THE HERO OF PANAMA

A TALE OF THE GREAT CANAL

By Capt. F. S. Brereton

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By CAPTAIN F. S. BRERETON

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JIM RESCUES PHINEAS BARTON

The Hero of Panama

A Tale of the Great Canal

BY

CAPTAIN F. S. BRERETON

Author of "Under the Chinese Dragon"
"Tom Stapleton, the Boy Scout"
"The Great Aeroplane"
'Indian and Scout"
&c.

ILLUSTRATED BY WILLIAM RAINEY, R.I.

BLACKIE AND SON LIMITED
LONDON GLASGOW AND BOMBAY
1912

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THE HERO OF PANAMA

CHAPTER I

A Post of Responsibility

It was one of those roasting days in the Caribbean, when, in spite of a steady trade wind, the air felt absolutely motionless, and the sea took on an oily surface from which the sun flashed in a thousand directions, in rays that seemed to have been lent some added fierceness by the reflection.

Squish! Squelsh! The ground surf, which was hardly perceptible from the coast, and scarcely so from the deck of a liner, was apparent enough from the old tub which wallowed in it. She rolled in a manner that was sickening to behold, until at times her scupper ports took in water, then a surge of the ocean would take her in a different direction; she would dive forward, dipping her nose in the oily sea till the hawser which had been passed out over her stern, secured to a large anchor, brought her up with a jerk and tumbled her backwards with her stern rail awash.

Ugh! It was enough to make a white man groan.

Even a nigger would have been inclined to grumble. But the Chinamen aboard the tub seemed, if anything, rather to enjoy this rocking. One of them stood almost amidships, his feet wide apart to preserve his balance, while he gripped the handle of the pump he was working, and turned it over and over with a monotonous regularity that seemed to match with his surroundings.

The man, who was barefooted, boasted of the very lightest of clothing, and wore his pigtail rolled in a coil at the back of his head. Other protection against the roasting sun he had none. Indeed, to look at him, he hardly seemed to need it, while the hot blast which came from the adjacent land passed over him without any apparent effect. Ching Hu was in his element.

"Nicee place, missee," he sang out after a while. "Plenty nicee and warmee. Stay long? No? Velly solly."

On he went, turning the handle without a pause, while there crept into his slanting eyes just a trace of disappointment. He sighed ever so gently, then assumed his accustomed expression. Not the wisest man in all the world could have said whether Ching Hu were happy or otherwise.

Just about ten feet from him, sheltered beneath a narrow awning of dirty canvas, a girl stood on the deck of the small ship, or, rather, she occupied a projection which overhung the water. Had this vessel been a liner, one would have guessed that this projection was the gangway from which the ladder descended towards the water to enable passengers to come aboard. But here a rapid inspec-

tion proved it to be merely a platform built out from the side, and suspended some eight feet from the surface of the ocean. From it a clear view of the ship's side was to be obtained, and, in these wonderfully clear waters, of the sandy bottom of the lagoon at whose entrance the vessel was moored. And it was upon the latter, upon the bottom of this heaving ocean, that Sadie Partington's eyes were directed.

"Ching," she called out suddenly, turning towards him, "I think they'll be coming up right now. Call the boys."

"You sure, missee? Yes? Velly well."

Ching Hu raised his eyebrows quaintly as he asked the question, and on receiving a nod from the girl, who at once turned to stare into the water, he raised his voice and called aloud in a sing-song style which would have made a stranger laugh. "Tom, Tom!" he shouted. "You comee now wid Sam. Wanted plenty soon."

