and laughed, others, furious, cried out that "They'd been jolly well had," and that "Gunner Bolton 'ad made fools of 'em all, 'e 'ad," and that "They would jolly well knock 'is blooming 'ead off, that they would, next general-leave day."

"Fall in, men," sang out the Commander, with a twinkle in his eye. "You shall have plenty of fighting presently."

Then he sent them back for the water-breakers and armourers' stores which they had dropped when fixing bayonets, whilst he and Williams, the captain of marines, took a rapid survey of the position, and Pattison and his blue-jackets commenced to overhaul the gun.

The top of the hill was flattened out into a little plateau about a hundred yards long, sloping gently towards the harbour and then falling abruptly into the steep side of the hill with a quite well-defined edge. It had its back to the sea and was facing the harbour.

At the east end, the end nearest to the entrance channel, and in the corner overlooking the sea, was the gun, an obsolete 12-inch Krupp, mounted in a deep circular pit, and poking its muzzle over a wall of sand-bags ten or twelve feet thick and about six feet high.

A little cluster of stunted trees hid the gun from view out at sea. Their trunks had already been half sawn through in preparation for felling them, and a few more strokes of the axe would bring them down.

The first thing to be done was to ascertain whether the gun could be made ready for service, as otherwise it was useless to remain there.

Already Pattison and his men had hauled away the tarpaulin covering its massive breech, and were rapidly examining the mounting and training gear.

"Rough and clumsy, sir, but we shall be able to train her round all right," he reported.

Magazines had been tunnelled out through the side of the gun-pit down

into the ground, and the doors were closed with padlocks. These were wrenched off, and Pattison reported plenty of ammunition. In a corner he found boxes of friction-tubes and fuses.

His men also found the ropes and blocks to be used in training the gun. They were brought out, made fast to the great gun-carriage at one end and to huge steel rings sunk in the concrete foundations at the other, a dozen sturdy Blue Marines "clapped on" to the ropes, and with Cummins standing on the sighting-platform the ponderous mass was slowly, and with many jerks, trained across the harbour.

It was then that the Commander realized his first mistake.

From that sighting-platform he could look down towards the sea, but the other edge of the plateau shut out all view of the harbour. It was now light enough for him to make out "No. 3" below him, but, looking inland, the flat top of the hill prevented him from seeing anything except the high land on the opposite side of the island, across the harbour.

His calculations had been made from that ledge of rock on which he, Glover, and Jones had hidden all the previous day. He had forgotten that they were then sixty or more feet above the harbour level, and had not dreamt that from the water's edge the gun itself was not visible.

To destroy the gun and get back to the *Laird* was his first thought, and he called for Pattison to jump up with him.

Pattison's face dropped as he, too, saw that fifty yards of hilltop were in between him and the pirate ships he had hoped to sink.

Suddenly Cummins turned to him with a suggestion. "How about half-charges—eh? A pinch of powder will 'flop' them down there—eh?"

"We might try, sir."

"They won't be very accurate at first, Pattison, but we'll improve—eh?"

"Right you are, sir, I'll manage that."

"We'll ferret them out before the day is over," he chuckled again, and looking down behind him he saw the *Sylvia* looming in towards the shore.

"For once Bannerman is up to time. We'll have the *Strong Arm's* up here in a couple of hours or so."

He sent the signalmen down the hill to communicate with the *Sylvia* and to order the second party to land immediately, and then he and Williams made plans for placing the top of the hill in some state of defence.

"We shall have them round us like flies when once they find us sitting up here," Cummins said.

Fortunately for them, the enemy had evidently intended to mount a second gun, had indeed already marked out the site for its gun-pit, and had prepared hundreds of sand-bags to defend it. These lay scattered in heaps on the plateau,

and were now used for making breastworks.

Williams and Saunderson hurriedly marked out the positions in which they were to be built, and the marines, piling arms, and stacking their greatcoats and blankets in a heap, "set to" with a will to haul the sand-bags over to the edges.

"Safer to send some men out in the long field, I think, sir," said Captain Williams, the cricketer, and ordered his taciturn sergeant-major—a martinet named Haig—to select two of the older men as sentries and place them, one along the path the column had just followed, and another down the face of the hill, on the zigzag path up which the Commander and Glover had seen the coolies carrying ammunition.

"'Square leg' and 'long on'—eh?" chuckled the Commander.

"Yes, sir, I think they will be enough for the present."

The first breast-work was to be built at the narrow end of the plateau farthest from the gun-pit.

It commanded the crest of the hill over which the little party had made its final rush, and the path they had followed ran along this ridge, dipping down for two hundred yards, and then rising steeply to the bush-covered knoll, on top of which they had extended and fixed bayonets.

One of Sergeant Haig's sentries (Williams's "square leg" man) was already standing in the gap made by the path as it disappeared into the dense bushes, and it was evident that an attacking force could take splendid cover there, and could sweep the greater part of the plateau with rifle fire.

This breast-work was therefore built right across the narrow end of the plateau, sand-bag was piled on sandbag till it was nearly three feet high, and as the men had hauled some great logs of timber across from the gun-pit to strengthen it, they called it eventually the "Log Redoubt", making loopholes in it for their rifles.

The bush-covered knoll in front of them they named "Bush Hill", and few will ever forget it.

Some of the men dragged sand-bags to the edge of the plateau, overlooking the harbour, to form two low breast-works, one on each side of the zig-zag path, as it led up to the gun-pit.

For twenty yards in front of these two breast-works the steep hillside was bare, but below this the whole hill down to the pirate village, which they could see at the bottom gradually becoming distinct as daylight increased, was covered with small trees and dense brushwood, through which the zigzag path wound its way upwards.

Men lying behind these sand-bags were somewhat protected by the Log Redoubt from rifle fire from Bush Hill, so Williams contented himself with raising them only two sand-bags high.

These being roughly completed, more sand-bags were dragged to the opposite end of the plateau, and a little redoubt constructed fifty yards beyond the gun-pit. From here fire could be directed along the farther ridges, which were devoid of cover and sloped steadily downwards, and also down both the harbour and sea slopes of the hill.

Sergeant Haig and nine Blue Marines were given charge of this work, and so it was known as "Haig's Redoubt".

Saunderson and his twenty Red Marines were told off to man the harbour breast-works, and Williams and his remaining ten Marine Artillerymen were to hold the Log Redoubt.

Every man was told off to his own special loophole, and each man laid his rifle and greatcoat on the ground behind it, the precious water-breakers were taken into the gun-pit, and the men's blankets, covered with the gun tarpaulin, were piled to form a little "zareba" in the middle of the plateau.

Meanwhile the signalmen had returned, bringing back two of the stragglers, and reported that the *Strong Arm's* party were already landing from the *Sylvia*.

It was broad daylight now, and presently the remaining two stragglers came into camp, looking very much ashamed of themselves.

For an hour both officers and men had worked like horses, and all this time the cold wind swept up to them the noises of the waking town at their feet—the dull drumming of Chinese gongs and the clanging of the ships' bells—but nothing else disturbed their work till suddenly the raucous shriek of a steam hooter startled them.

"That is the signal to start work. The coolies will be up here in half an hour," chuckled the Commander.

"What are you going to do when they do come up?" asked Williams. "If we caught them and prevented them from carrying the news back it would be a good thing. Every few minutes is valuable."

"All right, Williams, we'll try."

Then a signalman reported that the second party had already commenced the ascent, bringing with them the *Sylvia's* two Maxim guns.

At the same moment the sentry on the zigzag path below came running up. "Please, sir, there are fifty or sixty natives coming up from the town."

Cummins ordered everyone to conceal himself. "Don't any of you move till I sound a whistle."

Five minutes later they could hear the merry chatter of the coolies as they climbed up towards the gun, and the foremost of them appeared out of the trees in the open path below them. Something made them suspicious; they stopped and pointed upwards, jabbering rapidly. Then a young fool of a marine raised

his head to look over the breast-work behind which he was lying, and, in a panic, they all took fright, threw down their tools, and scampered down hill as fast as their legs could carry them.

"Heaps of time," said Cummins gently; "we'd better go to breakfast. 'Place your field' again, Williams," he chuckled, "and we'd better have a couple of people at 'point' and 'cover point' as well—eh?"

Breakfast of ship's biscuit and corned beef, washed down with a "pull" from the water-bottles, lasted ten minutes, and then everyone set to work again.

Williams suggested that they had better start lopping down the bushes below Saunderson's two breast-works.

"It would give us a better chance if they tried to rush us, sir."

"Now, lads," sang out the Commander, "get your axes and knives and cut down the bushes in front of you—make a clear sweep of them."

They started hacking and cutting, and in half an hour had cleared three or four yards along their front, when suddenly, bang! went a shell, bursting just below them, and the fragments went shrieking overhead.

Every man "ducked", then ran back up the slope, seized his rifle, and lay down behind his own breast-work.

"Whew!" whistled the Commander, "that is their game, is it?"

CHAPTER XX
The Fight for One Gun Hill

We Must have Oil—Under Shell Fire—The Pirate Guns are Silenced—
The First Attack—Hopkins Wounded—The "Strong Arm's" Arrive—
The Oil Party Cut Off—A Momentary Respite—The Second Mistake—
The Oil is Rescued—The Big Gun Fires

That first shell was quickly followed by two more, both of which burst below among the bushes. A fourth sang overhead, going out to sea.

Williams, Saunderson, Cummins, and the two signalmen searched through their glasses and tried to find the guns that had fired. The shells came two or three a minute—one burst near the men's blankets and covered the tarpaulin with dirt,

another crushed through the trees without bursting.

"I see them, sir," yelled one of the signalmen; "right over there, sir, under those trees;" and he pointed in the direction. As they all followed his hand, outstretched towards some trees on a hill, on the other side of the harbour, overlooking the low ground near the outlet channel, they saw two little spurts of flame shoot out from beneath them. Two little thin clouds of grey smoke drifted out of sight, and almost immediately a shell burst three hundred yards in front of the breast-works, high up in the air, and sent down a hail of bullets into the bushes; the other flew overhead.

"Shrapnel," muttered Saunderson, and, seeing Glover looking nervously from one to another, added, "I wish I wasn't so immense. Hi! Glover, come and stand in front of me."

Another shrapnel tore up the ground in front of the breast-work. One or two of the men were covered with dust. They all tried to wriggle themselves into as small a space as possible.

The non-commissioned officers had at first lain down with their men, but now, seeing their officers standing behind them, rose sheepishly on one knee, one after another. Saunderson's sergeant (Wilkins by name) stood upright, walked up to Saunderson, saluted, and said, "Beg pardon, sir, it shall not occur again," marched stiffly back to his men, and stood there like a statue.

"It's pretty hard luck on these youngsters to come under shrapnel fire before they are used to rifle fire," Saunderson said to the Commander. "If I once lay down behind a sand-bag, nothing in this world would induce me to get up again. I think I should give them something to do, sir. They are not old soldiers."

The Commander told Glover to ask Captain Williams to speak to him.

Glover bolted off, only too glad to have anything to do, gave his message, and ran back.

"Never run, boy; you are apt to get overheated," chuckled Cummins.

Poor young Glover looked fearfully ashamed of himself and grew as red as a tomato.

Williams was of the same opinion. "Let them go on cutting down the brushwood, sir."

Cummins nodded assent, and the necessary orders were given, the sergeants repeated them, with many flowery additions, and the men nervously rose to their knees and in a very half-hearted way prepared to obey.

"Leave your rifles, you fools!" shouted Sergeant Wilkins. "There are no niggers to shoot you. Get out of it, all of you!"

Once they got to work, spread out at wide intervals, they became less nervous, and Blue Marines and Red Marines vied with each other as to which should clear the wider space.

Williams and Saunderson worked among their men in the bushes, whilst Cummins sat on the sand-bag breastwork, Glover nervously hovering round him, and Dr. Richardson lying down by his side, waiting for a job.

Every now and then shells burst on the plateau, but it was evident that most of them were directed towards the gun, and Pattison and his men were having a very warm time of it.

Presently Pattison came across from the gun-pit to where the Commander was sitting, saluted, and told him in a very low voice that the recoil cylinders of the gun were empty, and that he could find no oil. The gun, of course, could not be fired with empty recoil cylinders. It would probably have toppled over into the sea.

Cummins did not reply for some time, and his face grew very stern. "We must get oil from the ships," he said at length, and sent a signalman to find out from the *Sylvia* whether the whole of the second party had already left the beach. "They are already a quarter of the way up," the signalman reported.

"Well, I cannot send them back now. I must get Bannerman to send me a dozen hands with a couple of oil-drums, and"—his eyes twinkling again—"I'll tell you what I will do. I will send Parker round to engage those guns. I believe he could reach them over that low ground."

He sang out for the signalman.

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted Pattison, "I should suggest that you ask Commander Bannerman to go round and shell those guns with his 12-pounders, and order Parker to send up the oil. I have been aboard the *Sylvia* for three weeks, and I think that Commander Bannerman will be more inclined to engage those guns than to spare a dozen men to carry up oil. Parker, sir, you know; I do not think you know Commander Bannerman."

The two men looked at each other in a strange way for a few moments. Cummins smiled grimly, called for the signalman, and wrote down:

"Commander Cummins's compliments to Captain Bannerman, and would he steam off the low land to the west and engage two guns on the hill behind. They are seriously annoying him."

"Will that do, Pattison?" he asked, smiling bitterly.

"I think so, sir."

"And, signalman, also make to Mr. Parker from me, 'Send four drums of oil—urgent'."

The signalman ran hurriedly off to make the semaphore, but before he could cross the plateau a shell burst overhead, and he fell headlong.

The second signalman, at a nod from Cummins, darted out and picked up the paper with the signals on it, and jumped down the side of the hill overlooking the sea.

Dr. Richardson and his sick-berth steward ran forward, bent over the prostrate man, picked him up, and carried him behind the gun-pit out of fire.

Pattison and Glover helped them.

They came back immediately, Glover white as a sheet.

"He is dead, sir," reported Dr. Richardson; "the top of his skull was carried away."

"Cover him up and get him out of sight of the others," said Cummins slowly; "and, Richardson, I must insist on your remaining under cover."

"Very good, sir;" and Dr. Richardson went away to take shelter behind the gun-pit parapet.

Back came the remaining signalman with the replies: "Captain Bannerman will have much pleasure in supporting Commander Cummins, and will engage the two guns which are annoying him ".

Cummins tore it up contemptuously.

The second was from Parker: "Oil is being sent with utmost despatch".

Pattison asked for orders. He could do no more with the gun, and was told to finish cutting down those trees—"They are probably aiming at them as much as at the gun." A few minutes went past, and then two marines came staggering up—one with blood flowing from his head, another with his arm limp at his side. A shrapnel had burst short.

They fell down inside the breast-work, and Cummins sent them over to Dr. Richardson.

They crawled across.

Then the sentries down below on the zigzag path came running back. "Hundreds of men are coming up, sir; they look like sailors, sir."

Cummins was perfectly prepared for this news, because half an hour ago he had seen a commotion among the cruisers in the harbour at his feet, and boats pulling to and from shore, and had guessed that they were landing sailors.

"The only people they can rely upon," he thought, and told Glover to ask Captain Williams to bring his men back.

"No hurry, Glover," as Glover, wild with excitement, was rushing off.

"Wish to goodness I had never brought that boy," he muttered to himself. "If he gets bowled over his cousin will give me my marching orders like a shot. I am sure she will.

"Plucky little fellow, too," he continued, as Glover came slowly back, alongside the huge Saunderson, at the head of his men.

As they came up the slope a shell burst among them, and the smoke hid Glover and Saunderson for a moment, but the wind carried it away, and they reappeared, Saunderson steadying his men with a backward sweep of his arm.

"That's better, sir," he said to Cummins, his face glowing with pride as the

Red Marines stepped quietly over the breast-work and lay down along-side their rifles. "Got 'em in hand all right now, sir."

And Williams's Blue Marines were just as well in hand, threw down their axes, and took their places without the least fuss or confusion—half of them in Sergeant Haig's redoubt, half of them with Captain Williams behind the Log Redoubt. A minute or two passed, and then a few blue-coated Chinese came into sight, and a little crowd of them halted at an open corner of the zigzag path, then rapidly deployed into the bushes on each side.

The men lying on the extreme right of the breast-work also caught sight of them, and without orders began easing off their rifles.

The whole line would have been blazing away in another minute, firing blindly into the bushes beneath them, if Saunderson, his face red with rage, had not bounded across and stopped them. Cummins chuckled.

As it was, their few shots made the Chinese scatter still more rapidly, and they vanished to cover without firing a shot.

Then came the most trying time of all, and it tested the young marines' endurance to the utmost. The two guns were firing rapidly, shells were screaming past, shells were bursting on the slope in front of them and on the plateau behind them. Every now and again a little white ball of smoke burst with a dull "puff" overhead, and a hailstorm of shrapnel bullets came splashing down. They knew, too, that the Chinamen were creeping up unseen through the bushes, and they could do nothing but wait.

The intense tension of suspense was still further increased by the sentry on the crest path running back from that gap in the bushes with a scared face.

Another party was advancing along the path they had followed in the morning, and almost before he had reported this, shots from Bush Hill came whipping past, and then from the slopes below a furious fire burst out, the bullets fortunately flying wildly.

Cummins sang out for the signalman. "Go back and signal to Mr. Parker, 'Am attacked in front and left flank. I expect you to keep my rear open'," and turning to Saunderson, who was standing near him, "Eh! Saunderson, you make me nervous standing up; I wish you'd lie down."

"I will when you do, sir."

"But I can't, you know," Cummins said, with a silly chuckle.

"For goodness' sake keep moving, then, sir," the giant answered nervously, as several bullets flew past, and one struck the sand-bag on which Cummins was sitting.

Cummins dug it out with his finger. It was a small-bore Mauser bullet.

"Hullo! that's capital!" he cried, jumping to his feet, as a faint report came from the extreme left, and a shell burst among the trees from which the two guns

had been firing. "Bannerman's got round at last."

The men saw it too, and gave a joyful cheer of relief.

"Now, lads," he sang out cheerily, "you won't be bothered with those shells, and these Chinese can't hit a haystack. Save your cartridges, and never fire till you are sure of hitting. The *Strong Arm's* will be here with their Maxims in another hour, so don't waste a shot."

With the dreaded shells silent, the men settled down more confidently and fired very seldom, and once or twice a yell of pain below told them that a cartridge had not been wasted.

The bullets were going past in great numbers—ping-ping! flick-flick! Occasionally one struck the ground with a puff of dust, or struck a stone or an axe and went whistling away, twisted out of shape. Every now and again one buried itself in a sand-bag with a thud, but most of them were high overhead. Evidently the Chinese were too undisciplined to take aim.

Still, it was a sufficiently awkward position, with three or four hundred men attacking from below, and probably as many on the left, concealed among those bushes opposite the Log Redoubt.

Cummins had only forty-eight men left, and though they were well in hand and were steadying every minute, the odds were sufficiently serious.

He was perhaps not so anxious about himself as for the second party, which was now reported by "No. 3" as being more than half-way up the hill. If the Chinese attacked them whilst they were struggling through the thick undergrowth, encumbered with the two Maxims, ammunition, and provision-boxes, it would go hard with them. Once they joined him with their machine-guns, he was confident of holding his ground till the oil arrived and enabled him to fire the big Krupp. His right flank, too, gave him little concern, for it was comparatively open in that direction, and gave no shelter for an attacking force; and so long as "No. 3" could sweep the sea-slope of the hill, he did not worry about his rear.

But could "No. 3" do so?

The wind, which had been blowing strongly from the north-west, was already beginning to veer again to the south, and was increasing rapidly in strength, and Cummins knew only too well that neither "No. 3" could remain near the foot of the hill, nor the *Sylvia* near enough to the low land to smother those two field-guns if the wind remained in that quarter and brought in a heavy sea.

Unsupported by the ships, he recognized that his position would be precarious in the extreme.

If, too, the *Strong Arm's* party followed his route of the night before, they would run right into the Chinese massed on his flank. Fortunately he could communicate with them through "No. 3", and signalled directions for them to incline

to their right and make for the shoulder of the hill on the eastern or gun-pit side of the top.

It took twenty minutes to get the signal to them and to get a reply, and it was a great relief to him when the signalman reported that the *Strong Arm's* landing-party had received the signal and were already altering their course.

"The oil is also on its way up," was the signalman's welcome news.

"I don't know what we should do without you, Gordon," the Commander said; "keep under cover as much as you can."

A marine now came hurriedly over to the Commander with a message from Captain Williams.

"He thinks, sir, that they are gathering for a rush beyond those bushes," pointing along the crest towards Bush Hill.

Cummins went across to the Log Redoubt, and found Williams scanning the bushes beyond him through his glasses.

"They are gathering pretty thickly behind there, sir, and I think I can make out a couple of Europeans."

Cummins could see them too, and he sent Glover to Mr. Pattison to tell him to bring his men out of the gun-pit. They swarmed over the parapet and came flying across the level ground, and lay down in the grass on the right of the Log Redoubt.

"They are using Mauser rifles, sir," said Williams.

"Yes, I know. How do you know?"

Williams held up his left arm, his handkerchief tied around the wrist and red with blood. "Two tiny holes slap bang through."

"Bones broken?" the Commander asked anxiously.

"I don't think so," Williams said, adding, as the most awful shrieks and yells came from the bushes—"they are trying to frighten us and getting up courage to rush across, but I think we can stop them in the open. Steady, men, don't waste a shot, and fire low. Loosen your belts, men, and see your ammunition clear."

Each of the ten Blue Marines loosened a couple of packets and laid them in little piles at his right-hand side.

A wild crackle and splutter of rifle firing rang out—another hideous yell. Two Europeans sprang into the open, and a crowd of blue-coated Chinamen followed them and began rushing madly across.

"Now, men, you can't miss them; fire low, fire low, and take aim. Take aim, can't you?" (this to a young marine who was shoving in cartridges and pulling the trigger almost at the same time).

Seven or eight fell before they had gone as many yards, but still they came on, the Europeans well ahead.

They covered a hundred yards, and now they were coming up the rise, the

ground behind them dotted with little blue heaps.

Cummins drew his revolver. "Is yours loaded, Glover?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then don't draw it unless they get over the sandbags," he chuckled, "or you'll be shooting me."

The marines were up on their knees now, firing over the breast-work. It was absolute slaughter, but the Chinese showed no sign of slackening.

One of the white men Glover recognized—the man with the black beard.

"Two of you take that black-bearded scoundrel," Williams sang out, "and two the other white man."

Chinamen fell all around them, but still they came on.

"Take a shot yourself, Williams," Cummins ordered. (Williams was a noted rifle shot.)

He seized a rifle, rested it on a sand-bag, took careful aim and fired, loaded, and fired again.

The second European twisted round and fell. As he fell his hat came off, and Glover recognized, with a funny feeling of regret, that it was Hopkins. The Chinese following him stopped, came on again, looked back, half a dozen threw up their arms and fell, and then the others had had enough of it, could face no more, and, throwing their rifles away, ran down the hill to the right. The black-bearded man, with fifty or sixty Chinamen still behind him, got to within fifty yards. The marines began to cheer, standing up now to fire.

They dwindled to forty, to thirty, and then with a sudden shock Glover realized that they were actually up to them, and woke to the fact that men were fighting hand to hand, marines clubbing their rifles and smiting left and right (they were still outnumbered three to one), and that the Commander was standing in front of him coolly firing his revolver.

He suddenly remembered that he had a revolver too, and drew it, but Cummins seized it and handed him his empty smoking one to reload.

A cheer on the right, and Pattison and his men threw themselves into the fray; another cheer, and the mighty Saunderson with half of his Red Marines came charging over; more revolver shots rang out, the Chinese began to give way, turned tail, and rushed down the slope, the huge bearded European last of all.

As he bounded back he passed Hopkins's prostrate body, bent down, lifted him up, and staggered away with him.

"Let him go, men; don't fire at him," shouted Cummins, and he disappeared into the bushes.

Glover heard the Commander mutter, "What a silly fool I am!"

The men stood up cheering like madmen; but firing started again from the

bushes, bullets came whistling over, and they were ordered to take cover.

Saunderson ran back to his breast-work with his men.

"That was a pretty close shave, sir," said Williams, coming up and painfully reloading his revolver with his wounded hand.

"A very close thing indeed," replied Cummins with a chuckle, as he reloaded his.

Pattison lay on the ground without moving, blood pouring from his head; one man was dead, lying half over the sand-bags with a bullet through his chest; one had a bayonet wound in his thigh, and was sitting up trying to stanch the flow of blood; another sat stupid and half stunned with a blow on the head from the butt-end of a rifle.

"Sing out for Dr. Richardson," said Cummins, bending over Pattison.

"Here I am, sir," the Doctor answered, coming up with an axe in one hand and an empty revolver in the other.

"I did not think it was the time to stand on professional etiquette, sir."

"My word!" Williams burst out, "I saw that axe flying round, and, man alive! you saved a beggar from running me through."

A cheer from Sergeant Haig's breast-work made them turn round, and they saw the head of the *Strong Arm's* party just appearing over the shoulder of the hill, beyond the gun.

If fifty men ever cheered loudly these did.

"What about Pattison?" Cummins asked, before he hurried across to greet them.

"Only stunned I think, sir; he's coming round already," answered Dr. Richardson.

* * * * *

At the head of the *Strong Arm's* party was Captain Hunter, looking like an enormous school-boy out for a holiday, his great red face beaming with sheer joy, and sniffing the air as stray bullets flew by.

He was followed on to the plateau by his men with the two Maxims and their tripod stands, box after box of ammunition, more breakers of water and more provision boxes, slung between them from poles across their shoulders, coolie fashion.

The Commander hurried up to him.

"Never expected to see you yourself, sir," he said, as Hunter grasped his hand.

"Well, fact of the matter is this. Helston sent me down in the picket-boat at the last moment to recall you, but I got there too late"—with a broad grin and

a twinkle in his eye—"to do that, and, well, when I saw my men going ashore by themselves, I simply couldn't stay behind, and here I am. Hope we are not too late for a scrap. We didn't start till nearly seven o'clock, and we've just taken two hours and a quarter to climb up that confounded hill. My fellows are pretty well fagged out."

"Only a quarter past nine!" Cummins exclaimed. "I thought it must be past mid-day." He rapidly explained the situation. "We've just repulsed a rush from the opposite side, and we have knocked over that man Hopkins and thirty or forty of their men as well, so they won't be coming on again just yet.

"Two of our people are killed, I am sorry to say, and five or six wounded badly. Pattison is badly damaged, and Williams has a bullet through his wrist. Down below us, under cover of those trees, there are about three hundred Chinese blue-jackets, and as many more on the crest behind those bushes. Those, though, won't be worrying us for some time.

"The *Sylvia* is keeping down the fire of two field-guns which bothered us a good deal at first from the opposite side of the harbour, and I am depending upon Parker to keep my rear open."

"You won't be able to do so much longer," Captain Hunter replied; "the barometer is going down rapidly, and a heavy sea was coming in even before I left, and it is blowing hard now from the south."

It indeed was, sweeping up from the sea in great gusts which one turned one's back to, and bringing heavy rain-squalls with it. Several of the half-cut-through trees, which had not already been felled, had been blown down, and the remainder swayed ominously.

"I'm afraid not, sir. Where will you have the Maxims?" asked Cummins.

"My dear chap, I'm only a volunteer. You're in command, and I'm only too jolly glad to do anything you tell me."

"That can't be done, sir. You are the senior officer up here, and must take command."

Captain Hunter's jolly face clouded over. "Well, look here, Cummins, 'pon my honour I'm confoundedly sorry I've come at all if it spoils your game. Believe me, old chap, I never thought of it; I didn't, really!"

"I'm only too glad to have you, sir," Cummins said, and what he said he meant—always. "Why, you are worth a dozen men yourself, sir!"

"D' you really mean that?" Hunter answered, his face flushing with pride and pleasure, like the great school-boy he was. "We caught sight of a lot of those skunks on our way up," he continued, "but they were much too wily to come within reach of us."

"That is serious news, sir. The recoil cylinders of the Krupp gun are empty, and I had to signal to Parker to send some drums of oil ashore. They are on their

way up now, with a dozen men."

"Phew!" whistled Hunter, "they'll run right into them."

Even as he spoke, the loud report of a solitary Martini was heard, halfway down towards the sea, quickly followed by more shots, and then a rattle of sharper reports—Mausers, evidently, by their short, sharp cracks.

"I must go back for them; you carry on here;" and Captain Hunter sang out for his marine officer, a dapper little subaltern, to follow him with thirty men, and, with a cheery shout of "Come along, lads," went striding down the hill he had just climbed.

Cummins now knew why bullets had almost ceased to whistle past either from Bush Hill or the trees below him. The little party painfully toiling up with its oil-drums had been sighted, and the pirate leaders, knowing probably for what purpose the oil was being brought, had sent most of their people to creep round under cover and intercept it.

* * * * *

Parker, from the unsteady platform of his destroyer's bridge, had heard the first few rifle shots from the party which he had just landed to rush those precious drums of oil to the top of the hill, and knew that they were being attacked. He could see them, too, lying in a small circle round their drums, and attempted, as best as he could, to shell the dense cover from which they were apparently being attacked.

The Commander now semaphored from the top of the hill an urgent message for him to do his utmost to protect them.

He could do nothing with his guns.

A heavy sea was driving in and pounding itself against the foot of the hill, smashing to match-wood the boats which had been left on the beach. The violent motion of "No. 3" herself made accurate shooting from any gun absolutely impossible, and though Pat Jones crawled out of his hammock down on the mess-deck to fire his beloved 12-pounder, even he, splendid old gunner that he was, could do no better.

The little shells were as dangerous to his own men as to the Chinese, and, not only had Parker to cease firing, but the necessity for immediately steaming out to sea became completely obvious. He had already hugged a lee shore too long, and must push away from these treacherous rocks.

His feelings can be imagined when he was compelled to signal, "Cannot maintain an accurate fire, and must haul out from the land".

"Hunter and Cummins will know I hung out to the last," was his only consolation as he turned "No. 3" into the fierce rain squalls which drove into his

face, and plunged her bows into the heavy seas.

Cummins smiled grimly as the signal was reported to him, and anxiously watched the destroyer fighting her way into safety.

With Parker unable to remain inshore, he knew that it was only a question of minutes before Bannerman would be compelled to follow his example, and expected momentarily to find himself once again under shell fire from these two field-guns.

Another danger was also imminent—a much more serious danger.

Down in the harbour one of the older cruisers, either the *Mao Yuen* or the *Yao Yuen*, was being warped across to a spot almost under the ledge which had concealed him the day before, with the very evident intention of shelling the top of the hill from there.

Her guns would not be able to touch the Krupp gun, but with shrapnel he knew that she could sweep the greater portion of the plateau, and knew, too, that unless that oil arrived and enabled him to use his Krupp gun, he could not possibly maintain his position. Once he could drop those 12-inch shells into the harbour, however inaccurately at first, he was confident of being able to destroy that cruiser—in time.

But without that oil and without the support of the ships, the very existence of the whole party was at stake; and the possibility of cutting through the mass of encircling Chinamen, fighting his way, encumbered with wounded, along the crest of the hill, and then endeavouring to maintain his position at some other point, even the possibility of rushing one of the forts at the entrance and standing at bay there, flashed through his brain.

He could do nothing more to assist Captain Hunter at present, so he employed his men in still further strengthening the sand-bag breast-works. The Maxims were placed in sand-bag redoubts, one at the angle between the Log Redoubt and the end of Saunderson's breast-works, and the other between these two breast-works. Both swept any approach up the harbour face of the hill by the zig-zag path, and the first also commanded the bare crest between it and Bush Hill.

Sand-bags, too, were hauled to the edge overlooking the sea, and little did the men think as they cheerfully piled them up that the Commander, studying his notebook and the sketches he had taken the day before, was debating the necessity of abandoning the hill, and the possibility of rushing one of the two forts.

No rifle fire was annoying them, no shell fire alarming them. Captain Hunter, whom they idolized, had gone to rescue the oil-drums; therefore the oil-drums would be up at the top directly, and the big gun would have the pirates at its mercy, so right cheerfully they worked, despite the soaking rain sweeping

the top of the hill.

Glover was standing near the Commander, blue with cold and soaked to the skin. Cummins suddenly noticed him and his condition. "Go and help with the sand-bags, boy; you can run this time," he chuckled, and turned to watch Captain Hunter's progress below him.

He and his little party of thirty marines had disappeared among the trees and bushes, crashing their way through them, but now they were hotly engaged, and their progress could be traced, as they fought their way down, by the line of smoke puffs which rose above the bushes.

The line steadily descended towards the little spot near the sea, from which the rapid firing of more Martinis comforted him with the certainty that the destroyer's men were still guarding the precious oil. The loud reports of their big-bore rifles, however, were almost drowned by the constant crackling of the small-bore Mausers.

Had he not been certain that, by a merciful dispensation, a Chinaman can seldom be made to take aim, he would have thought it impossible for any of the little band to survive.

Now the wind brought up the sound of British cheers—he could swear to Captain Hunter's above the rest. The line of smoke puffs swept downwards, and he knew that they had joined hands with the destroyer's men.

Then came the upward struggle, and slowly they fought their way, whilst the Chinese set up a shrill yell of triumph, and the Mauser fire crackled in one continuous roar.

Still the line of black powder smoke advanced, but more slowly. Then he saw, with anxious eyes, that it was stationary. The Chinese had got in above Hunter and cut him off. He watched a single tree; the little puffs of smoke came regularly behind it; the yells of triumph redoubled.

Captain Hunter and his men could advance no farther. Could he take the tremendous risk of reinforcing them and still further weakening the little garrison at the top of the hill?

His mind was made up in a moment, and he called Williams and Saunderson to him and showed them the position of affairs.

"Take forty of your men, Williams; leave me Sergeant Haig; creep down to the left till you get on a level with them, and rush their flank. There is no hurry, and don't waste cartridges."

"Thank you, sir, my men want something to warm them."

As they filed down the hill towards the left, the two field-guns again opened fire. Bannerman at last had been compelled to haul out in the face of the gale.

"Take cover, men," Cummins sang out to the few bluejackets and marines still left to him; "their bark is worse than their bite;" and he remained in the open

watching and waiting for Williams to come in touch with the enemy.

He and his party had already disappeared among the trees which had swallowed Captain Hunter and his men nearly an hour before. Ten minutes went by and nothing happened. Minutes seemed like hours, and to his tense nerves it seemed that the Chinese were closing in on Captain Hunter, and that the Martini rifle fire was slackening. Surging through his brain swept the burning thought that he had made not one, but two mistakes.

To find the gun unable properly to control the harbour was bad enough, but now his second mistake was ten times more serious. The Chinese could fight, and his whole plans had been based on the opposite belief.

For a moment his own inherent optimism and resourcefulness, bred in the bone through many generations of fighting men, deserted him. He saw the failure of his scheme, the ruin it would bring to the whole squadron, and the end of poor Helston's ambitions. Of his own fate he cared nothing at that moment, but cursed himself for leaving the sea to venture a soldier's job, and for sacrificing, to his own self-assurance, the men who had so willingly followed him.

At that moment his vivid brain even pictured the final back-to-back struggle and the sobbing panting of stricken men as one by one they fell.

Would he be the last? he wondered.

A shell burst on the ridge, and the jagged fragments screaming past him woke him from his nightmare to catch sight of Glover's scared face as he stood at his side.

Putting his hand on the midshipman's shoulder he said softly: "Glover, I am sorry; get under cover, boy."

But before Glover could move away a great burst of cheering came up from below.

Williams and Saunderson, with their forty men behind them, were charging into the flank of the unsuspecting Chinamen, and, hardly firing a shot, they were driving them like sheep from Captain Hunter's path.

Yells of pain and shrieks of agony told that they were relying on cold steel. The Martini fire broke out again with a roar, and now the line of smoke began to ascend once more.

With a gasp of relief and a funny feeling at the back of his throat, the Commander saw it coming towards him rapidly now, the whole eighty of them cheering madly.

They had got the Chinamen "on the run".

"Bring a Maxim over here, Glover! Quick, boy! we shall have them when they break into the open."

The cheering redoubled. Chinese suddenly appeared among the trees below them, doubling to left and right as Hunter burst through with a dozen or

more of his men. Then came the destroyer's men with their drums of oil, Collins the Sub at their head, a knot of men carrying some mess-mates, and, bringing up the rear, Williams, Saunderson, and the marines fighting slowly, running a few yards, then dropping behind a tree and shooting downhill.

Directly the oil-drums were safe and the wounded had burst through, Hunter swung his men round and went down again, his great, joyous, bellowing cheer heard above the noise of Mauser or Martini. The Chinese gave way and fell back down the hill. Some that tried to escape to the left had to pass Sergeant Haig's redoubt, and his men knocked them over like rabbits; others swept across the right towards Bush Hill, but then the Maxim spoke with its horrid "br-br-br", and brought them down in heaps.

In less than a minute not a living Chinaman was to be seen, but a desultory fire commencing again from "Bush Hill" showed that they were still under some control.

As Captain Hunter and his party, flushed with success and breathless with their exertions, swung into the plateau, a shrapnel burst above them, and the bullets, pouring down all round them, covered them with dust. A marine fell with a yell, his thigh smashed, but no one else was touched, and Hunter ran up to Cummins, who had now recovered his composure. He was simply mad with the physical joy of fighting, and this hailstone of shrapnel bullets had simply intoxicated him.

"My country! that was a pretty bit of fighting," he roared; "worth ten years of ordinary life. I've got your oil, and we've brought every man Jack back again. There's a man on the other side I'd like to shake hands with—after my own kidney, that chap—a huge fellow with a black beard; led 'em on time after time, but those skunks of Chinamen would not follow him."