A black face popped instantly from the caboose leading to the cabin—a big, round face, the face of a negro of some thirty years of age. Then the shoulders came into view, and following them the whole figure of the man. He stood for a moment or two on the topmost step, balancing himself against the edge of the caboose, one hand gripping a plate, while the other vigorously polished it with a cloth. It gave one an opportunity of thoroughly inspecting this negro, and promptly one was filled with a feeling of pleasure. It was not because Tom was handsome, for he was the reverse of that. Nature had, indeed, liberally provided him with nose and lips, so much so that those two portions of his physiognomy were

the most prominent at first sight. But if his nose were somewhat flattened and decidedly wide, and his lips undoubtedly big and prominent, Tom was possessed of other features which counterbalanced these detractions. His eyes seemed to attract attention at once. They seemed to smile at all and sundry on the instant, and flash a message to them. They were shining, honest eyes, which looked as if they could do nothing else but smile. Then the man's mouth completed his appearance of joviality; between the lips a gleaming double row of ivories were always to be seen, for Tom's smile was permanent. The smallest matter was sufficient to increase it, when the negro's ample face would be divided by a gaping chasm, a six-foot smile that could not be easily banished—the prelude to a roar of mirth and of deep-toned, spontaneous laughter. As for the rest of him, Tom was a monster. Six-feet-three in height, he was broad and thickset, and beside the dainty figure of Sadie Partington had the appearance of a veritable elephant.

"What you say, Chinaboy?" he asked, regarding the placid individual working the pump. "Come plenty soon, eh?"

"Ye-e-s. Missee say now."

"Den dinner be spoiled for sure. Taters boiled to rags ef I wait little minute. Stew no good ef left on fire for longer dan five minute. Missee, what you say dey doin'? They ain't gwine ter move yet?"

"Call Sam; you know as well as I do that the stew won't be spoiled. Come now, they're going to signal."

Sadie turned upon the negro with a frown, then again bent her eyes towards the bottom of the sea; for the girl was always ill at ease when the divers were working. Somehow or other, since her brothers had taken to this particular profession—and she had accompanied them upon their various trips—she had felt impelled to take upon herself the duty of watching them at work. She was only eleven now, though tall and old for her age, and for a year past she had almost daily taken her post on that tiny gangway to watch the two figures moving in the water below. For hours together she would be on the deck of this little boat, careless of the sun and heat, superintending the action of the pump and waiting for signals from the divers. And to Ching Hu, Tom, and the others her veriest nod was law. It was useless to argue with her: Sadie had a way of stamping her small foot which meant a great deal, and set all the men running to do her bidding. It was, therefore, with some show of alacrity that Tom prepared to follow his instructions.

"You Chinaboy," he commanded, grinning at a second Chinaman, who occupied the little galley down below, "yo make sure not boil de taters too much, and sniff dat stew. Not burn um, or, by de poker, Tom make yo smile. Yo comprenez what I say? Eh?"

He grinned one of his most expansive grins, and the Chinaman responded in a similar manner. He jerked his head in Tom's direction, thrusting it out of the galley door as he did so, and sending his pig-tail flying. His little, pig-like eyes rolled while he brandished an enormous wooden spoon. "Ling

knowee eberyting," he lisped. "See to dinner fine. Hab de stew beautiful."

"Den yo come along, yo Sam, lazy feller," shouted Tom at the pitch of his voice. "Whar yo got to, boy? I gives yo de biggest—oh, so yo dare!" he exclaimed, as a negro came from the after gangway, where a small ladder led to some of the men's quarters. "Yo's been sleepin'."

Tom held out an accusing finger, and gripped his comrade by the bare arm; for, without shadow of doubt, Sam's eyes were blinking. He had the appearance of a man who has just awakened. But the negro shook his head vigorously.

"Yo let go my arm, Tom, yo big elephant," he said, grinning widely. "I'se been down b'low fetchin' a bucket o' coal. What yo want?"

"Missie dar order us both; de boys is comin' up."

Tom still gripped the second negro, and playfully lifted him from off his feet as if he were merely a child, then he set him down against the ship's rail, while the two at once stared into the water. Truly they might have been described as brothers, so very alike were Tom and Sam in appearance. In fact, had their two heads been alone protruding from a window even Sadie would have been troubled to distinguish between them; but the similarity ended with the faces. Tom was huge, Sam was barely five feet in height, and slim in proportion; but he seemed to have inherited all the dignity which Tom had missed. Merry enough at all times, Sam was inclined to be a trifle pompous, and of a Sunday, when in port, his get-up generally was sufficient to open the eyes of everyone who beheld him. Now, however, his

feet were bare, and he wore but a shirt and loose cotton trousers.