"He led the first rush," Cummins answered, trying to calm him, "and led it well, too. Have you lost many men, sir?"

"What a brute I am!" he cried, the joy of battle quickly vanishing. "I don't know exactly, but we've brought them all back. Before we came ashore I told my men that if anyone fell he should not be left, and—and they are splendid fellows, Cummins."

The casualties were serious enough. Five had been killed—two of the destroyer's and three of the *Strong Arm's*—and eleven wounded—three of these belonging to Captain Williams's party, three to the destroyer, and the other five to Hunter's party.

"That oil is worth a good deal now," said Cummins sadly.

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Behind the gun-pit parapet Dr. Richardson busied himself with the wounded, a lieutenant of the *Strong Arm*, Gibbins by name, took charge of the gun in place of poor Pattison and commenced to fill the recoil cylinders, the less fatigued of the men carried on hauling sand-bags towards the edge overlooking the sea, whilst the remainder, thoroughly exhausted, lay down behind the breast-works.

Shells were still coming from those field-guns, but the *Strong Arm's*, reassured by the *Laird's*, who had already begun to despise them, soon learnt that they were harmless so long as they kept down behind their sand-bags.

Meanwhile preparations were being made to shell the hilltop from the guns of the cruiser which had been warped across the harbour. Her guns could not at first be elevated sufficiently to reach the top of the hill, but they were overcoming this difficulty by letting water into her on one side and giving her a list to starboard, and thus tilting her gun muzzles still farther upward.

Hunter and Cummins were anxiously watching this operation—necessarily a slow one—and it was not completed before Gibbins rushed across to them and reported the Krupp ready for action.

"We'll weigh in first, old chap!" Hunter exclaimed with glee.

A great shell, grooved and lead-coated to take the rifling, was hoisted out of the magazine, the derrick raised it to the breech, a dozen men shoved it home with a long rammer, a quarter charge of powder-bags followed it, the clumsy breech-block was slowly worked across, Gibbins sprang up to the sighting-platform and jammed in the friction-tube with its lanyard, and all was ready.

Cummins coolly examined everything till he was satisfied that nothing was wrong with gun or mounting, and then the ponderous mass of steel was laboriously trained towards the spot where lay the cruiser under the cliffs, at the opposite side of the harbour. From the sighting-platform not even her masts could be seen, and the direction had to be roughly found by means of rifle cleaning-rods stuck in a line on the edge of the intervening plateau.

Clumsy this method was, but the best available.

Cummins grasped the lanyard, the gun's crew were ordered out of the pit in case of accident, the marines, lying behind the breast-work at the edge of the plateau and in front of the gun, were cleared out of danger, and he gave it a sharp tug.

A huge cloud of smoke, a huge, bellowing roar, cubes of burning gunpowder leapt down the side of the hill, some or the sand-bags were blown over the crest, the muzzle of the gun cocked itself into the air as the gun recoiled along its slides and then gently slid forward again. Everyone rushed to the edge to see where the shell fell. Half a minute of breathless anxiety, heedless of the bullets that were flying past, and then, up on the cliffs, behind the cruiser, a balloon-shaped mass of white smoke burst out, masses of rock leapt into the air and fell

splashing into the sea, and the roaring of the explosion tossed from hill to hill, and, crashing from cliff to cliff with tremendous reverberations, came up to them like thunder.

"Their game is up," shouted Hunter. "Cheer, men, cheer!"

Cummins, a quaint little rain-soaked figure, standing on the parapet of sand-bags behind the gun, and with the lanyard still in his hand, simply chuckled: "You can load again, men, she is quite safe."

CHAPTER XXI
On One Gun Hill

The Hill on Fire—Gunner Bolton, R.M.A.—I Help Dr. Richardson—Doing Well—We Stir Up the Pirates—Reporting to the "Laird"—A Yarn with Collins—A Overwhelming Rush

Mr. Midshipman Glover relates his experiences

I have often wondered whether or no I was really frightened.

Certainly, whilst we were climbing up that hill through bushes and trees, in the most absolute darkness, I should have been in an utter funk if I had not been obliged to stick to the Commander and do my utmost not to lose touch with him.

As far as I can remember I thought of little else but that, and to wish that he would not go so fast. When at last we had found the pathway—just as it was getting light—I was too excited to be really frightened, and afterwards, when I had to follow the Commander about the level space on the top of "One Gun Hill", as we called it, I was kept so busy taking messages that I hardly thought of the bullets, or even the shells, and was much more afraid lest the Commander should think that I was funking.

At first it was simply horrid to have to walk across, for you could hear bullets going by and making a noise just like a crack of a thin whip, and sometimes would see one strike the ground or a sand-bag just in front of you, where you

would have to pass in a few seconds, and then—well, it was jolly hard work to prevent your legs from going as fast as they could go. I seemed to take up so much room, so much more than anything else near, that it seemed actually impossible for the bullets to miss my body. In fact, when they commenced shelling us, and Mr. Saunderson, who is really an immense man, turned round and told me chaffingly to stand in front of him, I thought that I actually should shield him if I did so. That feeling explains what I mean rather better than anything else I can say.

Later, however, I became so awfully tired and sleepy that things just happened, and I did what I had to do quite mechanically. When the Chinese made their first rush I was hardly even excited, and remember that I thought it the most natural thing in the world to see Hopkins fall down wounded. I was sorry for him, just as one is in a dream, and, in fact, I kept on thinking that presently I should wake up and find myself on board the *Laird*, with some silly idiot of a midshipman playing a trick with my hammock. It never even occurred to me till long afterwards that all that time the Commander had been standing in front of me to protect me.

I was very cold and very wet, and stood shivering and watching Captain Hunter trying to rescue the oil-drums, and afterwards found myself hauling sandbags and piling them round one of the Maxims, and getting warmer every minute.

Then I remembered that the Commander had told me to do this.

When a little time afterwards he put his hand on my shoulder, with a terribly sad expression on his face, and said in a strange voice, "Glover, I am sorry," I had not the least idea what he meant, and thought that it was because I was absolutely drenched to the skin.

Of course I know now what he meant, but at the time had not the faintest notion that we were in so much danger.

What did at last really wake me was the firing of that big Krupp gun and the noise of the shell bursting on the cliff on the opposite side of the harbour, just above the cruiser which was preparing to shell us, and not far from the ledge where the Commander, Jones, and I had been hidden.

Quite close to where it burst were several little groups of Koreans—white patches against the green background. They had been watching from daybreak the attempts to recapture One Gun Hill, but now vanished out of sight, and we never saw them again.

Our second shot, five minutes later, was still nearer the cruiser, but she made no attempt to move, and began firing single guns. They had been obliged to give her a tremendous list to starboard, in order to elevate their guns sufficiently, and as her gunners could not see our Krupp gun from the decks, they had men stationed high up on the cliffs, some distance away, who signalled with flags (I

could see them quite plainly) after each shot, whether it was right, left, short, or over.

Most of them went right over (they were firing shrapnel), some burst very short, only the fragments of the shell coming crashing on the ground round the gun, whilst the bullets plunged into the bushes below us, beating them down.

Many actually struck the slope of the hill before bursting, and whether it was these, or whether it was the burning cubes of gunpowder which went flying down the hill each time we fired that gun, I do not know, but presently the bushes and undergrowth began to smoulder, and the smoke, all the denser because they were damp, was driven down towards the town by the wind.

This in time increased the clear space below the breastworks, but the smoke made our shooting all the less accurate, did not hide us at all, either from the two field-guns or the cruiser, and unfortunately concealed the movements of the Chinese behind it.

I suppose that Captain Hunter or the Commander never thought of that at the time, otherwise they might have stamped the fire out when it first began to burn.

"Go and get something to eat," the Commander had told me; "I sha'n't want you for half an hour." So I had gone across to Sergeant Haig's breast-work, and was lying down close to a fire his men had made, and huddled up against the sand-bags to find some shelter from the wind and rain.

I was feeling precious hungry again, so, unfastening my haversack, I broke off a big hunk of that home-made cake. It was jolly good, and I had a good pull at my water-bottle; old Mellins had filled it with weak tea. It was jolly hard work pulling out the stopper, for my fingers were so numb with the cold.

I broke off another piece of cake and gave it to the marine lying next to me. It was Gunner Bolton, with his rifle pointing through a loophole and his finger on the trigger. He turned round into an easier position, and after a few bites said: "D'ye think, sir, as 'ow I shall get into trouble about that 'ere gun?

"You see, sir, it was just like this. I'd been bringing up the rear and got rather be'ind'and, what with one thing an' another, and in them thick bushes, it being so dark an' all, I jest lost mysel' and couldn't no'ow find the rest of 'em. So I thinks to mysel', 'Jest obey orders', and when you're lost, as the Commander said, 'Jest climb and climb'.

"Well, that was what I did, sir," he continued, with a half-anxious, half-humorous expression, "and I climbed and I climbed till, blow me! I simply fell over them sandbags, and not a savidge anywhere could I see. So I jest lights my pipe and stops there, knowing the Commander would be along in no time. But you see, sir, I've raythe done 'im out of 'is show, and my mates are raythe furious about it too.

"I wish I'd 'ung on to the party, an' then there wouldn't 'ave been none of this 'ere trouble."

He munched his cake solemnly and then added slyly: "That 'sentry-go' business, sir, that's what riled 'em. That was just for effect, I don't mind telling you, sir."

"That's all right, Bolton," I told him. "You won't hear any more about it from the Commander, I'm sure of that."

"Well, I 'opes you're right, sir; an' if you'll look arter this 'ere rifle of mine I'll jest see if there ain't a little o' that 'ot cocoa left."

He crawled away, scraped a little out of the big mess-tins, warmed it over the fire in his own tin cup, and brought it back to me.

It was jolly refreshing, I can tell you, and warm and oily.

He took his rifle from me and watched me drink.

"You'll put in a good word for me, sir, when we gets aboard the *Laird*; now, won't you, sir?"

I promised that I would do so, but could not help smiling.

"You see that 'ere Chinaman?" he said presently, jerking his thumb towards a motionless blue heap which lay about a hundred yards away along the crest—one of those who had bolted away from Captain Hunter. "I shot 'im, sir; knocked 'im all of a 'eap. Caught 'im in the upper works I did, sir, an' 'e jest toppled over an' over an' never moved a 'air, though there I was all waiting, with another cartridge jammed in, in case 'e did.

"Never moved a 'air," he kept repeating softly to himself, evidently vastly contented with his marksmanship, "an' with that 'ere rifle too," and he kept patting its breech.

"Eh! look at that, sir!" he said, pointing down to the harbour, just after the Krupp gun had fired again, and jumped to his feet, waving his rifle over his head and cheering loudly, as did the others, for the shell had landed, fair and square, in the cruiser's stern, and seemed to have practically wrecked her.

Every man on top of the hill roared himself hoarse.

However, they sank down behind the sand-bags again, for they had drawn a rapid fire from "Bush Hill" and the field-guns.

I watched the great clouds of black smoke rolling up from the cruiser.

"If that ain't pluck, call me a coal-shovelling stoker!" cried Bolton, as the big fo'c'stle gun fired again before our Krupp had time to reload, and the shell burst just below the crest.

We ducked our heads behind the sand-bags, and the fragments tore up the ground.

"There's a Englishman a-running that show, sir; none o' your spotted Dagos, I'll be bound."

He was just a little too talkative for me, so I went away, Sergeant Haig smiling grimly as I left. "Haven't had much to do this side yet, sir."

I ran across to the rear of the big gun just as it fired again.

That shot was short, and whilst they were reloading her the cruiser fired two more rounds; but our next shell struck her farther forward, bringing down her funnel and foremast and crumpling her up like match-wood.

We could see them taking to their boats and pulling ashore, and the men yelled again with delight, for although her shells had done very little mischief, and had only wounded one man—a marine behind the "Log Redoubt"—the noise of their bursting shells was intensely unpleasant and disconcerting.

The big Krupp was now turned on the cruisers lying to the right of the town, but these were so much closer in and right down under the land that it was still more difficult to drop shell anywhere near them.

Of course we could not see anything of them from the gun itself, and had to chance more or less the direction and also the powder charge, trying first three bags of powder, which sent the shell almost over the back of the forts at the entrance, and then two bags, which did not send it far enough, but made it go ricocheting down the side of the hill before it burst near the bottom. We tried elevating the sights a little, and gradually began to drop our shells with some amount of precision.

The *Hong Lu* was, of course, the ship we were most anxious to hit, because she was the only ship which was really good for any serious fighting.

I was watching the men working like demons inside the gun-pit, hauling the big shell and the bags of powder from the magazines, and training her with the clumsy tackles, when presently Dr. Richardson called me.

He had found a little hollow in the side of the hill overlooking the sea, and there he had brought all the wounded men and was busy among them still, with monkey-jacket off and sleeves rolled up.

He was bandaging a marine who had just been struck by a shrapnel bullet.

It had struck him a slanting blow on the back of his head, and he sat there gazing stupidly in front of him, supporting himself mechanically with his hands as he swayed unsteadily.

When he had finished the bandage, Dr. Richardson lowered him on his back in the grass, and injected something into his arm with a syringe which the sick-berth steward handed him.

He shoved the needle right through the skin, and I thought that the man would surely yell, but he only opened his eyes for a second and then closed them again.

"Now, Glover, if you have nothing to do, try and get some cocoa for these fellows."

I was only too jolly glad to do anything for them—there were nearly twenty of them huddled in a sheltered corner, most of them apparently asleep, and one or two groaning terribly.

I stepped across to Sergeant Haig, and the stern old man got hold of some cocoa and some water out of a breaker, and I hunted up some fairly dry wood for the fire, and in time we got it hot. I had to carry it back myself, as he would not leave his men. When I had done this, and everyone who was not unconscious had had some of the cocoa, Dr. Richardson sent me to get blankets and any oil-skins I could collect. The blankets were not difficult to find, for they were all under that big tarpaulin, but very few men had their oil-skins, and those that had them were not any too willing to part with them.

But I managed to bring back half a dozen, and we covered up all the wounded we could.

Mr. Pattison looked simply awful. He had lost a tremendous lot of blood, and his head was covered with bandages; but his face was a horrid purple colour, and he was puffing out his cheeks and blowing through his lips every time he breathed.

"Hasn't come round yet," Dr. Richardson told me.

"Will he die?" I asked anxiously, for everybody had been awfully sorry for him ever since he had lost destroyer "No. 1", and I, of course, knew too that he was frightfully gone on Milly, and wanted to see him get back his luck.

"Can't tell, Glover; hope not;" and Dr. Richardson sat down wearily and tried to light his pipe.

"Haven't we done splendidly so far, sir," I said, opening my jacket to shield him from the wind as he struck his damp matches.

"Ask Pattison," he answered, shrugging his shoulders.

Captain Hunter came down just then to see how the wounded were getting on, so I slipped away, and, to tell the truth, was not at all sorry.

And, also, being near so many men who had been hit made me feel rather frightened.

* * * * *

I had better explain to you now exactly how we were situated at this time. All told, one hundred and fourteen men and ten officers had been landed. Of these seven had been killed and eighteen wounded, including Mr. Pattison, but not including Captain Williams (nor indeed Captain Hunter and Mr. Saunderson, who both had skin wounds, and several of the men as well).

This left us thirty seamen and fifty-four marines, one of the wounded blue-jackets and three of the wounded marines being still able to handle their rifles

whilst lying on the ground behind the sand-bags.

The marines were manning the breast-works and the blue-jackets the Krupp gun and the two Maxims, Mr. Gibbins being in command of the big gun, and Collins the Sub in command of the Maxims.

The sand-bag breast-works we had made in the morning were now vastly improved, and were much more substantial, because the men, when not firing, had dug away the earth behind them and strengthened them in front with the earth thrown out. Each man, in fact, had vied with his neighbour in digging himself farther into the ground, so that actually there was now a trench behind the breast-works.

The rain, too, had soaked into the bags and made them more heavy and bullet-proof.

Captain Williams's Log Redoubt ran right across the side facing Bush Hill, and was so high that it kept off a great many of the bullets from there, and made it almost safe to walk about the top of the hill, if you only stooped down.

The Maxim redoubt, too, at the harbour end of this breast-work, was quite strong and nearly four feet high, and Mr. Collins and his men added to it whenever firing was slack.

The town itself was hidden from us by the line of smoke from the smouldering bushes about fifty yards down the slope of the hill. Hardly a shot came from that direction. None either came towards Sergeant Haig's redoubt or from the sea at our rear.

It was nearly mid-day, and the field-guns were still shelling us, but I think that the noise of their shells was the worst part of them so long as we kept under cover. Although several had burst right in the centre of the plateau during the last hour, nobody had been touched during that time. These were all common shell,[#] for they appeared to have run short of shrapnel, or found that they could not rely on the fuses bursting properly.

[#] Thin-walled shell with a large bursting charge. Shrapnel shell have a small bursting charge and scatter round bullets when they burst.

The men had become so used to these shells, that if one burst they hardly turned to look at it. Sometimes you would see a man screw himself down more firmly into the ground; but most of them took no notice at all, and joked amongst themselves or jeered at the unfortunate signalman, or one of the Maxims' crews, who happened to be in the open and had to throw himself on the ground to escape the flying splinters.

The Commander did once try to reach those guns with a Maxim, but the range must have been well over two thousand yards. We could not see where the bullets were going, and certainly they had no effect on the people working them.

Once or twice, though, when the firing from the bushes became brisk, we soon made them ease down by letting off fifty or sixty rounds into Bush Hill, and Collins kept both the crews very much on the alert, with belts of cartridges ready to pump out bullets in case the enemy tried to make another rush.

We had a fair amount of ammunition left, a fair amount of water, and plenty of provisions, and so, all things considered, we were pretty comfortable.

The rain too had ceased, the wind also began to lose force, and every now and again the sun came out, though not for long enough to dry our dripping clothes.

Captain Hunter and the Commander had been all this time walking up and down the plateau as if it were the *Laird's* quarter-deck, or standing on the edge and watching to see where our big shells were falling. They and Mr. Gibbins, who had to climb up to the sighting-platform each time the gun fired, were the only people much exposed to danger. The Commander did not take shelter, I am sure, because the Captain did not, and to give the men confidence; Captain Hunter because he thoroughly enjoyed the excitement.

Down below us we could see little "No. 3" a mile out to sea, the *Sylvia* not far from her. Both were having a very bad time of it, half smothered in spray and both rolling heavily—the *Sylvia* because she had very little of her cargo of coal left and was very high in the water, and "No. 3" because she always did so.

Right away across the island, beyond the entrance, the *Laird* and the *Strong Arm* were steaming backwards and forwards, and they too were making pretty heavy weather of it. I wondered whether they could see us at all, and thought how Mellins and Toddles must wish that they were up here with me.

"No. 2", half buried in the heavy seas off the corner of the island near the forts, was doing her best to keep up communication between the big ships and the *Sylvia* and "No. 3".

Mr. Lang always seemed to have the rotten jobs to do; but I have heard that this was because he was something like Mr. Pattison, and never thought of anything except getting close to the enemy, and Captain Helston had never forgotten the loss of "No. 1".

The big Krupp was now beginning to drop her shells quite close to where the cruisers, torpedo-boats, and the remaining (Patagonian) destroyers were lying. One had fallen almost aboard the *Hong Lu*, but we could not rely upon any shot with the least degree of accuracy. However, all of them had started to get up steam, clouds of black smoke coming up through their funnels, and the Commander thought immediately that they might try and escape, so Captain Hunter

sent me with Gordon the signalman to try and report this to Captain Helston.

The signalman had previously found a little open spot on the hill with a good background, against which his flags could be seen from the sea, and he began waving them vigorously from side to side, whilst I watched through my glasses to tell him directly the signalman on board the *Sylvia* or "No. 3" spotted him. "No. 3" it was who first ran up the answering pendant.

"Them *Sylvia's* don't think of nothing but sleepin' an' eatin'," growled the signalman, and commenced slowly semaphoring "Captain Hunter to flag-ship.—Am dropping shells into harbour, and ships are rapidly getting up steam. All quiet up here."

I saw that "No. 3" had taken in the message, and she hauled down the answering pendant and began to steam towards "No. 2" till it was possible to pass it on to her.

Presently "No. 2" had also received it, and hoisted flags to call the *Laird's* attention. Her signalmen must have been very much on the alert, for almost immediately her answering flag went crawling up—a tiny little patch in her rigging—to her mast-head, and I could see "No. 2's" signalman perched on the unsteady bridge, half smothered with spray and semaphoring with his flags.

Down came the flag aboard the *Laird*, and I could imagine the signal midshipman already tearing down the bridge ladder to take the message to Captain Helston.

"That'll cheer 'em up, sir, out there in the wet," said the signalman, as I climbed up again to report to Captain Hunter that I had managed to pass it through to the flag-ship.

I was sent down to wait for any reply, and found the signalman watching the *Laird* through his telescope. "She's just going to make a signal from her mast-head semaphore, sir," he said. So I stood by to write it down as he spelt out the letters.

[The mast-head semaphore consists of two large black-and-white arms, which can be worked from the bridge below.]

"I.F—E.N.E.M.Y—L.E.A.V.E—H.A.R.B.O.U.R," I wrote down as he sung out the letters, and the message continued, "Endeavour to support me with your gun. 'No. 3' and 'No. 2' are to rejoin the squadron, and *Sylvia* to act independently."

I was just rushing up hill with this when the signalman sung out, "They've started again, sir," and spelt out, "Officers and men, *Laird* and *Strong Arm*, congratulate you all on success. Repeat signal to 'No. 3' and *Sylvia*."

I left him obeying the last order, and took the signal to Captain Hunter.

He and the Commander smiled grimly.

"Those torpedo-boats and destroyers will never dare to go out in this weather," I heard the Commander say. "The *Hong Lu* might possibly run away,

though she certainly couldn't fight in this weather, and those other two old tubs could not even run away." He was right, too, for though they all did weigh anchor directly afterwards, they never attempted to leave the harbour; but, whilst the big ships began slowly steaming round it, merely keeping steerage-way on, the destroyers and torpedo-boats moved in so close to the land that it was impossible for the big Krupp to touch them.

I felt quite sad to signal, "Cruisers not attempting to leave harbour—steaming slowly to avoid shell", and knew how dreadfully disappointed they all would be.

"If only this gale would blow itself out, we might tempt them out, even now," I heard the Commander say.

For the next half-hour we tried our utmost to hit the *Hong Lu*, but as she was constantly on the move, and the clumsy gun could not even train steadily, but went groaning round its roughly-made turn-table in a succession of jerks, it was evidently impossible to do so.

Then we tried another scheme to lay the gun for a certain spot on the cliff opposite us, with a very small charge of powder behind the shell. A man at the edge signalled whenever the *Hong Lu* in her circling came towards it. Mr. Gibbins stood by with the firing lanyard and fired directly he could see the top of her fore-mast in line with that spot on the cliff—the top of her fore-mast being the only thing he could see from the sighting-platform, and then only when she happened to be right on the far side of the harbour.

Well, we never did hit her, nor any of the others either. They never gave us a chance; tumbled to our plan directly and stopped their engines. Then, when the blue-jackets had struggled with the gun and trained her in a different direction, the *Hong Lu* would be out of it again. They evidently had people signalling the movements of the gun from the cliff above them.

If we could only have made certain of our powder charge it would have been more easy; but even with, say, only one bag and a half of powder, the shells would never drop in the same place twice running, though, whether it was due to the powder being old and bad, or the gun too worn-out, I do not know.

It was frightfully disappointing, and even the Commander showed signs of irritation. Mr. Gibbins and his sweating gun's crew were simply furious.

The poor old gun was by this time simply white with bullet splashes, and looked quite helpless as it wobbled from side to side and puffed out its erratic shells.

The marines, too, had constantly to be shifting away from Mr. Saunderson's breast-works so that it could fire over them, and this annoyed them.

* * * * *

Now that the rain had ceased, the bushes began to burn quite furiously, fanned by the wind, and the cloud of smoke stretched right across our front, rolling down towards the town. The fire had left a clear space of blackened twigs and half-burnt grass for nearly sixty yards in front of Mr. Saunderson's breast-works, and it was lucky enough for us that it had done so.

There had been a complete lull of firing, and I had gone across to yarn with Mr. Collins, to whom I had not yet spoken.

He was in the Maxim redoubt at the corner, strengthening it with sods of turf, and he winked at me as I came near him. "Having a good time, Glover?"

"Ra-ther," I said. "Wouldn't Mr. Parker like to be here too?"

"He's a splendid chap," said Mr. Collins. "Never thinks of himself, and sent me up here without my asking. Do you know, he had every mortal thing ready—except the oil-drums, of course. The men even had their leather gear on, and water-bottles filled, before he got the Commander's signal. He thought he might want reinforcements."

"I rather expected to see Jones come ashore," I said.

"Poor old Jones is on his beam-ends, groaning in his hammock, pretty bad with rheumatism or something like it. That day on the ledge in the rain was too much for him. You're a pretty lucky chap to get ashore—the only midshipman of the whole crowd," he continued. "How did you manage it?"

"Well," I said, rather sadly, for I had at one time been conceited enough to imagine that I'd been chosen for ability, "the Commander knows a cousin of mine, and she asked him to look after me."

Mr. Collins smiled somewhat sarcastically. "If I hadn't had an aunt who knew an admiral, who'd known Helston years ago, I shouldn't have been here either."

"He seems rather down on me now, though," I said. "Whenever I go near him he sends me away."

"Can't you guess why, you fool?" Mr. Collins asked, hammering down a big load of earth his men had brought him.

"No; I thought I'd done something wrong."

"Silly young ass! Why, he and the Captain are simply being potted at from those bushes beyond us, and he doesn't want you to be bowled over. He won't take cover either; he can't, I suppose, while the Captain struts about enjoying himself. It may be jolly plucky, and Hunter is as grand a man as ever lived, and I'd follow him, and we'd all follow him anywhere, but he's simply playing the fool."

"Oh!" was the only thing I could say.

We were interrupted by one of the Maxim gun's crew pointing down the slope of the hill just beyond the line of smoking bushes.

"Beg pardon, sir, but I think there's a heap of natives down among them there bushes."

"Go back and tell the Captain, Glover," Mr. Collins told me, stepping inside the redoubt and calling his men back to the Maxim.

"Go quietly."

I had hardly left him before the most frightful yells came from below and from Bush Hill; out from the cloud of smoke burst hundreds and hundreds of screaming Chinamen, and from Bush Hill a most awful fire was opened. I could hear the rattling of a Maxim, and a fearful hail-storm of bullets swept across the level top of the hill.

I had never heard anything like this before, and bent down and ran.

CHAPTER XXII
The Final Attack on the Hill

We Defend the Gun—Hunter to the Rescue—Hopkins Again—A Confession—Hopkins's Will—Hopkins Makes a Request—Back to the "Laird"—Helston Acts—I am Sent Below

Mr. Midshipman Glover's Narrative continued

As I ran I heard both our Maxims pumping out lead with their horrid noises, and Mr. Saunderson's voice steadying his marines as they fired point-blank down the hill. Sergeant Haig's men slewed round to their left and fired sideways into the howling mob, and Captain Williams behind me was trying to stop the Chinamen's Maxim. The noise was awful—the noise of Martinis, Mausers, Maxims, and the screaming Chinese.

"Tell Mr. Gibbins to keep his men inside the gun-pit till they are wanted," roared Captain Hunter, as he looked at his revolver to see that it was loaded, and "Stay there till he leaves it," added the Commander quite fiercely.

Hardly had I given the message to Mr. Gibbins, whose men had already seized their rifles, before the marines began rising on their knees, some of them

fixing their bayonets. I knew what that meant, and must confess that I was horribly frightened, and felt jolly thankful to get to the lee side of that big gun and behind the parapet. With my head over the sand-bags, I could see all that was going on.

Mr. Saunderson fell forward, but scrambled to his knees again, looking very white in the face. A marine near the Commander sprang right in the air with an unearthly yell and collapsed in a heap. A second later hundreds of pale, tawny faces, with little pig eyes, showed up over the crest, and one or two of the marines came crawling back to the gun-pit for shelter. I saw Captain Hunter lift the second off the ground and almost throw him back to his place.

They were all on their feet now, firing without putting rifle to shoulder. Chinese went down like nine-pins, but hundreds took their places; a crowd of them were right up to the breast-work, just to the right of the centre Maxim, hitting out with rifles, prodding with bayonets, and slashing with old naval cutlasses. The marines clubbed their rifles, fighting like tigers, man after man dropped down, and a howling mass broke through, pushing Saunderson's marines on one side by sheer weight of numbers, and came streaming across towards the gun.

I saw the dapper little Subaltern from the *Strong Arm* rushing across with his men from the breast-work overlooking the sea, but they were thrown back like corks in front of a wave, and now the yelling mob was right up to the sand-bag parapet. I had drawn my revolver unconsciously as they came rushing across, and I seemed to become quite cool.

"Now's your time, boys," shouted Mr. Gibbins to the twenty blue-jackets he had inside the gun-pit. "Fire downwards or you'll hit our own men." He leaped on top of the parapet, and, as the first Chinaman tried to scramble over, struck him a blow on the head which knocked him headlong, and then began coolly and deliberately firing his revolver into the seething mass below him.

The whole top of the hill seemed covered with Chinamen, a seething, struggling, yelling mass, with a fringe of marines at the edge, the butt-ends of their rifles, swinging round and round, coming down with sickening thuds on those shaven heads.

Here and there among them, two or three marines, back to back, were clearing a circle round them, and across to the left I could see Captain Hunter cleaving them in front of him.

They were all round us now, clambering over the parapet or pulling down the sand-bags, and though they fell, shot at the muzzles of the blue-jackets' rifles or bayoneted through the body, more filled their places, and tore the sand-bags down like wild cats.

One had half wriggled himself over in front of me—my pistol went off, and

he sank down out of sight. Another climbed over him, and I found myself on top of the parapet, though I cannot remember getting there. I fired again, and he too fell, clinging to my legs. I staggered forward, and should have been dragged down among them, but a blue-jacket on my left ran him through with his bayonet, and with a gurgle he let go my legs and slid down.

"Keep farther back, sir," the blue-jacket muttered hoarsely, and jumped across to drive back three more who were nearly over. With a terrible kick of his iron-shod boot he caught one full in the face, but another gripped his leg, the third his rifle, and, before anyone could move, had hauled him headlong to the ground. As he disappeared among them they closed round him with a yell.

I felt a burning red feeling in my head and eyes, and, like a fool, jumped after him, fired my last four cartridges right into them, and began hitting out with my fist and the empty revolver.

Somebody caught me by the wrist, but I wrenched myself free; somehow or other the pressure in front of me became less. I found myself standing over the blue-jacket, with my back to the parapet, with only three or four Chinese in front of me, prodding at me with boarding-pikes and old cutlasses; but, strangely enough, it struck me even then that they were not trying to kill me. I discovered that I had an axe in my hand—how it got there I don't know—and was waving it round and round. The Maxims—our Maxims, by the noise they made—started again, and men were cheering all round me. Chinese came sweeping back past the sides of the gun-pit and brushing against me, and those in front seemed to melt away. It was just like a wave that had swept up a sea-shore, surged against a rock, flung itself all round it, and then, with its force spent, slid back to the sea.

Suddenly I was seized by the collar from behind and swung off the ground. I struggled, I bit, I hit out with what strength I had, but the axe was torn from my hand, my feet were swept from beneath me, and before I could even yell for help I was rushed across the plateau, over the breast-works, and down the side of the hill in the midst of the Chinese.

Just as we got below the edge, one of the men who had hold of me fell with a shriek.

I kicked myself free (he was dead), but two more pounced on me, threw me to the ground, lifted me up, struggling like a cat, and bore me down again.

I was half choked with the smoke of the burning bushes as they rushed through them, and a hundred yards below they stopped, threw me face downwards on the grass, forced my hands together behind my back, tied them there, and then two of the hulking cowards sat on me.

I didn't think—I didn't feel any pain; my brain seemed absolutely frozen, for, just as that brute had fallen and I had kicked myself free, I saw something which I shall never forget for the rest of my life.

Captain Hunter had seen me and, head and shoulders above the retreating Chinamen, had plunged down through them, roaring to his men to follow.

From the bushes below the great black-bearded man suddenly rose up. With curses and blows he rallied his men, and they turned and faced upwards. Down came Captain Hunter through a mob of them, cutting his way to me. He had a long-handled axe in his hand. Circling it round and round his head, striking to left and right, he was carving a way through them, and they gave way and fled helter-skelter, to leave him confronted by the huge European. I saw Captain Hunter's face light up with a fierce joy, and he raised his axe for a mighty stroke; but the European fired his revolver point-blank, the axe dropped from his hand, his arms sank to his side, he stared stupidly in front of him, the revolver cracked again, and, with a sob, I saw Captain Hunter disappear beneath a howling mass of Chinamen, who turned again with a yell of triumph. But by this time his marines had poured over the breast-work and flung themselves in front of his body, and that was the last I saw of that awful hilltop—the little knot of marines fighting slowly backwards towards their breast-work, and carrying Captain Hunter with them. I cared for nothing then. I did not even mind those brutes sitting on me.

Chinese came flying past, some shrieking with fright, others screaming with pain. One or two, when they saw me, tried to spring at me; but the two men drove them off, then lifted me up like a doll and carried me farther away, covering me with a Chinaman's tunic to prevent me from being recognized. They stripped it from a native lying wounded and dying in the bushes.

The noise of firing recommenced above me, and some bullets came crackling through the bushes (our bullets), and I almost wished that one would kill me.

Chinese yells burst out again in the direction of the Bush Hill. They were answered by defiant cheers, one of our Maxims began to rattle, then a burst of Mauser firing drowned every other sound, the noise of fighting dwindled away, a solitary shout, a piercing scream, the Maxim ceased, and all was still once more. I could not tell whether that attack had been repulsed or whether it had swept across the hill, and felt that I only wanted to die.

My captors—three great lusty sailors—hurried me downhill, and presently they came to the cultivated plots above the town, and across these they went at a run, avoiding parties of coolies hurrying up the hill and armed with strange, old-fashioned weapons.

I saw that they were making for a small, white-painted bungalow under some trees, and presently they reached it and flung me down in an out-house among a lot of firewood and coal, tied my legs together and slammed the door, bolted it from the outside, and left me in darkness.

How long I remained there I do not know, but now I felt a stabbing pain in

my chest whenever I tried to wriggle into a less painful position, and another in my leg close to where I had been wounded before.

I began to wonder what they were going to do with me, and whether I should be tortured—for we had all dreaded falling alive into their hands—but I don't think that I really cared what happened.

The door flew open, two of the sailors came in, caught me up, and carried me out across a garden and through a verandah with long cane chairs under it. Here a native servant led them inside the bungalow, a bamboo curtain was pushed aside, and they sat me down on a mat on the floor.

Lying on a little trestle-bed in one corner was a man groaning in his sleep. The native servant bent over the bed, touched him on the shoulder, and he woke with a start and raised his head.

It was Hopkins, his eyes glittering strangely, and his face all drawn with pain.

"Thank God! you are safe, Glover," he cried, and made them unfasten my legs and arms. When I was free once more he ordered the men out of the room, but they refused to go, talking excitedly.

"Guess they want their re-ward," he drawled, and asked me to open a heavy cash-box at his side. He fumbled at his neck and found the key.

"Tally up a couple of hundred dollars' worth of bills," he asked me, "and sling them at those scoundrels."

It was a funny thing for me to be counting out the sum to be paid for my own capture and handing it over to those brutes, but I did it automatically. I really did not feel, or hear, or see anything quite as if I were awake; and when I read over what I have written, it seems so jerky and disconnected, that I have often tried to make it read more smoothly, but then I don't think it would give you quite the impression it still gives me. Incidents just seemed to happen; they did not seem to have any connection, but went on, one after another, till I woke up standing over Hopkins's cash-box and paying those ugly brutes.

I ought to have hated and loathed Hopkins, but somehow or other I didn't—none of us did, I fancy—and remembering, as if it were in a dream I had just wakened from, the gallant way he had led that charge, I felt awfully sorry for him, and forgot that, but for him and his partners, Captain Hunter would not be lying dead on that hill above me, nor many others—how many, I dare not think.

"Captain Hunter is killed. That brute with the black beard shot him," I blurted out; and it may seem funny to you, but I knew that he would be just as sorry as I was. His face twitched. "That is Schmidt," he said.

"He died trying to rescue me," I said, and something seemed to stick in my throat. I could not keep it back, and threw myself on the floor and sobbed and sobbed till tears came.

Even now I don't feel in the least ashamed of myself, and I know that I was absolutely too played out to mind then.

"I'm sorry, Glover, I'm mighty sorry, but it would have been up against you if he had hauled you back."

He said it so seriously, that a faint idea of what he meant flashed through my mind, and I remembered the second attack which I had listened to whilst I was being carried down the hill, and the endless stream of coolies pouring up the hill.

"Why?" I gasped.

"Come here," he said, stretching out his hand and drawing me gently to him. "Guess there ain't no blood on it 'cept my own," he added bitterly, as I half drew back. "You and your chum, young Foote, were the last to shake that hand, youngster, and you wouldn't have seen me again an' been still jumping around but for that and one thing besides." I remembered then that Toddles and I had shaken hands with him when he had been exchanged for Ping Sang.

"I reckon that if somebody hadn't just sloshed around and coralled a few of these heathen, and sent 'em up to bring you down at a hundred-dollar bill a head, you'd be getting about stiff by now. If that whole outfit up top there ain't wiped out by sundown, we've got a couple o' thousand who'll eat what's left after dark."