Let us join them at the rail and stare over into the water. Beneath the oily surface a wide stretch of yellowish-white sand was spread out on every hand, till it became a greenish tinge, and was finally lost in the blurr of the ocean; but directly beneath the ship it sparkled in the sun, while one could easily see the tiniest prominence, the few rocks existing here and there, and the deep shadow of the ship riding to her anchors. A derrick was rigged out over the rail, close to the platform occupied by Sadie, and from this was suspended a long wooden ladder, with ponderous weights attached to its lower end. Close at hand, through a sort of stirrup, passed a couple of ropes, while the piping conveying air to those below ran out over the gangway. It was there, too, that the smaller signal lines were attached.

As Tom and Sam looked over, their eyes caught the reflection from two metal objects down below, and very soon the latter became apparent as the helmets of the divers. They could see the two—for there were that number at work—seated on a huge boulder, side by side, while within some fifteen feet of them were the broken timbers and debris of what had once upon a time been a vessel.

"They've sat like that this past fifteen minutes," explained Sadie. "Seems that there's nothing to be found in the wreck. They'll be wanting to be hauled aboard in a minute. There's George moving."

As she spoke, one of the helmets swung slowly backwards, while the eyes inside peered aloft. Then

there came a jerk at the life line. Sadie instantly responded.

"Coming up," she said. "Get a hold of the tackle, boys."

She still kept her place, superintending operations, while Tom and Sam together gripped the tackle, and, having pulled gently at first, began to haul lustily. In a little while one of the divers had reached the foot of the weighted ladder. At once the tackle was slacked off, while all watched the man slowly ascending from the depths, dipping deeper as the swell rolled the ship, and coming nearer the surface as she returned to an even keel. Then, with a squelch, the top of the shining helmet broke through the surface, the man reached the rail, and was lifted aboard. Sadie proceeded at once to loosen the screws securing the helmet to the rest of the dress, and lifted the huge metal globe from off the shoulders of the seated man.

"What luck, George?" she asked impetuously, staring anxiously into his face, and noticing how tired the man seemed, and how sallow he was. "You found something? It's going to pay?"

"Not if we work a year at it," came the answer in a dull, despondent tone of voice. "Help me to get this dress off, Sadie, my dear. I'm burning in it. I've felt smothered, so hot that I couldn't work down below. Jim's coming up at once."

The second diver was, in fact, already being hauled up, and anyone who happened to have watched the first make his ascent from the depths would at once have remarked the difference between the two. For the diver who now sat on a box on

the swaying deck of the small vessel was bigger than he who was ascending; at the same time his movements had been far less active. The one now nearing the top of the ladder clambered up the rungs with the agility of a cat, in spite of the fact that every foot he rose made the weights he carried on his back and chest and on his boots all the heavier. His helmet shot out of the water with a burst, as the vessel rolled heavily, pulling the ladder up, only to throw it back at once.

"You hold on dar tight, yo, Massa Jim," shouted Tom, as he leaned over the rail. "Yo tink dis all a beanfeast. Not so when de ship roll so much. S'pose yo lose de hold. Buzz! Yo go right down to de bottom and stay dere fer good. Huh! Come in."

He gripped the extended hand of the diver, hauled the boy aboard, and promptly seated him on a second box. Three minutes later the helmet was off, and one had an opportunity of contrasting the young fellow who had appeared with the diver who had first of all ascended.

The latter was a young man of twenty-five perhaps, and, as we have said, was decidedly sallow and unhealthy-looking; in fact, natural good looks were marred not a little by his complexion. But with the one who had been addressed as Jim it was different. The young fellow was barely seventeen years of age, and his rosy cheeks displayed the fact that diving did not disagree with him. Then, too, his voice was so different. It was crisp and laughing, and anything but despondent; while, when he had rid himself of his diving weights and of his

heavy boots, and was on his feet, one saw that he was of a good height, held himself well, and moved with the quick step that one might have expected from having seen him clamber from the depths of the ocean. But there was concern in his face when Sadie called him.

"George don't feel over well, Jim," she called out. "He said a minute back that he was burning hot; now he's downright shivering."

"Fever," said Jim promptly, taking his brother's hand. "Tom, there, just leave Sam and Ching to haul in the tackle. I want you."

"Sah, what for? De master ill?"

Even his smile was almost gone as he looked at George with eyes which were startled and wide open, for the happy-go-lucky Tom, so unused to sorrow or sickness, could tell at a glance that his young employer was anything but himself.

"Get along and fetch a bed on deck," commanded Jim; "then rig a shelter over it. Best place it right aft; there's more room, and you'll be able to pull the awnings over better. George'll stay on deck; it's too hot down below."

Pulling his diving suit off hurriedly, he helped his sister to disrobe the sick man; then, with Tom at George's head and Jim at his feet, they carried him aft and laid him on the bed already prepared. Sadie at once took her seat beside him, armed with a fan, while the negro, Tom, hastened to fetch water from the big canvas sack in which it was placed every day to cool. A strong dose of quinine was given to the sick man, and thereafter there was little to do but to watch him and tend to his immediate needs.

"We'll get up anchor and make right off for Colon," said Jim, as he stood beside his sister, some little distance from the bed. "There's nothing down there to salve, and we're wasting time and money. Better get back and see if there isn't another job to be had. This salvage work ain't paying us at all. We're losing heavily. Guess we'll have to get back on to the land."

Even he was a little despondent as he spoke, for matters had indeed not been going well for George, Jim, and Sadie. Americans born, one only of the three could remember their mother; for she had died shortly after Sadie's birth. But their father was a constant and pleasant memory to them all, for he had been with them till six months previously. A diver by profession, Mr. Silas Partington had managed to save a few dollars, and had bought up a salvage plant, with which for a while he had done excellent business. Then he had met with a grave misfortune. He and those whom he employed had worked for weeks at the salving of a sunken steamer, and had actually brought her to the surface and commenced to tow her into shallow water, when an accident had happened. The bulkhead which they had bolted across the huge rent made in the ship's side by a collision that had sent her to the bottom had, for some unforeseen reason, blown out. The air which had been forced into the vessel, and which had expelled nearly all the water in her, thus bringing her to the surface, had escaped at once, and down she had gone under the ocean; but on that occasion she had found her bed in a deep hollow, where diving was impossible.

"It just broke Father," said George, when describing the thing to Jim. "He lost heavily. There were weeks of work paid for, besides valuable plant lost. It brought him down to this."

"This" was the purchase of an old vessel, and the seeking of salvage jobs along the Caribbean coast. Silas had brought his children with him—George because he was already a partner, Jim and Sadie because he could not afford to keep them on the mainland. The cruise along the coast of Mexico had proved disastrous, for Silas had been blown overboard during one of those terrible tornadoes which occasionally sweep the gulf, and George was left to fend for the family—an undertaking he found none too easy. Jobs were few and far between, and that wretched Caribbean swell, together with a shifting, sandy bottom, made salvage work extremely difficult. The coffers of the Partington family were, indeed, already very empty, and the time was at hand when the ship must be sold to pay wages. And now George was down with fever.

"It's this hole of a place," growled Jim, as he thought the matter out that evening. "A man can't work off this fever-stricken coast and escape it. We'll get back to America. Somehow or other we'll manage to get work."

Early that evening George again was in a high, burning fever, and needed careful watching; but as the night wore on he quietened down. During the first hours of the morning the terrible burning again seized the sick man, and in a moment, as it seemed, he awoke in a frenzy and leaped from his bed. Dashing Jim aside as if he were a child, and knocking

Sam to the deck, he leaped over the rail and splashed into the water. In the dim light they watched him striking out for the shore, and as they followed in the dinghy they saw him clamber on to the mud banks and enter the forest. But though Jim searched high and low, and lay off that pestilential part for a solid week, often repeating his search in the forest, there was never any trace of his brother. The sick man was utterly swallowed up by the jungle.