He was so earnest, and so evidently believed what he said, that his words made me feel cold with horror.

He saw my dismay and said: "I reckon, though, that this combine is just about busted. We shall just have to quit.

"Those rotten ships ain't no more use for fighting than—than—than I am," he finished, and caught his breath as some pain seemed to grip him. He went on in a minute.

"See here, youngster, I'm shot clean through the stomach. I reckon I might pull through if it had been a slate-pencil of a Mauser bullet, but it was a Martini bullet, and I've got just two more rounds of the sun and then I pass in my checks. I had seen you on top of that hill sticking to little Cummins like a 'possum, and when I got downed I guessed that I'd fish you out to do something particular for me."

"The Commander wouldn't let me stick to him if he could help it," I said. "He was afraid of my being shot, for he knew that he was being fired at."

Hopkins smiled. "Guess he didn't calculate that I stopped 'em potting at him when you were in his vicinity. I'll show you why."

He put his arm under his pillow and drew out a photograph, looking at it with strange eyes, and handed it to me. "Guess that's the reason."

It was a photograph of Milly, and just like the one Mr. Pattison had.

"How did you know Milly?" I cried, tremendously surprised.

"Helston introduced me one day in London. I met her several times, put the old man" (the Admiral) "on to a good thing in oil shares, got an invite to his place at Fareham for a couple of days, and—and—and—well, Glover, your cousin simply knocked me over, and" (the colour rising under his tanned face) "I asked her to be my wife."

"You did?" I asked, simply astounded. (Fancy old Milly marrying a pirate!)

"Yes, I reckon I did," he answered quietly, his face twitching again; "and I reckon I meant it, and meant it for all time."

"Did she——?" I began.

"She did not say 'No'," he replied, speaking reverently. "She said that she would give me my answer when I came back."

"But how could you——?" I began, and could have bitten my tongue off.

He knew well enough what I meant, and his face paled and became fearfully hard and rigid.

"If she had promised to be my wife, Glover, I would have thrown up this cursed job, though I reckon they might have hunted me down in time and got a knife into me later. As it was, I had to go through with the show. I had sworn to back up my pals, but calculated my job might about end when I'd delayed Helston and brought out those beastly destroyers.

"Youngster, we three—Hamilton, Schmidt, and myself—have looked death face to face together a hundred times, and, wife or no wife, a white man could not throw up the cards and back out of the game when his chums were cornered.

"I could have quitted any night this last fortnight, skedaddled out in a junk, but, well, I didn't, and here I am now, with a hole in my stomach, waiting to be planted."

I had dropped his hand, but took hold of it again.

"What do you want me to do?" I asked.

He pulled a packet from under his pillow, wrapped round in Korean oiled cloth. "That's my will, Glover. I want to sign it. You'll find a pen and ink on that table over there. Get it."

I brought pen and ink and unwrapped the package. I found a few legal-looking papers, and a sheet of the *Laird's* mess note-paper dropped out, with "H.I.M.S. *Laird*" printed on it. As I picked up this I saw written on it, "My Last Will and Testament".

"We shall want another witness," he said, "to do those lawyers out of a haul;" and he beat on the wall with a split bamboo.

His butler or head boy came hurriedly in with a scared face. Hopkins could not sit up in bed, so I held the paper against a book whilst he signed his name, "Reginald S. Hopkins, late U.S.N.", and then I added my own name and the head boy his, first in Chinese characters and then in a rough school-boy hand in En-

glish, "Hi Ling".

"Promise me, Glover, to hand that to the Admiral."

"To the Admiral?" I said. "To Milly's father?"

"Yes, youngster; I've left her all I possess, and it's a tidy big lump," he added.

"But!" I gasped. Milly could not take his money—a pirate's money, I thought.

He guessed my thoughts and winced, but added with a grim smile:

"Every cent is as clean as it ever is on the New York Exchange. My guv'nor made it in oil, and that's what's left of it. The Admiral won't smell nothing worse than oil, I reckon, in those greenbacks, for I've never had fingers on them."

"How can I take it to Milly?" I asked. "Are you going to send me back to the Commander?"

"Guess not," he smiled faintly. "Those docu-ments won't be dispatched that way, I reckon. They're hurrying up with spades to bury that little lot right away. Back you go to the *Laird* as fast as I can send you. I've got a destroyer waiting for you, with her boilers near bursting, and two thousand dollars I've promised those wretched cowards aboard her when they bring back a receipt for you from Helston. The weather is pretty bad, but she'll stand it, and I'll die more easy when I know you're safe aboard that packet. And you'll take Hi Ling too, in case there's any legal rumpus concerning that signature.

"Will you do this for me, youngster?"

I hated going back to the ship without the Commander and his men, but if he would not send me back to them there was no help for it; and, besides, I wanted to do what I could for him.

"If you won't send me back to the Commander, I'll take them aboard and promise to hand them to the Admiral," I said.

Hi Ling had gone away, but now returned with two of the sailors who had captured me. They brought a great blue cotton cloth and began to wrap me in it, whilst Hi Ling talked excitedly to Hopkins, evidently in great distress.

"He doesn't want to leave me," Hopkins said. "I've nobody else to look after me."

"But you can't be left alone," I said; "they might kill you."

"Not till I've got that receipt from Helston," he answered grimly, pulling a revolver from under the bedclothes.

The blue-jackets prepared to lift me on their shoulders, and I hurriedly shook hands with Hopkins, not daring to look at his face.

They lifted me up and took me out of the room, but I heard him call out, and they put me down. He called me, and I went back.

His face was rigid with pain and sorrow. "Glover, youngster," and he clenched my hand, "tell her I loved her; tell her I love her now; tell her that I

died fighting. I led that charge well? I did, did I not? Tell her that."

I felt a sob coming up at the back of my throat, and darted out again.

He called me back, and said in half a whisper, with a catch in his throat; "She may think I died fighting—on—your—side. Don't let her know."

I squeezed his two hands. I could not say a word, for my lips were quivering. I left him there.

The sailors seized me roughly, covered me from head to foot in the blue cloth, and began running. I could hear Hi Ling panting at my side.

In a little while they stopped, I felt the breeze and the smell of the sea, and they jolted me into a boat and began pulling from the shore.

They unwound the cloth which still covered me, and I saw that we were making straight for one of the Patagonian destroyers. We bumped alongside, and I scrambled painfully up. The Chinamen on deck gesticulated savagely, and one or two spat at me; but I was so utterly miserable, that I did not seem to care what happened, or even to be frightened.

They cast off almost immediately, keeping close inshore till they came near the entrance, and then had to shoot out into the harbour.

The destroyer must then have come into view from One Gun Hill, for a huge shell fell with a splash in the water a hundred yards astern, ricocheted against the cliffs, and burst with a roar, the frightened crew throwing themselves flat on the deck or rushing down below.

I jumped to my feet and yelled with delight. It was our 12-inch Krupp, and the Commander and his men were still holding out on the top of the hill. Oh, the relief and the joy of it!

I looked upwards, but could not see the top of the hill on account of the smoke from the gun and from the still burning bushes.

We were now slipping past the ledge on which the Commander, Jones, and I had lain two days ago, and the cruiser at the foot of it was burning furiously quite close to where we had sunk the dinghy.

"Mista Hamilton belong all same dead man." I turned round. It was Hi Ling, rubbing his thin hands sadly and then pointing to the wreck. "Shell he come and makee blow up—vely blave man—plenty numbly one fightee man. All belong vely bad joss," he added mournfully.

"The lame Englishman dead?" I asked.

The Chinaman nodded his head.

Then we ran past the place where we had knocked over the two sentries, passed between the landing-stages, and between the two forts, lined with men gaping down at us, twisted round a corner, and dashed into the full force of the gale and the huge seas on our starboard beam. No wonder that the crew would not take me out under two thousand dollars.

I could see the *Laird* right ahead, five miles out to sea, and the Chinamen hoisted a great white flag at the masthead, which flew as stiff as mill-board to leeward, and made straight for her.

They had to ease down immediately, as seas were coming right over us, and we were hardly clear of the rocks near the entrance before Mr. Lang in "No. 2" sighted us, and came racing along to cut us off, tumbling and lurching through the following seas.

One of the crew came running aft, jabbered to Hi Ling, and pointed to me.

"Captain he wantchee you go topsides all same blidge," said Hi Ling.

Up I went, and they made me understand that I had to make myself conspicuous, so that Mr. Lang could see me.

I waved my handkerchief—I don't know what had become of my cap—and shouted in my excitement, though, of course, that was silly; and then a wave flopped on the bridge and drenched me from head to foot, and as the salt water soaked through my clothes, those places on my chest and leg began to smart again.

Mr. Lang had seen our white flag, and came staggering up with a signal flying at the yard-arm—"Heave to" and "Send a boat".

A boat could not live for a moment in that sea—at any rate, no boat that we had—so I jammed myself against the bridge rails and semaphored with my arms, "Midshipman Glover on board—a prisoner—being taken back to *Laird*".

I could see the stir this signal made, everybody trying to see me. Then Mr. Lang spotted me and waved his arms. His signalman semaphored, "Remain where you are; will communicate with *Laird*".

I explained to Hi Ling, and he to the captain—a great, gaunt, honest-looking Tartar—who grunted a reply.

Off went Mr. Lang to the *Laird*, and in twenty minutes back he came and semaphored, "Will follow you to lee of island and send a boat".

I told Hi Ling, but the captain shook his head decisively after chattering to some of the others. "No can do," said Hi Ling, "Mista Hopkins he wantchee leceipt flom numbly one ship," and he pointed to the *Laird*. "No can do," and he pointed to "No. 2".

I signalled across, "Have orders to transfer me to *Laird*—refuse to put me aboard you—no fear of treachery—have no torpedoes in tubes" (I had noticed this previously). Mr. Lang waved his hand, and "No. 2" thrashed back to the *Laird*.

We had already drifted half a mile past the entrance, and presently saw the *Laird* steaming away towards the north of the island, and we followed her, even before Mr. Lang could get back or make a signal, and soon began to get shelter in the lee of the land.

The *Laird* came grandly down, her masts swaying in a stately, deliberate

manner as she rolled from side to side, till she, too, ran into smoother water and lowered a cutter.

Five minutes later it came alongside, with Toddles in command. I jumped in, followed by the captain and Hi Ling, and we shoved off back to the *Laird*. She gave us a lee, and I caught a rope and scrambled up, followed by the captain, as agile as a monkey, though Hi Ling could not face it, and remained terror-struck in the boat as she went up and down, and the crew kept her from stoving in her side against the ship.

It was Captain Helston who hauled me through the gangway, and I hurriedly explained that the big Chinaman wanted a receipt for my safe return. He was given it, swung himself down the side without deigning a word or a look, and the boat took him back to the destroyer, after we had hauled Hi Ling on board with a bow-line under his arm-pits.

"What news, Glover? Quick!" said Captain Helston.

I told him all I knew. It was a painful story and a long one, and I finished it in his cabin. He was fearfully agitated, and paced backwards and forwards, clutching his empty sleeve.

Dr. Fox, too, who was standing over me, was scarcely less alarmed. I had never seen him show the least feeling before.

"What are we to do, Fox? What are we to do?" Captain Helston kept saying. "It is impossible to land another man, even if I could spare one, and we've only three hours of daylight left. They'll all be murdered."

A midshipman—it was Dumpling—came down. "They've fired that gun again, sir," he said, grinned at me, and disappeared.

"They are still holding out, Doc. What can we do?"

"This is a matter of life or death, not only of strategy and tactics," said Dr. Fox suddenly. "One thing must be done—done at once, too—and you know what that is."

"Yes, yes. I must draw off their attention from Cummins by attacking those forts; a terrible risk, but it must be taken." His face became quite calm and happy again, and he rang the sentry bell.

"Send the First Lieutenant to me."

The First Lieutenant came running down.

"I am going to attack those forts at once. Signal to the *Strong Arm* to support me, and to Parker and Lang to close and await orders."

"Very good, sir," said the First Lieutenant and vanished with a joyful smile.

Picking up his telescope, the Captain went on deck, and Dr. Fox began taking off what was left of my monkey-jacket and examining my body. I heard the buglers sounding out for General Quarters, and heard the stamping of the men as they rushed cheering to their stations.

"Look at yourself, boy," said Dr. Fox, standing me on a chair, and I saw myself in the sideboard glass. I had no cap, my face was scratched all over, my flannel shirt was all covered with blood and was almost torn in half, one trouser leg had a great tear in it, and there was more blood on that, but the sea on board the destroyer had washed most of it away. I was sopping wet, and one boot had gone too.

"You don't look worth much; hardly worth sending you back, was it?"

I snatched at my torn monkey-jacket and pulled out the package.

"Mr. Hopkins is dying, sir. That is his will, and he wanted to know it was safe aboard here. He has left everything to Milly."

"To Milly!" said Dr. Fox, astounded. "I knew that he did meet her two or three times. Was he too in love with her?"

"Yes, sir; I think she half promised to marry him. Aren't you awfully sorry for him, sir?"

Dr. Fox smiled that cynical smile that made you want to kick him.

"I can't stop here all day," he growled. "I'm short-handed with Richardson away, and must look after my job. You have had enough fighting to last you till doomsday, so just you go down to the ammunition passages and wait there till I come."

"Can't I stay on deck, sir?"

"Do what I tell you!" he snarled, and, to see that I obeyed him, he took me down below himself.

CHAPTER XXIII
The Attack on the Forts

Below the Armoured Deck—We Engage the Forts—We Silence the Forts—My Wounds are Dressed

Mr. Midshipman Glover's Narrative continued

The men were hurriedly closing water-tight doors and lowering the water-tight hatchway covers. Dr. Fox and I must have been nearly the last to go below,

for the men had to stop lowering the big armoured hatchway cover aft, in order that we might scramble through it and climb down the steep iron ladder to the magazine flats.

The heavy iron armour fell into place with a thud. I heard the men above screwing down the clamps which secured it, and for the first time in my life realized that we were shut in below the armoured deck, and wondered how we were going to escape if anything happened.

Of course I had often been there before during drills, but this was the real thing, and I felt like a rat in a trap.

The big space we were now in was called the "cross passage", and ran right across the ship, with the sloping dome of the armoured deck above it. The magazines opened into it at the after end, and on each side the ammunition passages ran for'ard. These were two tunnels just broad enough for two men to squeeze past, and just high enough for them to stand erect. They ran along each side of the ship, under the curved edge of the armoured deck, to open into another cross passage for'ard, where were more magazines, and from the top of them rose the ammunition hoists—great armoured tubes, five on each side—leading up to the main and upper deck 6-inch guns.

From the for'ard cross passage a huge armoured tube ran up to the fo'c'stle to feed the fo'c'stle 8-inch gun, and there was a similar one running up from the after cross passage to the quarter-deck gun.

Standing underneath and looking up through this one, I could just catch a glimpse of the sky; but of course no daylight came down, and though there were electric lights here and there on the bulk-heads, it was very gloomy.

Men were in the whitewashed magazines, with felt slippers on their feet, handing out 6-inch shell and cartridge-cases. Others, rushing out from the darker ammunition passages, seized them, shoved them into little canvas bags bound with rope, and dashed back again to feed their own especial ammunition hoist. Hooking the bags to a rope which ran up the tube, passed over a pulley-wheel at the top and led down again, they hauled the shell and cartridges up to the 6-inch gun above them.

I crouched in a corner to be out of the way, and as it grew hotter and hotter, and the stifling air became full of dust, the electric lights themselves began to blur indistinctly; and the men, leaping along the passages, jostling each other as they passed, muttering as they barked their shins or dropped a projectile, clothed in nothing but boots, duck trousers and flannels, their faces and necks streaming with perspiration, looked like demons.

A stoker near me, one of two who stood by with a fire-hose, muttered to his mate, "Blow me, Bill, if it ain't as 'ot as 'ot."

"You've 'it it to a shovelful; it's wurs'n what them stoke'olds are," I heard

Bill reply, as he cut off some tobacco and stuffed it into his cheek.

"So long as we don't get no blooming fire down 'ere, I'm a-comfortable enough a-standin' 'ere a-watching of them others a-workin'. But what breaks me 'eart every time," he continued, "we don't seem to never get no 'ead o' water through this 'ere hose-pipe. I don't 'old with them new-fangled pumps they've got aboard this 'ere junk."

"The same 'ere," answered his mate, and they settled themselves comfortably on the coiled-up fire-hose to enjoy their quids of tobacco.

Dr. Fox, the three Paymasters, the Chaplain, and the sick-bay people were trying to get a clear corner, and were laying out bandages, tourniquets, and surgical dressings, the mere sight of which made me feel horribly uncomfortable, and more like a rat in a trap than ever.

It was bad enough whilst the men were rushing to and fro, and in that thick, stuffy atmosphere you could smell nothing but sweating men; but presently they had brought out as much ammunition as they could heap round the bottom of the hoists, and there was nothing more for them to do yet. The ammunition parties grouped silently below their own special hoists, and the magazine parties had time to pass their arms across their eyes and wipe the stinging sweat away.

It was a time of terrible suspense, for not a sound could be heard from above, where we knew the guns' crews were standing round their guns, and from below nothing but the regular rhythm of the big engines, the rapid throbbing of the dynamo-engines and the pumps behind the bulk-heads, and every now and again the harsh rumbling of the steering-engine aft.

Added to all this we were rolling very heavily.

Presently a man came scrambling down one of the hoists—sliding down the rope—and there was a sudden stir as men eagerly questioned him.

"Are we getting close inshore?" "Have the forts opened fire yet?" "Is that big gun still firing?" "Where's the *Strong Arm*?"

Then there was silence again—all but the noises of the engines drumming and thudding on the other side of the white bulk-heads.

The First Lieutenant, trying to appear calm, walked round and round, first along the port side, then down the starboard passage, seeing that everything was ready and everybody in his place, speaking a word here and there to a petty officer, and followed closely by his midshipman messenger, a very junior chap we called "Daisy".

Then the little bell at our end of the conning-tower voice-pipe tinkled loudly. The man stationed there sang out for the First Lieutenant, and he came running up. Captain Helston was giving him an order from the conning tower.

"Very good, sir," he shouted back.

"Stand by on the port side, men; we are just going to commence."

Oh, wasn't it exciting! and didn't I wish that I was up above that armoured deck with the sky overhead, instead of lying down there so stiff and sore that I could barely move!

The men were fidgeting nervously from one foot to the other, and then the silence was broken by the banging of the guns in the port battery overhead. A second later the quarter-deck 8-inch went off, and we could feel the ship quiver; another quiver came from the fo'c'stle big gun for'ard. Two minutes of this and then men shouted hoarsely down the hoists for more ammunition, the voice-pipe bells tinkled, and the order came down to pass up only common shell (shell with thin walls and a large bursting charge).

Men flew backwards and forwards, the dust thickened again, the heat and the mugginess were horrid, and every now and again some of the powder smoke would be blown down the hoists and make those stifling ammunition passages darker still.

The First Lieutenant walked steadily backwards and forwards along the port side, singing out, "Steady, men; don't hurry—don't crowd," and the two stokers near me tucked their feet out of the way and went on chewing their quids of tobacco.

Then a man slid down one of the starboard hoists and crawled aft to Dr. Fox. He had a great gash in one leg, with some spun yarn tied tightly about it.

"They're firing furious," he gasped, "and a splinter from the first cutter caught me."

Then the port guns ceased firing, and we heard the steering-engine rumbling "hard over".

"We are turning now, boys, and going past again. Stand by for the starboard guns," sang out the First Lieutenant.

The quarter-deck gun ceased firing. Now we were almost round again, and could faintly hear the boom of the *Strong Arm's* guns coming down the hoists.

There was a crash and a roar above us, something came clattering down one of the port upper-deck hoists, a man jumped and picked it up—a fragment of shell—and he dropped it again precious quickly with burnt fingers. I remember that the men all laughed at him.

"Want the doctor!" someone shouted down.

In a moment Dr. Fox was there with a bag over his shoulder. They made a bight in the rope hoist, he placed his foot in it, and grasped the rope over his head.

"Haul handsomely, men," he growled, and they hauled him up the hoist. He was down again in a minute or two, sliding down the rope.

"Too late!" I heard him mutter as he landed, his hands and sleeves covered with blood.

"Who was it, sir?" somebody asked him, but he took no notice.

Then the starboard guns and the quarter-deck 8-inch commenced, and we had begun to go past those two forts for the second run.

I pictured our shells bursting against the rocks and among the guns I had seen there, and wondered whether the European in charge was sober or not, and whether the Commander was still holding out round his Krupp gun. If only I hadn't been such a fool as to jump down off that parapet of sand-bags, I might have been with him still.

We were coming to the end of the second run now, and the First Lieutenant had just said as he wiped his forehead: "They can't stand much more of this if we're making anything like decent shooting," when they commenced cheering on deck, and somebody shouted down that the forts had hoisted a white flag. The men below cheered from one end of the passages to the other, and the guns above ceased firing.

Dr. Fox and a sick-berth steward climbed up a hoist to look after some more wounded on deck, and in a few minutes the main engines began to slow down and presently stopped altogether.

On deck we heard the bos'n's mate pipe, "Away, second cutter!" a voice yelled down the hoist, "Any second cutters down below there?" A couple of men belonging to that boat scrambled hastily up, there was silence again, and we could do nothing but wait and wonder what was happening.

"If we sit here much longer I'm blowed if we sha'n't miss our first dog-watch," said one of the stokers cheerfully, and unbending his cramped legs.

"'Tis a hill wind that don't blow nobody no good," added the other reflectively, and they both spat into a dark corner behind the fire-hose.

"Put those two men in the Commander's report," said the First Lieutenant, who had just come over from the opposite side and saw them spit.

Daisy, his midshipman, got out his pocket-book and took their names.

"What about yer hill wind now?" said the first one who had spoken, as Daisy went away, and they sat down again. "That will blooming well stop yer chawnce of going ashore and picking up a bit o' loot."

Old Mellins scrambled down to see me, and jolly glad I was. He is such a thoughtful chap, and had brought me some grub—a pot of pâté de foie gras and some bread and butter. Till I saw it I never realized how terribly hungry I was; and you should have seen me eating it, with Mellins standing over me, spreading great chunks of the pâté on thick slices of bread and butter, and telling me all that had happened.

"Our first run past those forts simply knocked the stuffing out of them. You couldn't see them for dust and the smoke of the shells, and when we turned round and went for them again they hardly fired a gun. We could see them tumbling

over each other in their hurry to scramble out of the forts, and after we'd ceased firing someone hauled down their colours and hoisted a white flag as big as a sheet. It was simply ripping."

"How about the Commander?" I asked.

"He's going strong, and firing that big gun into the harbour every four or five minutes. 'No. 2' and 'No. 3' are right in under the forts, and Toddles has taken the Captain inshore to take possession of them, or what is left of them."

"Anybody killed?" I asked.

"We have one, poor Joe Connolly, the coxswain of my picket-boat," said Mellins sadly, "and the *Strong Arm* has three killed and nearly twenty pretty badly wounded. A 6-inch shell burst on her upper deck—in the battery."

Dr. Fox and his sick-berth steward came along then, and Mellins was sent away to get me some more clothes, as the ones I had on were torn and blood-stained. It wasn't all my blood, I think, for when Dr. Fox had ripped off my shirt he only found a clean cut along my ribs, and the wound in my leg was a nasty stab made, I expect, by one of those horrid boarding-pikes the Chinese were prodding me with.

This wound was much the more uncomfortable, and Dr. Fox took quite a long time probing and syringing it till it was quite clean.

It was very painful and smarted a good deal; and wasn't I jolly glad when he had finished and left me alone again, and Mellins had helped me into my clean things!

CHAPTER XXIV
The Capture of the Island

A Crisis—Inside the Pirate Island—A Feeble Resistance—Doctors Wanted—An Awful Night—Schmidt Escapes

Whilst the *Laird* and the *Strong Arm* steamed past the forts for the first time, at a range of between four and five thousand yards, the forts had replied furiously and struck the *Laird* repeatedly.

Hardly had she fired the first gun before a shell passed through her foremost

funnel, making a large rent in it, but, fortunately, not bursting. A second struck the first cutter, completely wrecking it and wounding one or two men with the splinters which flew in all directions. Another shell struck the armoured belt at the water-line and burst, doing no damage, and leaving only a dent in the hard steel. A fourth had passed through the ward-room and burst in the Gunnery Lieutenant's cabin, setting it on fire, whilst the last struck one of the upper-deck 6-inch gun-shields, forced it back on top of the gun and burst, killing Connolly, the captain of the gun, and wounding three of his men badly.

The *Strong Arm* had not been struck till the ships began to turn, but then she was hit by several shells in quick succession, and lost three killed and seventeen wounded.

But the fire of the two ships had been so terrific, that even as they steadied on their course, and edged in to within three thousand yards for their second run, the signalman up aloft in the fore-top saw the Chinamen already leaving their guns, and before they had completed this second run the enemy had hauled down their flag and presently hoisted a white one.

Captain Helston immediately ceased fire, and ordered Lang and Parker to go close inshore with their destroyers and reconnoitre.

Mr. Lang signalled from "No. 2" that the forts had been evacuated, and Helston called away the second cutter and went himself to make certain that such was the case.

There was no doubt about it—the forts were completely deserted—and he signalled to the *Laird* and ordered her to land fifty men and occupy them at once, pushing on himself through the entrance-channel till he came abreast of the deserted landing-stages. Not a Chinaman could be seen.

Here he made the men lie on their oars, and now he could see the whole of the harbour, the smoking wreck of the cruiser at the foot of the cliffs on his right, the little town on the other side of the harbour, and the cruisers beyond it, hugging the shore and mixed up in confusion with the anchored merchant ships.

The cruisers were evidently not showing fight, that was as plain as a "pike-staff", but the sharp bursts of rifle firing that the wind brought down from One Gun Hill told him that Cummins was still being severely pressed.

He knew from Midshipman Glover's hurried report that the little party was much reduced in numbers and must be running short of ammunition, and, as far as he could judge, the attack on the forts had not reduced the danger of the Commander's position. In fact, the inference was that he might have driven out the garrison of those forts only to reinforce the crowds of infuriated Chinese, who would now make one more determined effort to overwhelm the gallant little cluster of men who had so desperately held on to that hilltop since daylight.

Fortunately the sudden necessity for immediate action, the prompt resolve

to bombard the forts as the only means of relieving the pressure on the Commander's party, and the celerity with which the reduction of those forts had been carried out, bore him along on a wave of fortune which seemed to sweep away his recent indecision and vacillation.

He abruptly determined to take a step still more decisive.

The risks of the project almost appalled him; but the necessity for instant action was so vividly apparent, that though he momentarily hesitated before irrevocably committing his little squadron, the continuous rattle of musketry from the hill above decided him upon one final resolution.

There might be more guns hidden on the high land all round him. The cruisers might still oppose him valiantly, and there was but one hour of daylight remaining, yet he determined to make this last effort for entire success.

"Get back to the *Laird* as fast as you can," he said to Toddles, the midshipman of the boat, who had been looking with wonder at the change which had come over him.

"Back starboard; give way port. Pull, men, for your lives;" and with bending oars they drove the boat out to sea again, out between the destroyers, and splashed through the heavy seas.

With their boat half-full of water, they pulled under the lee of the *Laird*, hooked on their boat's falls, and were hoisted up with a run.

"Belay those fifty men," Captain Helston told the First Lieutenant, who hurried up to receive him as he scrambled down on deck, "and go to quarters again. I'm going to take the whole squadron inside."

"Oh!" whistled the First Lieutenant, and rushed off.

The bugles blared; signals flew to the *Strong Arm*; men passed the word to the guns' crews that they were going right inside; men bellowed the news down the ammunition hoists, down the engine-room and stokehold gratings, and on deck and down below from the bowels of the ship cheer after cheer burst forth.

Now the *Strong Arm* had the news, and her men too began to cheer as the two ships gathered way and made straight for the entrance.

As they passed between the two weather-beaten little destroyers, rolling gunwale under, with their funnels white with salt, the crews of the destroyers sprang to "attention" and then broke into cheers. The *Laird* was right in the entrance now, her boats, swung out at the davits, almost grazed, to port and starboard, the rocky ledges in which the abandoned guns were mounted.

Grandly she answered her helm, swung round the bend in the channel, and steadied as she majestically moved past the deserted landing-stages. The *Strong Arm*, carefully handled by the First Lieutenant, followed her. "No. 2" and "No. 3" dashed in after them, and the whole of the squadron except the *Sylvia* was inside the island harbour.

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The sudden approach of these two ships to the attack had found the forts totally unprepared to make any effective resistance.

For the last three weeks the squadron had shown such an evident disinclination to come to close quarters, that Hopkins, Hamilton, and Schmidt had been lulled into a sense of false security, and, imagining that no attack would be made from that quarter, had withdrawn a considerable number of the artillerymen from the forts, all trained and disciplined men, to strengthen the attack on One Gun Hill.

The seizure of the Krupp gun had taken them completely by surprise, and the necessity for its recapture was imperative.

Unable to rely upon their coolies, they had hastily denuded the ships and gathered sufficient blue-jackets to make the first rush. Though nearly successful it had ended disastrously, Hopkins being mortally wounded and such a number of men being killed, that the remainder could only with difficulty be again induced to advance from cover.

The unsuccessful attempt to cut off the small party with the oil-drums, the destruction of the cruiser, and the death of Hamilton, the lame Englishman on board her, made it evident to Schmidt that he must, once for all, overwhelm Cummins and his men before the weather abated and allowed further reinforcements to land. He had, therefore, brought up every coolie he could find, armed them with every weapon he could lay his hands on, and stiffened their wavering ranks with the disciplined men from the forts and what blue-jackets he could muster.

Inciting them to fury with tales of what their fate would be if they were captured, he had plied them with drink, and gathering them behind the smoke from the burning bushes, had hurled them at the top of the hill.

It was with this wild, fanatical mob, mad with unaccustomed drink, that Hopkins had sent the small body of blue-jackets to endeavour to rescue Glover, and though in this he had been successful, the assault itself had been finally repulsed.

Only a few men were left in the forts themselves, and the European in charge, who had been drinking heavily during the last ten days, was in no fit state to utilize even those that remained to him, and when Schmidt first awoke to the fact that the squadron had at last ventured to attack, he left his beaten men to continue to harass the top of the hill with rifle fire, and rushed down towards the forts.

Before he could reach them he met the terror-stricken mob of men flying from them, and almost immediately afterwards saw the top-masts of the *Laird* and the *Strong Arm* appearing behind the harbour entrance.

These frightened fugitives, scared out of their very lives, had splashed hurriedly past the destroyers lying huddled inshore, and spread the panic among their crews, who, not even waiting till the *Laird* appeared inside the harbour, took to their boats or jumped overboard and made for the shore.

Schmidt knew well enough that there was nothing now to stop Helston's squadron, knew that the greater part of his blue-jackets were already on top of the hill—many of them dead—knew that one of his partners had been blown to pieces on the opposite side of the harbour, and that the other lay dying; but with a gambler's trust in the last throw of the dice, he jumped into a dinghy, pulled himself across to the *Hong Lu*, and tried to rally his cowed and dispirited men.

* * * * *

It was from the sides of the *Hong Lu* that suddenly, as the *Laird* and the *Strong Arm* steered into the harbour, flames shot out and shells came wildly past them. The two remaining cruisers joined in, and for perhaps five minutes the water round the two ships was lashed into foam, and the cliffs behind them were struck time after time by the Chinese shells.

But every gun that could bear upon the unhappy cruisers crowded under the land poured in a fire so concentrated, so coolly aimed, and so accurate, that their already demoralized crews could not stand to their guns, and running their ships ashore, swarmed over the bows and left them to their fate.

The *Hong Lu* did indeed make one desperate and gallant attempt. Extricating herself from the other ships, she commenced steaming towards the *Laird* and the *Strong Arm*, and came down at great speed with the intention of either ramming one or other of them, or of forcing her way past and escaping to sea.

The *Laird* and the *Strong Arm*, opening out a little in the broader part of the harbour, poured in a very hail of 6-inch shells. The *Hong Lu's* thin, low plates were rent open in a dozen places, water poured in, and she began visibly to sink by the head. An 8-inch shell burst at the foot of her foremast under the bridge, her bows were smothered in flame and smoke, she fell off to port, and then she too ran with a crash up the shore, and her crew began jumping overboard.

The *Strong Arm* steamed towards her to complete the destruction, if necessary, and saw one huge solitary figure on her quarter-deck. This was Schmidt, who quickly dived into the sea, swam with powerful strokes to the land, and disappeared in the dense cover.

With the *Hong Lu* abandoned all opposition ceased, and from the top of One Gun Hill the faint sound of cheering could be heard. Looking through their telescopes they could see the gallant little party clustered behind the breast-works they had defended so long, standing up on the sand-bags and waving their hel-

mets as they cheered.

They, too, were safe.

The light was already beginning to fade, and heavy squalls of rain made signalling difficult, but Cummins managed to get one semaphore signal through to the *Laird*: "Enemy disappearing; am short of ammunition, and require medical assistance. Richardson is killed."

Helston sent for Dr. Fox and handed him the signal.

"I'll go myself," said the Doctor.

"I thought you would," replied Helston. "I'll give you fifty men, and you must get up there as fast as you can, and I'll turn my search-lights on the top of the hill as soon as it is dark. I don't expect that you'll find the Chinese have any more fight left in them, but if you do I will help you."

"No. 3" was sent out to bring the *Sylvia* into the harbour, parties of men were sent aboard the ships, destroyers, and torpedo-boats to remove the breech-blocks of their guns, and a strong body of men was sent down to the forts to do the same there. They found five bodies in the batteries, but very little material damage done—very little compared to the apparent destruction as seen from the ships. Two of the smaller guns had been dismounted and one of the 6-inch had been disabled, but nothing more, though masses of the rock behind them had been blasted with the shells and lay between the guns in heaps.

Another party tried unsuccessfully to extinguish the fire aboard the *Hong Lu*, but had to leave her to her fate, for the flames had taken firm hold of her and were spreading rapidly towards the magazines.

It was quite dark before these precautions were complete, and meanwhile Dr. Fox, with his escort of fifty men, was hurrying to the top of the hill, bearing more ammunition and the urgently-needed surgical dressings.

He had landed far from the town, and, giving it a wide berth—for already the sounds of rioting and tumult rose from it—had struck the zigzag path just as daylight failed.

But few natives had been met, and these had fled precipitately.

Dr. Fox pressed on up the hill, aided by the *Laird's* search-light, which lighted up the path ahead of him, made still more slippery and treacherous by the heavy rain now falling. Urged to his utmost exertions by the knowledge that he and his men were urgently wanted, he scrambled on, stumbling every now and then over the bodies of dead Chinamen and over rifles which had been thrown away in their flight, and now lay scattered in great numbers on the path.

At last he came out into the open in front of the breastworks, and feeble cheers greeted him from the remnants of the defenders. The search-lights of the ships lighted up the whole of that charred open space below the crest, and hundreds of prostrate bodies dotted it, thickly piled, literally in heaps, where the

Maxims had swept them down in their last mad rush, their yellow faces horrible in the beams of the light. Right up to the sand-bags they lay, giving proof of the fierceness of their charge, whilst the dark eyes and haggard, drawn faces of the marines and bluejackets behind the breast-work showed only too plainly the terrible struggle they had made to defend it.

Cummins came forward with blanched, anxious face, his left arm bound across his chest.

"Thank God! you're come. Poor Richardson was killed three hours ago, and we have thirty men wanting you."

The worn-out defenders had roused themselves for a minute or two to welcome their comrades, but then lay down exhausted, and, with all danger past, fell asleep immediately, drenched though they were by the bitter cold rain which swept moaning across the plateau.

Nobody on that bleak hilltop will ever forget the night which followed.

The men were too utterly wearied to carry down the wounded, even if this had been possible. No one thought of leaving the dead unguarded, so the fifty men whom Dr. Fox had brought hastily pulled down the Log Redoubt which Captain Williams had maintained so stoutly, and with the timber made two bonfires under the lee of the gun-pit parapet. By their light and that of the search-light Dr. Fox dressed the wounded who hobbled stiffly over from where they had fallen, or were carried to him.

The dead, too, were collected, reverently laid together, and covered with the big tarpaulin from the Krupp gun—Captain Hunter, Dr. Richardson, eleven marines, the signalman who had been the first to fall, the sick-berth steward who had been killed with Dr. Richardson during that fight round the gun, whilst trying to protect the wounded, and five blue-jackets.

The Commander resolutely refused aid till the last, and when his turn came Dr. Fox found that he had a terrible gash on the left shoulder—from a cutlass—cutting clean down to the collar-bone and shoulder-blade, and his arm was quite helpless. "Another inch, and you would have bled to death," said Dr. Fox grimly. "The bones saved you."

"I dodged my head in time, or it would have caught me there," said Cummins, raising a feeble chuckle; but then he fainted through loss of blood and sheer exhaustion.

Saunderson had a bullet through his chest, and lay very still, wrapped tightly round with a bandage, and too worn-out and numbed with cold to worry about his condition.

"You'll be all right," Dr. Fox told him, and covered him with a blanket; "only don't move till morning."

* * * * *

Down below every corner of the harbour was being searched by the lights of the ships, for Schmidt was still at large, and there was no knowing what devilry he might devise.

The *Hong Lu*, burning fiercely, threw a red glare over the hills and turned the harbour to a blood colour, and from time to time tremendous explosions on board her quenched the flames momentarily, but they leapt out again more furiously than ever.

From the town itself came the angry buzz of shouting and yelling; rifle shots rang out in a jerky, spasmodic crackling, and it was evident that the natives, emboldened by hunger, by the desire to save their own possessions, or by the lust of looting, had gradually crept back and were now fighting among themselves.