"Dead?" asked Sadie sorrowfully, her young cheeks hollowed by the trouble.

Jim nodded. "Sure," he said, with emphasis. "Dropped in some corner and never rose again. There's no manner of use searching further. Sadie dear, we've got to get ashore and set up somewhere for ourselves. I've got to be father and brother and everything to you."

That, indeed, was the position of affairs. Sadie was too young to look to her own fortunes, while Jim was none too old. But an American lad can make as good a struggle as anyone: Jim swore that he would. He had long since tried to remember friends of his father's, but had given the matter up as hopeless. There were only Ching, Tom, and Sam, all three of whom had been employed on the salvage plant, and were old servants.

"Too poor to help us, anyway," he thought. "They'll easily get employment, and will go their own way. I'll have to hunt out a job in New York. I'll take anything that'll give me enough to feed and give a roof to Sadie. Besides, there's the boat; there'll be a little left for her when all the wages are paid."

"And I ain't gwine ter be dismissed, not nohow," said Tom, when Jim told the jolly negro of his plans. "Me and Sam and Ching's been doin' a jaw. We're agoin' to hold on to you and missie. We're all a-goin' ter get work together till you've made a pile fer yerself and can give us employment. Yo ain't no right ter order us away."

Thus it happened that Jim, having sold the boat and effects at Colon, went aboard a coaster bound for New York, Sadie and Tom and Sam, with the Chinaman, accompanying him.

"There's five hundred dollars in this bag," he told his sister. "That'll keep the wolf away till we've had time to look round. Don't you fear, Sadie; we'll land upon something good yet, and, who knows, one of these days, perhaps, I'll make that pile that Tom's always talking about. But guess it'll want a heap of doing."

CHAPTER II

En route for New York

"WANTED, hands to help in building construction down town, New York."

The advertisement caught Jim's eye as soon as he looked at the newspaper which happened to be aboard the coaster on which he and Sadie and the others were voyaging to New York, and fascinated him.

"See here, Sadie," he said. "It'll be just the thing. There must be heaps of jobs which I could do, even though I have no knowledge of building. Carrying bricks and so on, you know. There will be good wages, and the money will keep us going while I look round. Eh?"

"And perhaps there'll be a firm working in the docks round New York," ventured the wise Sadie. "Then you'd be able to get a job at diving. I shouldn't mind there; it isn't as dangerous. This building work would give Tom and Sam and Ching jobs too."

"Sure!" exclaimed Jim, beginning at once to feel less despondent. Not that this young American was apt to be downcast for long. But we must tell the whole truth concerning him. The heavy responsibilities so suddenly cast upon his shoulders, and the persistent ill fortune of the family, had somewhat upset

his nerves, and robbed him of a little of his accustomed jollity. Still, with five hundred dollars behind him, and this advertisement before his eyes, he felt that the far future might be left to take care of itself; for the immediate prospects were brightening.

"We'll take the job, the whole lot of us," he said, as they sat on the deck in the dusk discussing matters. "We'll take a little tenement down in the working quarters. You'll housekeep, Sadie, and we four will go and earn dollars. Gee! There's no frightening me. This thing was beginning to get on top of me, and bear me down; but now, not a bit of it. I'll win out; one of these days I'll own a salvage plant of my own."

It is better to face difficulties brightly and with full courage than tackle them half-heartedly. Jim felt all the stronger for his courage, and paced the deck alone that night with hopes raised, and with full assurance for the future.

"I'll get a widow woman, or someone respectable like that, to come and help Sadie keep house," he said to himself. "It'll be company for her while I'm away. And of course there's her education: she'll have to have more schooling. We've rather forgotten that she's still only a child, for she behaves as if she were grown up."

That was, indeed, one of the pathetic items in the history of Jim's family. His father, Silas, had been pressed as it were into a course of action which meant a sudden cessation of all home life for Sadie, and which brought the child amongst grown-up men when she should have been at school, with some of her own sex about her, and playmates to romp with.

"Get life belts, put them on, and then go on deck," said Jim shortly. "Sadie, take charge of this bag of dollars. I'm going up to see what's happened."

Conscious that he had done all that was possible, and that Sadie was now in excellent hands, he turned and made for the companion, directing Tom to take the whole party on deck, and wait for him near the companion. With a few active steps he was there himself, and able to look about him. There was a slight sea fog enveloping the ship, through which, a hundred yards away, shone the lights of a steamer. Shouts came from her deck, while her siren was blowing frantically. On board the craft on which he himself stood there was also considerable noise and confusion. A couple of lights were swaying right forward, and running there Jim saw that a man was being slung over the bows in a rope's end. Right aft, where were quarters for steerage passengers, there was the sound of many voices, shouts, and hoarse cries of alarm, and once the shrill shriek of a woman.

"How'd it happen?" he asked one of the deck hands standing near him.

"How do most of these here things happen, siree?" came the answer. "This here fog did it. The look-outs war bright enough; but reckon the two ships jest bumped clean into the same course, and didn't see one another till their bows was touchin'. We're holed badly, I'm thinking. You take my advice, and get hold of your traps."

Jim leaned over the rail, and stared at the man swinging in the rope's end. The lantern he carried showed a huge rent in the bows of the ship, while the sound of rushing water came to his ears.

"Six feet by five, down under the water line, mostly," came from the man. "You'd better be slinging me over a sailcloth or something, or else the water'll fill her."

"They'll never do it," thought Jim, staring at the rent. "I've been enough on board ships to know what this means. I'll get back and see that Sadie's safe."

He ran back to the companion, where he discovered his friends seated on the hatchway.

"Tom," he said, "come along below with me. We shall have to take to the boats, and the sooner we've food with us the better. Lead along to the galley."

"Purser's store, sah; I knows very well. You say we gwine ter leave de ship."

"She's holed badly; she's bound to founder, I guess."

"Den de Lor' help us!" groaned Tom. "You listen here, sah. Forty Spaniard workmen living aft. Dey play de dickens. Dey fight for de boats. Not like dat at all. Tom say dat dere be trouble."

The mention of the men who had taken passage aft caused Jim some amount of perturbation. He had noticed them as he came aboard, and it was because of their presence on the ship that he had taken passage for himself and Sadie amidships.

"I'd have gone steerage with her had it not been for those dagoes," he had told himself. "There's little enough money to spare nowadays for luxuries; but they're a rough crowd, and I wouldn't like Sadie to be amongst them."

It had followed that he and Sadie had taken berths

amidships, while Tom and Sam and Ching had, as a natural course, got places aft. Jim realized, now that Tom reminded him of the fact, that the Spaniards on the ship might prove a greater danger to them than the foundering of the vessel.

"Guess they're a rough crowd, and likely to lose their heads," he said aloud. "Let's get some food quick, Tom, and then see what's happening. We'll keep close together."

They ran along the alley way towards the purser's store, and, finding the door closed, Tom burst it in with a mighty heave from his shoulder. Jim snatched one of the hanging oil lanterns, and together they made a hurried survey of the contents.

"Here's a sack; hold it open, Tom," commanded Jim.

He ran his eyes round the shelves, then, without hesitation, pitched tins of preserved beef, of milk, and of other foodstuffs into the sack. In little more than a minute it was full to the neck.

"Get ahead," said Jim promptly. "I'll bring along this cask."

He stuffed a metal cup into one pocket, and hoisted a small cask of beer on to his shoulder. Had he been able to make a careful selection he would have sought for water; but in an emergency beer would do as well as anything, and already he knew that time was very limited. Indeed the ship had already a bad list on her; she leaned so much to one side that walking was difficult, while she was down at the head so that his return to the companion was made uphill. But in a little while the two arrived, panting, at the top of the companion, Tom bearing the lantern with him.