Presently the horrors of the night were intensified by flames springing from the go-downs and warehouses near the water's edge. In half an hour they were well alight, burning fiercely, and, fanned by the wind, the flames spread to the bamboo-matting huts, leaping from one to another with their fiery tongues till the whole lower part of the town was one roaring furnace. The flames and the black smoke blowing across the lurid harbour almost hid the search-lights of the ships.

It was a weird and frightful spectacle, fit end to an awful day.

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Far from exulting in its success, Helston's squadron that night was sunk in gloom darker than the acrid clouds of black smoke sweeping through its rigging, for the names of the killed and wounded had been signalled with flash-lamps from the hill, and posted up on each lower deck was the grim list, the roll of killed beginning with Captain Hunter, idolized by officers and men alike, and ending with Gunner Bolton, the corner man in the *Laird's* Nigger Minstrel Troupe. His mess-mates would chaff him no more "that he had done them out of a show".

Even Ping Sang was not happy, and wrung his hands as he saw the flames devour the warehouses, crammed, as he guessed only too accurately, with his own merchandise, and implored—at times almost commanded—Helston to endeavour to save them.

But Helston was obdurate—not another man would he risk; and though he did send two steam-boats to haul off a big steamer lying alongside the pier under the town, and they succeeded in towing her away before the flames reached her, he resolutely refused to land another man either to quell the riot or subdue the fire.

Even now he was anxious about Cummins and Dr. Fox, and "stood by" all night with a couple of hundred men, to go himself to their assistance if the hill were again assailed.

In the intervals of smoke he could see the flickering bonfires they had lighted on top of the hill, and round which they were huddled waiting for the morning. One incident broke the strain of that terrible night. It was when the clouds of smoke were densest that suddenly a man aboard "No. 2", which was lying farthest out from shore, sang out that he had seen a sail show black above the low land near the narrow outlet.

He lost sight of it behind the driving smoke, and when the view had cleared again and a search-light had swept towards it, a junk could plainly be seen bending and staggering under the fierce gusts of wind which whirled down on her as she cleared the island. A rain squall shut her out, and when it had passed no further trace of her could be seen.

Mr. Lang thought rightly that Schmidt himself was aboard her, and made a signal asking permission to endeavour to cut her off to leeward of the island, but Helston refused to allow him to venture out—the risks were too great—and doubted not that the helpless, clumsy junk could well be left to the short shrift of that howling gale outside.

Even his own ships must have been dispersed that night, and he gave fervent thanks, where thanks were due, that success had been granted him, and that his squadron lay in safety inside the harbour.

Schmidt it indeed was who, with some of his boldest men, had seized the junk under cover of the smoke, cut her grass hawser, towed her silently with a dinghy till she had reached the outlet, hoisted her bamboo-matting sails till he had cleared the land, and then let her run before the raging gale under bare poles.

How he at last reached land, gathered more men round him, and spread terror through the island waters of the Chusan Archipelago, must be told another day.

CHAPTER XXV
The Fruits of Victory

Oh, the Pity of It!—We Find Hopkins—Helston has Suspicions—

Helston's Speech—A "Stand Easy"—Ping Sang Departs—We Hand Over our Ships—Homeward Bound—The Admiral Speaks his Mind

Dr. Fox concludes his experiences

If I had only known that I should have to spend the whole night on top of that hill, I should never have been such a fool as to volunteer.

The young Surgeon of the *Strong Arm* was every whit as capable of doing the work as I was, and his youth would have carried him through the night's exposure without harm. As it was, I always date the commencement of my rheumatism from that horrible night, and never cease regretting that at the moment when Helston showed me the signal from One Gun Hill, and I read of the death of my Surgeon, Richardson, and of the wounded lying there without anyone to look after them for the last three hours, my common sense should have failed me momentarily.

Ugh! How it rained and blew! That zigzag path was a miniature torrent, and my feet slipped backwards in the squelching mud at every pace. The idiot, too, who was training the *Laird's* search-light thought, I have no doubt, he was lighting my way; but he kept his beam fixed on me and the men who went with me, with the result that I was nearly blinded. The shadows were made still more intense, and it was more difficult than ever to avoid stumbling over the bodies of the dead Chinamen which littered the path.

Two hours' hard work it was before the wounded were patched up and made fairly ship-shape.

The Mauser bullet wounds did not bother me much, but quite a number of men had deep flesh wounds inflicted by cutlasses, swords, or bayonets during the hand-to-hand fighting, and it does not require much imagination to understand the difficulty—the impossibility, in fact—of making a good job of these, dressing them by the unsteady light of the *Laird's* search-light, with the rain pouring in torrents and driving almost horizontally across the top of the hill before the gale.

As each case was finished, and the poor fellow, blue with cold (the skin of their hands and faces was wrinkled like a washerwoman's hands), was laid down somewhere in the lee of the dripping sand-bags, I injected morphia to ease his pain, and could only hope that he would be sufficiently alive in the morning for us to get him safely down to the ships, where he might have a chance of being properly looked after.

Little Cummins had about the worst wound of the lot, and even if he managed to pull through, I had little hope that his left arm would be of much use to

him.

However, he tried to be cheery, especially when I told him that young Glover was safe and sound aboard the *Laird*, and gave one or two of his irritating chuckles before he fainted. He then lay quiet for the rest of the night. There was no need to give him any morphia, for he was absolutely "played out".

Saunderson, with a bullet through his right lung, did not worry me much, because so long as he kept still and was tightly bandaged, nothing more could be done for him, and his grand physique would carry him safely through the night's exposure.

Things were made more comfortable when the men who had come with me pulled some logs across from one of the breast-works and made a fire close to the Krupp gun parapet, and probably more lives were saved by this means than by anything I did.

The men who had defended the hill all day were now fast asleep, most of them absolutely unprotected from the cold rain, so I made my fellows bring them nearer to the fire. Many were so exhausted that they were carried across without being awakened. In fact, it was so difficult to distinguish the dead from the living, that they actually carried over two dead men and laid them down round the fire, nor was their mistake discovered till morning.

At last I finished, and had time to crouch down behind some sand-bags and managed to light a pipe, shivering with cold and cursing myself for a fool for ever having been induced to join Helston in his mad enterprise.

The gale shrieked and howled; the rain stung my face. Seawards, out of the pitchy blackness of the night, the waves bellowed as they pounded the foot of the hill in one incessant roar; the burning ships and warehouses, the crackling of musketry in the town below, the constant explosions from the doomed ships, all made of the harbour a very inferno, from out of which the cold, clear searchlight flashed pitilessly on the slaughter-house round me.

Twenty English and two hundred or more Chinamen lay there sleeping their last long sleep.

Oh, the pity of it all!

My worst enemy could not accuse me of being sentimental, and that night all feeling whatever seemed numbed; but as I recognized the dead faces of Hunter, Richardson, and a dozen men whom I knew, the only thought was one of bitterness that men should throw away their lives so comparatively uselessly, and the selfishness of it all made me feel almost angry with them.

Hunter's family I knew. He left a wife and two children. Richardson had only recently married; and little did they reckon, they and the other poor fellows, when they volunteered for this expedition in their lust for change, for excitement, for self-glorification or chance of promotion, the misery they were to inflict.

Who bears the bigger share when the man goes out to war?

Is it the man, with his cares forgotten as the shores of England slip down below the horizon, with the hot blood coursing through his body and the fighting instinct of the male animal to bear him along, or is it the woman he leaves behind him—the mother, wife, or sweetheart—who is left to her humdrum daily duties, with her heart full of empty pains and aching fears, to hope and long and dread for news, day after day, week after week?

It seems foolish to write this, but all through that ghastly night, turn my thoughts how I would, they ever came back to the bitterness, the selfishness, the pity of it all.

Every now and again some wounded man wanted attention—one man became delirious, and at intervals uttered horrible shrieks. Pattison also became delirious, and I had to keep a man watching lest he should tear off his bandages.

About three in the morning one of my men thought he heard a cry for help down the sea slope of the hill, and we searched by the light of the signal lantern for nearly an hour, but found no one.

No longer, no more terrible night, have I ever spent; but at last it did end—the darkness lessened, the uncanny search-light was switched off, and daybreak gradually revealed the gruesome sights which had been but half seen and only partially conjectured before.

Fortunately both the doctors of the *Strong Arm* came up to relieve me an hour after daylight, and I quickly scrambled down the hill, slipping and sliding in the mud.

I met Helston on the way down, and his face lighted up with relief when he saw me, and I was able to give him a fairly cheerful account of the wounded. He had landed with a couple of hundred men and driven the mob of Chinamen out of what was left of the town, and was now on his way to Hopkins's bungalow, guided by Hi Ling, the head boy.

"Come along with us, Doc, old chap. I want you to see Hopkins before you go off to the ship, if it is not too late."

We were close to the European bungalows, and Hi Ling led us straight to the one Hopkins inhabited, going on ahead of us.

As we approached we saw that everything was in disorder. Furniture, clothes, books, and papers were strewn all over the verandah, and a dead Chinaman lay sprawling half in, half out of a window.

"Looted during the night," I thought, and saw that Helston also thought so, and neither of us expected to find the American alive.

Hi Ling met us on the verandah, wringing his hands and moaning. We pushed aside a bamboo curtain and followed him into a room where everything was in still greater confusion, a trestle-bed overturned, drawers ransacked and

their contents scattered, and lying on the floor was Hopkins himself, with a dead Chinaman beside him. The one we had seen from outside had probably been killed as he tried to escape.

Both had bullet wounds, and had evidently been killed by the revolver Hopkins still held in his clenched hand.

He was quite dead, and I must confess that I felt much relieved, because nothing could have saved him, and also I did not want him to speak to Helston of Milly, as I feared he might have done, for Helston was of such a peculiar disposition, that I was very anxious that he should know nothing about the photograph or the will which Hopkins had made in her favour—nothing, at any rate, till I had got him safely home.

I hurriedly examined Hopkins, and whilst doing this tried to find the photograph of which Glover had told me; but it was not near him, only the crumpled-up piece of paper which Helston had signed on young Glover's safe return.

Poor fellow! the knowledge that his will was safe may have cheered his last moments.

We prepared to lift the body and place it decently on the bed, but, unfortunately, whilst we were righting the trestle-bed the photograph fell on the floor, and though I hastily tried to seize it, Helston stooped before I did and picked it up.

His face became rigid as he recognized it, and I saw his hand shaking as if he had an attack of ague, but in a few moments he recovered himself and gently laid it on the table.

"Help me to lift him, Fox," he said in a husky voice, looking at me suspiciously, and we laid Hopkins on his bed and left Hi Ling to prepare his master for burial.

The faithful Chinaman was actually crying. I had never seen a Chinaman cry before.

Hardly had we gained the verandah before Helston stopped, turned abruptly, and went back again. Through the open window I saw him place the photograph in Hopkins's breast, inside his pyjamas.

He rejoined me immediately, and said in a strained, hard voice: "What is the meaning of it all, Fox? You seem to know something about it. Tell me, for God's sake!"

I thought it best to tell him all I knew, and did so.

As I feared, he magnified the very little that I could tell him, and would not believe that I knew no more.

Poor chap! his face was drawn and haggard as he rapidly questioned me in a jerky, constrained manner, trying vainly to conceal his agitation, and darting suspicious glances at me.

"Did you know anything of this before we left England?"

"Nothing. I knew that they had met. Nothing else."

"But had you no suspicions?"

That made me angry. I hate being badgered.

"Look here, Helston, all I know I have told you. That he should fall in love with Milly is nothing remarkable. A dozen men, to my knowledge, are, or pretend they are, in love with her, and as to the photograph, why, every girl thinks the gift of a picture of herself quite sufficient a reward for that."

"Yes, perhaps; but there must have been something in it if he has left her all his money."

"Oh, confound you, don't be such a fool!" And, thoroughly irritated, I left him to climb his way wearily to the top of the hill, whilst I went off to the *Laird* to get something to eat, a bath, and an hour's sleep. But for that nine stone, more or less, of frilled and furbelowed Milly, Hunter would not be lying dead on the hill above, nor Richardson either, and without Richardson I was left single-handed, just when I wanted him most. I wished most devoutly that Helston and I had never saved the life of that avaricious old Chinaman, Ping Sang, ten years ago.

The first thing I did when I went aboard the *Laird* was to get the First Lieutenant to send half a dozen men ashore to bury Hopkins behind his bungalow, and then I had a hot bath and turned in, and slept like a log till I was called an hour later.

I felt better after that, and was hard at work for the rest of the day preparing one of the cleanest of the merchant ships—the *Hoi Feng*—for the wounded, and by night we had brought them all down from the hill and safely aboard her, sending to her the wounded still on board the *Strong Arm* and our own ship as well.

But for half an hour for dinner I did not stop working all day, and what with our own people and the wounded Chinamen, who began creeping back to the town in great numbers, we had enough to do and to spare.

It was nearly midnight before I finally turned in, and at two o'clock Jeffreys, the Sub-lieutenant, woke me up and told me that the Captain was walking up and down the quarter-deck in the rain, and would I speak to him and try to make him go below, as no one else dare approach him.

He was walking up and down with long strides, his hands clasped behind his back, his head drooped between his shoulders, and his eyes vacantly staring ahead of him.

He seemed to wake, as if from sleep, when I put my hand on his shoulder (his monkey-jacket was wet through).

"And this is the moment Bannerman chooses to ask me for the *Strong Arm*," he said fiercely, "and poor Hunter not even buried yet. How I do despise that man, and wish, with all my heart, that I could give her to Cummins; but he won't be

fit for duty for weeks, and is junior to Bannerman, so I suppose Bannerman must have her. It makes me boil over with anger to think of him stepping into Hunter's shoes."

This was not, I knew well enough, the real cause of his discomposure, but I was only too glad that his thoughts should be turned into another channel.

"He'll be stepping into yours if you don't take more care of yourself and get below out of this rain," I told him.

Ultimately I managed to induce him to undress and go to bed; but his mental condition seemed very unstable, and I much feared that the strain of the whole expedition would result in his complete break-down.

However, he slept soundly enough after that, and was much more composed in the morning.

That day every man who could be spared from the squadron was marched to the top of One Gun Hill, and there Hunter, Richardson, and their men were buried, and their graves marked by rough wooden crosses, with their names carved on them.

Three volleys were fired. The buglers of the squadron sounded a melancholy Last Post, and they were left there with that grim bullet-splashed Krupp gun to guard them.

The expedition had been successful.

It was Helston who read the burial service, and before the men marched down to their ships he made them a short address as they stood on the plateau in a hollow square round him. He always showed to advantage on these occasions with his tall figure, commanding features, and resonant voice.

"Officers and men of the Royal Navy and Royal Naval Reserve," he said—"we have paid the last honours to those of our comrades who lie buried here on the summit of the hill they defended so valiantly, and no words that I can say will add to their honour.

"They have, by their courage and devotion, enabled this expedition to be completely successful, and now that our return to England will not long be deferred, I want to say two things to you.

"Do not forget them.

"When we leave them here on this lonely hilltop standing in the midst of a distant ocean, sometimes think of them.

"If fate had ordained that any of you standing round me should have been now lying amongst them, you would have wished to be remembered by your mess-mates.

"They have done their duty and given up their lives in the doing of it; so let every man keep the memory of what they have done, before him, as long as ever he can, and thus pay them a greater honour than by merely marching here

to their burial.

"The other thing which I want to say is this.

"They have not died directly serving their Queen or their Country (we are, as you know, lent to the Chinese Government), and this makes the sacrifice of their lives all the more bitter, and it will be still more deeply felt by their relatives at home.

"But though they were not serving under the British Admiralty, remember that what they have done here, on this hilltop, will add to the glory of our navy, and help to keep alive its fighting spirit.

"The Royal Navy has not been tried severely for many generations, and it is such a deed as this—the defence of One Gun Hill—which increases the confidence the navy has in itself to maintain its old traditions untarnished when the hour of trial shall come.

"Rest assured that the lives which have been lost since we left England will not have been wasted if we—those who are dead and those who are alive—have helped even a little to increase the honour and prestige of the Royal Navy.

"Men, remember the mess-mates you are leaving here, even as you would wish to be remembered yourselves."

Helston always "fancied" himself at speech-making, and was almost cheerful as he and I walked down the hill together and stopped on the slopes to watch a crowd of surrendered coolies who had been set to work to bury their own dead.

* * * * *

For a week after the capture of the island of Hong Lu the gale blew with such fury that Helston could not venture out of the snug harbour.

During this time practically the whole of the Chinamen had surrendered, and were employed by Ping Sang and A Tsi to bury their dead countrymen, and afterwards to load the merchant ships with what goods had been saved from the great fire and prepare them for departure. Among the coolies were sufficient seamen to form crews for all the captured merchantmen, and the survivors of the men-of-war's crews were also set to work on board the remaining cruisers, destroyers, and torpedo-boats to get them in a fit state to steam to the mainland.

Personally I should have hesitated to send these men aboard their own ships again, but Ping Sang and A Tsi never doubted the expediency of this course, and their trust was not misplaced, for they worked with such energy that in a very few days the ships were ready for sea, and cleaner probably than they had ever been.

A Chinaman knows his master when he meets him—he has wits enough for that—and right well did they labour to appease the wrath of such a tyrant as

was Ping Sang.

Each one thought that the safety of his head and his pigtail depended upon his exertions, and no greater stimulus was required. Though a Chinaman may not dread death, he dislikes the idea of the preliminary pain sufficiently strongly.

At any rate, they coaled our five ships with a speed which could not be equalled by the smartest ship in the Channel Fleet.

During this time we doctors were extremely busy, and, more by good luck than by excessive skill, the wounded progressed favourably.

They were all aboard the *Hoi Feng*—the steamer I had converted into a hospital ship for them—and did extremely well. Pattison was convalescent in ten days. Saunderson and little Cummins joined him soon after, and all three were always ready to greet me cheerily whenever I climbed up the side, Cummins chuckling hugely, and annoyingly, at having "dodged the doctors", because he knew well that I had at first thought his arm would have to come off.

Young Glover rather worried me. The boy's wounds would not heal properly, and the wound in the chest must have penetrated more deeply than I, at first, had thought, because he developed some pleurisy on that side.

Helston's broken arm was also on the way to recovery, and the rest in harbour and the comparative immunity from worry did him a vast amount of good.

I took him for walks ashore every day when it did not rain, but was always careful to land on the side opposite to the town, and never went anywhere near One Gun Hill or Hopkins's bungalow. He always made great efforts to talk about every subject under the sun, but before we had gone far he inevitably reverted to the one subject—Milly. It was slightly tedious, and tried me considerably; but the man's whole existence was centred round her, so I suppose it was natural.

That did not make it any the less boring, however.

Our people had been for a month on salt provisions, but we were able to supply them now with fresh vegetables from the island, and killed the few oxen and goats we could find to give them fresh meat.