"Holy poker! but dere's the duce of a row aft,

massa," sang out Sam, seeing them arrive. "I tink dem men is trying to put out de boats."

"How many are there?" asked Jim quickly.

"Seven, I tink. One just here; the others aft. Not like de noise dem scum make."

Jim had never been aboard a vessel under similar circumstances, and had therefore never experienced the confusion which follows a collision. He had read of such affairs, and had marvelled at the wonderful coolness and discipline maintained in some cases. Then he had heard of very opposite results, where men had lost their heads, and where they had fought, each for his own individual safety, as if they were wild beasts. Remembering the class of individual who had taken passage aboard this coaster, he could not help but wonder whether discipline would be maintained on this occasion. The shouts, the babel of sounds coming from the stern, seemed to indicate the opposite.

"See here, Tom," he said, when he had listened for a while. "You and Ching will stay right here by this boat, taking care of Sadie. Just give a look to the tackle, swing her out, and put all the grub on board. Best put Sadie there also. Sam and I'll get along right now to see what's being done. The captain maybe'll want some help. Those fellows along there appear to be fighting like demons."

"Den you git along, sah. Me and Sadie'll be all right. Ching Hu, yo Chinaboy, jest you hoist dat cask aboard, and mind yo don't let um tumble."

That was the best of the huge negro; he could be depended upon to keep his head, while his devotion to Sadie was without question. Jim felt no

qualms as to his sister's security as he dashed forward again, Sam close at his heels. A minute later he met a little group coming towards him swiftly. It was the captain of the vessel, with his two officers, and some half-dozen men.

"It's a case with us," Jim heard him say as the group came to a halt.

"She'll be down in half an hour, and that don't give us too much time to get ready. Mr. Jarvis, jest hop down to the engine room and tell 'em all to come up. Quartermaster, guess you'd best make a round of all the cabins; there's time for that, and we want to see that no one's left. You others had best come along with me: we've got to fix those fellows aft. They tell me they're fighting like rats to get the boats out. We'll have to stop 'em. Glad I am there's so few women aboard. What about the young lady amidships?"

"She's safe, Captain," broke in Jim at once. "I've put her in charge of one of my negroes and the Chinaman. She's been placed in the boat by the companion, and we've got food and drink there also. I'm ready to come along and help you aft."

There was a lantern swinging in the captain's hand. He lifted it coolly, for there was no trace of flurry about this solid-looking man, and closely scrutinized Jim's features.

"Gee!" he exclaimed, reaching out to shake his hand. "You're the sort of chap a skipper's glad to know. You've seen to the safety of the sister, as is only right, and now you come along shoulder to shoulder with us. Guess there'll be bad trouble back there."

"Guess there will," answered Jim. "They're fighting, if one can judge by the noise."

"Jest like tigers, and they'll take some quelling. Look here; get a hold of anything handy and don't stand no nonsense. We can't afford to take lip from any of those Spaniards. Ef a man shows a knife, lay him flat on the deck. Come along."

He led the way swiftly along the deck, and the handful of men with him followed closely, picking up any likely weapon as they went. Jim possessed himself of an axe handle. It was long, and moderately heavy, while sufficiently tough to withstand any blow. He swung it up over his shoulder and took his place beside the captain and his mate. In a minute they had arrived at the rail from which one overlooked the small waist of the vessel, where the steerage passengers were accommodated. An oil lamp hung from the boom, which was housed in its crutches over the waist, and the feeble rays served to show what was happening. There were a couple of boats on either side of the deck, and about these a seething mass of men fought. Without knowledge of the sea, having no idea how to swing the boats out, and no order or method, the result of the frantic efforts of these foreign workmen had been disastrous in one case at least. One of the boats hung suspended from the tackles, while its stern washed in the water below, spars and oars and sails having been tumbled out of it. The other three still hung in their davits, and had been hoisted by the tackles from the crutches placed between their keels and the decks. As the captain and his men arrived, some of the men below were tugging at the tackles,

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"STAND AWAY FROM THOSE BOATS"

while others were cutting the canvas covers of the boats adrift with their knives. In one corner of the waist of the ship three women were huddled, two men being engaged in a desperate fight within three feet of them.