There had been many fowls on the island, but, unfortunately, during the first two days, the coolies had eaten them all.

However, there were plenty of pheasants and pigeons in the woods, and from somewhere or other guns appeared—every officer seemed to have brought one, though little did any of us think that we should get any sport—and shooting-parties landed every day and were so successful, that the wounded on board the *Hoi Feng* fairly revelled in fresh game.

The fresh meat and the vegetables did probably more good than all our doctors' skill; at any rate, we attributed the excellent progress they made to this change of diet—and rightly, I think.

Eventually the weather moderated, and Helston sent the *Sylvia* to Shanghai to telegraph his dispatches to Peking and to the Admiralty at home, to purchase more surgical dressings and more cattle, and to await instructions from England before returning.

Ping Sang went with her.

Very glad, too, we were to get rid of him, for the old gentleman had got "on our nerves", and we had begun to dislike him intensely. Without a spark of humanity, and unable to sympathize with our heavy losses, he showed by his manner, even if not by his actual words, that he regarded us practically as his employees, and, now that our work was accomplished, was only too anxious to see us started on our way home. According to agreement with the Admiralty, the cost of the personnel of the expedition would cease when he had sent us to Hong-Kong, so it was quite natural that he should try to hasten our departure. However, he showed so little consideration for everybody that we hated him.

He was also much incensed at Helston's absolute refusal to allow his men to aid in refitting the captured ships; but Helston rightly considered that they deserved a rest after their three months' hard work, and a right good time did they have, leave being given after morning "divisions" to every man not actually required on board, and they indulged themselves to their hearts' content in securing trophies, playing football, seining for fish, and scrambling about the island.

What strange beings blue-jackets and marines are!

They asked to be allowed to mount guard over the graves on One Gun Hill during the time the squadron remained, and worked out all the details themselves. Helston found their arrangements such that every man in the squadron would at one time or other do his turn of duty on that plateau, and the only alteration he made in the scheme was to detail two midshipmen for duty there in charge of the hilltop, changing them every twenty-four hours.

Many of the men also went ashore in their working suits, and the blacksmiths and the armourers obtained permission to take their tools with them.

We could see from the ship that they were working round the big Krupp gun, but did not interfere, and in about ten days they asked Helston and myself to go up there. We found that they had constructed a stout iron fence, enclosing the gun-pit and the graves, planted small fir-trees all round it, and actually built a solid stone cairn supporting a great boulder of some hard rock. It had evidently come from the beach at the foot of the hill; but we never asked how they had managed to haul it up, though we shrewdly suspected that they had forced the coolies to do this for them.

They had smoothed and polished the faces of this boulder, and on them had engraved the names of all the men buried there. On one face were also the names

of those killed previously—during the fight south of Hong-Kong and during the operations outside the island.

Strange fellows they are, for, probably, if Helston had given them orders to do this, the work would not have been carried out half so substantially.

They were all up there to show it to Helston. Every man in the squadron had done a little, so they told me. Helston made a speech, and everybody was vastly pleased with himself—with justice, too, for the railings and the monument were stout enough to stand unattended for years.

The *Sylvia* returned a day or two afterwards with the news that the Chinese Government was sending a transport with blue-jackets and officers to take over our ships, and that when this was done we should be immediately taken down to Hong-Kong and sent home.

She brought a mail which she had found waiting for us at Shanghai. There was nothing for me, as usual, except a couple of bills. Telegrams came for Helston from the Admiralty congratulating him and the expedition on its success, and also the Queen had done us the honour of telegraphing her congratulations, condolence at our losses, and expressions of sympathy with the wounded.

These two telegrams were immediately signalled round the fleet, and it was rather pleasant to know that they had been sent off from England only three days since.

Helston made a big ceremony of the reading of the Queen's telegram, "dressed ship", and "fell in" the crew of the *Laird* on the quarter-deck, making them a speech after they had heard the telegram, and calling for three cheers for "The Queen". The feeling of personal loyalty to the Queen was always so intense that one invariably felt that the cheers were completely genuine. Every man Jack yelled his cheers till he was hoarse.

Helston went from the *Laird* to each of the ships in turn and repeated the ceremony, returning so extremely pleased with himself that I conjectured rightly that he had repeated the speech as well.

We had nothing now to do but wait for the transport, and it appeared at last, a great lumbering steamer, the *Moi Wa*, crowded with Chinese blue-jackets.

"Ping Sang must have hustled them at Peking," said Helston to me, evidently surprised at the promptness of the Chinese Admiralty. "He knows we are anxious to get home, and did his best for us, I expect."

"Did his best for us? For himself, you mean!" I answered. "He doesn't care a twopenny rap for our feelings, but wants to get rid of us and the cost of our pay and food. Why, I actually heard the old miser ask the Paymaster whether he would have to pay the men left behind at Hong-Kong wounded; and the Paymaster told me that Ping Sang also asked him to let him know what was the total daily pay of the officers and men killed on One Gun Hill, and when

he learnt it he rubbed his hands with delight—the fat, oily brute—and said, 'Five pounds a day, fifty dollars a day, nearly four hundred dollars a week', and went off chuckling."

"You don't make allowance for him, Doc."

"No, I don't," I replied shortly, "and I cannot either."

How we all managed to pack ourselves into that transport I cannot imagine, but we did somehow or other after she had been cleaned out, and, amid much firing of salutes from the Chinese now aboard our old ships, we slowly steamed out of the harbour three days later, lumbered through the dark entrance-channel and between the forts which had kept us at bay for so long, and turned our bows southward.

We all felt a pang of regret at leaving the ships which had been our homes for such an exciting three months, and I think everybody came on deck to watch One Gun Hill sink slowly beneath the horizon, and was somewhat silent for the rest of the day.

We anchored off the dockyard at Hong-Kong four days afterwards. A most uncomfortable passage it was, and one of the first persons to come over the side was Harrington, the sub-lieutenant of "No. 1", who had been so badly scalded and kept in hospital. He was practically well, and only rather sad that he had been unable to accompany us.

Helston and I, as soon as we could manage it, took rooms at the Peak Hotel, taking Jenkins with us and Hi Ling as well, for I meant to keep my eye on that man and see him safely in England, in case there was any legal trouble about Hopkins's will.

A big cruiser left for home almost immediately, and the crew of the *Strong Arm* took passage in her. Bannerman went with them, of course, and very glad we were to see the last of him. I know that I was.

The remainder of us were ordered home by the next intermediate P. & O., and we had five days to wait for her. These five days were full of troublesome annoyances to me, because the colony, from the Governor downwards, especially the Chinese merchants, fêted us as I certainly had never been fêted before and trust never will be again. However, I managed to avoid most of the entertainments, and spent most of my time playing golf in the Happy Valley, and left all those things to Helston, who, on the average, must have made three speeches a day, so enjoyed himself thoroughly.

Cummins, Saunderson, and Glover I had sent up to the officer's sanatorium, and the last two were practically well before we left.

Eventually our P. & O. arrived, and we made a comfortable voyage home in her, only marred by the foolish enthusiasm of the people at Singapore, Colombo, and Aden, who gave grand dinners in our honour, and wanted more speeches.

They did not get them from me, but Helston was in his element.

By the time we reached Port Said, Cummins had resumed duty, little the worse for his terrible wound, and Helston, frightfully eager to reach England, especially Fareham, as quickly as possible, telegraphed to the Admiralty and obtained permission to go overland. He arrived in London a week before we did.

I joined him at his hotel as soon as possible, and found Jenkins there in a bland state of happiness.

"The Cap'en is just doing 'imself a treat, sir," he told me. "That there Miss Milly 'as come to 'er senses at last, sir, and all's going to end 'appy like. The Admiral 'as been and read 'The Articles of War' to 'er, I reckon, and the Cap'en 'e won't be wanting Mrs. J. and myself to keep house for him no longer."

"Have you seen your wife yet?" I asked him; and his face dropped as he answered somewhat mournfully, "Well, sir, I ain't finished my leave yet."

Helston came in presently, looking marvellously well and full of animation.

"It's all right, old chap," he sang out, as he nearly wrenched my hand off. "Milly is going to marry me directly I'm promoted, and, from what they tell me at the Admiralty, I shall be promoted in July without a doubt. You must be my best man, old chap; and the Admiral is bringing her up for a week or so, and we four will have a jolly good time before we go down to Fareham."

My "jolly good time" meant, as I expected, looking after the Admiral and listening to his endless and pointless yarns. However, I did not mind for once in a way, and should have quite enjoyed myself if Milly herself had seemed happy. But, poor little soul, I could see that she was not, and one evening, when we happened to be alone in the private sitting-room, after a very tiring day, she suddenly came over to where I was reading the evening-paper, buried her head on my shoulder, and burst out crying. She broke my spectacles, too, which was a nuisance. As far as I could gather between her sobs, she was feeling frightfully lonely, wanted a mother, which, poor little soul, she had not had since she was two years old, and didn't want to marry anyone.

I sent her off to bed, and went out to buy another pair of spectacles.

I had an idea that the old Admiral would not be so keen for her to marry Helston if he had known that Hopkins had left her all his money, and told him all about it; but I had misjudged the old man, for the first thing he said was: "Well, Helston deserves it, if any man does, and Helston shall have it, too," so I could say no more.

Next morning Milly was in the most boisterous spirits.

CHAPTER XXVI
Home Again

Home at Last!—The Big Gun Again—Milly's Wedding

Mr. Midshipman Glover tells of his home-coming

Hurrah! How jolly good it is to be back at home once more! You shore-going loafers don't know what it is like to feel that in an hour or two you will drop the Ushant light and pick up the Eddystone. It's pretty bad sometimes when it is the other way about, and you are going away and don't know how long it will be before you will see Old England again; but it's just worth it all to come back, see the Eddystone sticking up out of the sea, and then make Plymouth and the green hills of Devonshire and of Cornwall.

You people who stay at home all your lives don't know what England is like till you have lost sight of her.

Toddles, Mellins, and I, we were just fizzing over with happiness, and stayed up all the night, and had a bet as to who would spot the Eddystone first, the officer of the watch on board that P. & O. letting us stay in a corner of the bridge so long as we didn't make a row and move about much.

Toddles saw it first, so Mellins and I had to stand a jolly good blow-out at the very first opportunity. I was all right now, as right as rain, and had been quite well for a fortnight at least.

We ran into Plymouth Sound early in the morning; they sent out Admiralty tugs to take all our people ashore. We three midshipmen got leave till night, and the three of us had a splendid time. Mellins swore that he had never eaten so much in his life, and we all hoped that he hadn't—even he was rather sorry for himself afterwards.

They let us go on leave next day. The Admiralty had given us a month as a special reward (whoop! wasn't that luck?), and it was just splendid going home.

My Pater lives in Hampshire, and has a jolly snug house right in the country, miles away from the railway. Effie, my little sister, met me in a dog-cart and drove me home. She looked as smart as a new pin, but you can't imagine how shabby I was, for, somehow or other, I had lost all my plain clothes, and had to borrow odds and ends from Toddles, and they were much too small for me, and my boots were Purser's Crabs[#], done up with string. But it didn't matter a cent.

[#] Boots of Admiralty pattern supplied to the men from the Paymaster's stores.

Effie made her pony go like the wind, I can tell you, and my battered old uniform tin case went jumbling into the road—it couldn't damage it any more, though—and we had to lash it in.

You feel such a man when you get into the train, and, well—when you get out at the sleepy old station and drive along the same old road and meet all the village people you've known ever since you can remember, you feel quite young.

We met Toby, the stable-boy, half a mile from the house, leading the farm horses back from watering, and I couldn't resist this, made Effie stop, jumped on the back of one of them, and raced her home.

She simply flew along, but I overhauled her and won easily, tearing up the drive; and though there were the Pater and my Mother and everybody at the door waiting for me, I couldn't stop the horse, and he turned sharply into the stable-yard and pitched me off into a bush.

Jolly old bush! I'd been pitched into it fifty times.

We sailor men look forward to that day coming home all the time we are away, and it's worth it, I can tell you.

I'd brought everyone of them a present of sorts—a curio from Hong-Kong, or something I had picked up on the island—a rifle from One Gun Hill for the Pater, and a great piece of shell which had burst aboard the *Laird* for my Mother, and she couldn't get it out of her head that that was what had wounded me.

Then and there I had to show them all my wounds—I had four, you know.

First, that little one on my head, which you could find if you looked carefully; and the one on my chest which had given all the trouble, and had left a pretty big scar; and the stab on my leg, and the bullet wound just below it.

Wasn't the Pater proud, and so was Effie; but my Mother burst into tears, and then, I think, we all cried and hugged each other and had a ripping time; and I told them that Toddles and Mellins were coming to spend a fortnight with me, and that Mellins loved sardines and cake—the richer the better—and told Effie she would have to marry one of them, for they were the best fellows in the world,

and she said she would, and so that was all right.

Of course we quieted down afterwards, and then I had to go and show Toby my wounds, and the old housekeeper, and she cried too, and gave me some home-made bread, with honey spread half an inch thick on it, the honey-comb in it too, for she knew I liked that.

And the bed too—same little bed, in the same old attic, with a funny, poky little window looking over the kitchen garden—it had never looked more cosy; and my Mother came up when I turned in, and cried when she saw my pyjamas all in holes, and knelt down by my bed and said her prayers, and I said mine to her, and she cried again, and I blubbered a little, I was so absolutely happy; and Effie came in very early next morning, and we had a jolly good pillow fight.

Good things cannot last for ever. It's just as well too, I expect, or else we should never know they were so good.

Toddles and Mellins came presently, and we had simply a ripping time; but then we were all appointed to different ships, and had to join them at Portsmouth.

I hadn't forgotten Milly and the old Admiral at Fareham, and had taken him the will, as I promised Hopkins. I don't think the lawyers made any difficulty about it, though I believe it took a precious long time to get the money over from America.

Milly wanted to kiss me—I always dreaded that—but I shook her hand hard and edged away; so that didn't come off, and she never tried again. She wanted to know a lot about Hopkins, but she never found out that he had been a pirate and was fighting against us, and I don't think anyone ever told her. I'm sure the Captain never would.

She was properly engaged to him now, and things seemed to be going on very serenely.

I went down to the village and saw him and Dr. Fox, and Jenkins too, in mortal fear of his wife—I guessed that at once—and the Captain asked me to his wedding, which he hoped would take place in August.

Dr. Fox was as grim as ever. He was opening a parcel when I went in, and I heard him say in his snappy voice, "Look what the silly fools have sent me! What a waste of time, and I have nowhere to put the thing."

It was a brass model of the big Krupp gun in its gun-pit, and round the oak stand was a silver plate with the names of all the *Laird's* men on the lower deck who had fought on One Gun Hill.

I myself should have been jolly proud to get it, but Dr. Fox gave one or two funny coughs, and said again, "What silly fools! I shall have to write and thank them, I suppose. I hate writing letters."

I met Mr. Saunderson that day just outside Portsmouth Dockyard, walking along the Hard. He stretched out his huge hand and lifted me half off the ground.

I was glad to see him.

"Don't want you to keep the bullets off now, Glover," he said, and took me into the Keppel's Head and gave me lunch.

I went to sea for the next four months in my new ship, the *Royal Oak*, in the Channel Fleet, and when the July promotions came out it was simply fizzing.

Captain Helston and the Commander had both been promoted to post-captains, and Mr. Parker of "No. 3" and Mr. Lang of "No. 2" to commanders. Collins, the sub of "No. 3", and Harrington of "No. 1", who had tried to save the stokers when the shell burst her boiler, were made lieutenants, and best of all, down at the bottom of the list was "Noted for Early Promotion", and then followed my name, and Toddles's and Mellins's, two more of the *Laird's* midshipmen, and three of the *Strong Arm's*. Dumpling's name wasn't there. Ogston, the Assistant Engineer of the *Laird*, had been promoted a few days before. We were all so glad.

You can imagine how excited I was, and I had to stand a sardine supper that night down in the *Royal Oak's* gun-room.

I knew, too, how frightfully delighted they would be at home, and the very next mail brought a fiver from my Pater.

Pat Jones happened to have been sent to my ship as one of the quarter-masters, and he was just as delighted as I was, and I tried to make him share the fiver with me, but he wouldn't.

However, I know that the Pater is going to look after him and give him a good billet whenever he leaves the service, so that will be all right.

Well, Milly was married in August, up in London, and as the *Royal Oak* happened to be in Portland I managed to get leave, and went up to see the wedding. It was a jolly grand affair, and there were any number of old friends there.

I met Captain Cummins the day before, looking in at a jeweller's shop in Regent Street, with his hands in his pockets and a toothpick in his mouth. He had such a melancholy, comic-looking expression, and he chuckled, just as he always did when he caught sight of me, and took me into the shop to help him to choose something for Milly.

It was a thing she could stick in her hair if she wanted to, or she could divide it in three and fasten it round her neck by a chain, with the big piece under her chin if she wanted to wear it like that. I know he must have given a tremendous amount for it.

He gave me lunch at a swagger club, but didn't talk much. He had just been given command of a ship on the Cape of Good Hope station, and was going to commission her in a week's time.

"Busy laying in a stock of toothpicks, youngster," he chuckled.

I think he was rather down in his luck.

The wedding was a glorious success, and I did think that Milly or any other girl ought to be jolly proud of such a husband as Captain Helston. He looked splendid, though his left arm was still almost helpless, and made a speech at the lunch afterwards; and dear old Toddles—he had managed to get away too—had to reply for the ladies, and we all enjoyed ourselves, except Toddles, who was red and angry for the rest of the day.

Dr. Fox was there, quite genial, for a wonder, and Captain Williams and Mr. Saunderson, and Mr. Parker and Mr. Lang, now both of them commanders.

Mr. Pattison had gone on the Australian station (I felt very sorry for him), but Captain Cummins was there, and made an awfully funny speech, and then went off without saying good-bye to anybody.

Toddles and I managed to fasten a couple of white shoes on the carriage with wire, so that they couldn't get them off, and we made a splendid noise when Captain Helston and Milly drove away.

In the evening Toddles and I went to a theatre—Captain Helston had given us a box all to ourselves—and we did wish that Mellins could have been with us. We had a ripping time. Toddles forgot all about the speech, and we managed to catch the last trains back—he to Portsmouth and I to Portland. He was much more lucky than I was, for his ship was alongside the jetty, and he only had to walk aboard, whilst I had to take a shore boat and pull two miles off to the ship, getting on board at two in the morning, wet through, and had to be up again by six o'clock, as I happened to be signal-midshipman for the week.

I never heard anything more of Ping Sang, though I believe he sent Captain Helston and Dr. Fox two expensive Chinese jars; but about three months after the wedding both Toddles and I got letters from A Tsi, and he sent us each a very quaint carved ivory junk.

We were both jolly pleased with these, and Toddles says he intends handing his junk down to his children as an heirloom.

* * * * * * * *

[Transcriber's note: the source book had running headings on its odd-numbered pages. In this etext, those headings have been combined into an introductory paragraph at the start of each chapter.]

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