"Down below there!" bellowed the captain. "Stand away from those boats."

He might have spoken to a party of dead men for all the effect his words had. The frantic individuals down below seemed not to have heard them. They still went on with the work of preparing the boats, though it was clear to everyone that, what with their eagerness and their utter selfishness, the hoisting out, if left to them, would end only in disaster.

"Down below there, you dogs!" shouted the captain. "Stand away there! Fall in in the centre of the deck."

He repeated his words in Spanish, for a skipper who sails those seas soon acquires a considerable vocabulary; but his orders fell upon deaf ears only, and all the while time was flying, the ship was settling, the moment when she would founder was drawing dangerously nearer.

"Guess we've got to fix 'em in our own way," said the captain, turning on his little party. "See here, we'll get down this port ladder, beat the men back from the two boats there, and then tackle the others. Jest keep close together, and ef there's opposition don't be too gentle. This ain't the time for gentleness; they'll understand hard knocks when there ain't anything else that'll knock sense into their silly heads."

He led the way promptly, looking in the feeble

rays of his own lantern, and that suspended from the boom, a regular commander. With his clear-cut but anxious features, his peaked beard and short moustaches, this skipper gave one the impression of power, of coolness, and of courage. Indeed he was just the sort of man required in such an emergency, for he inspired his followers with confidence, and took his post at their head as a matter of course. The mate slid down the ladder immediately on his heels and Jim took the whole flight in one bound.

"Now," said the captain.

"Lummy! Dis someting like, dis am," murmured Sam, his eager little face looking up into Jim's. The diminutive negro had armed himself with an enormous stake which he had discovered in some odd corner, and he flourished it. There was a little grin on his face, while his sharp teeth flashed. In fact, in one brief moment, the negro, who had always worked so well and so quietly, who had never displayed any pugnacity or traces of excitement, had become an altered individual. There was a something about him which seemed to say that fighting was a pursuit which pleased him, that he was longing for the fray. But by now the whole party was gathered in the waist. The captain led them to the port boats, flinging aside all who stood in his path. In fact, to clear the Spaniards into the centre of the deck was no difficult matter. They were so absorbed in their task that they were taken by surprise. But a moment or two later, when they found a group of resolute-looking men lined up between them and the boats, which seemed to be their only hope of safety, the frantic people became furious and desperate.

"Two of you men just see that the tackles are free and all ready for hoisting," said the captain, his eye on the passengers. "We've got trouble to meet here, and when it's over we shall want to get the boats out precious slippy. Ah, you would, would you?"

In the short space of time which had elapsed since he had come to the waist the fury of the Spaniards had risen perceptibly. It wanted only a maddened leader now to turn the whole pack upon the captain and his men; and, in a trice, the man made his appearance. A huge fellow, with glittering ear-rings, whipped something from his belt and snarled at the captain. Then, with a shout as if he were a maddened beast, he dashed forward, a huge dagger held before him.

"I've got more of that for the likes of you," said the captain, stepping swiftly forward and meeting the man with a terrific blow from his fist. Indeed the Spaniard turned a half-somersault, and landed with a thud on the deck. But his mates were too desperate to notice his discomfiture; they came at the little band in a mob, and in a moment Jim and his comrades were fully engaged. A little active man bent low and ran in at our hero, while the latter caught the glint of something bright in his hand. Crash! The staff with which he had provided himself fell on the Spaniard's head and sent him sprawling. Bang! Sam's ponderous weapon missed the mark at which it was aimed and struck the deck heavily. Next instant the negro was locked in the arms of one of the attackers and was rolling with him on the decks.

But Jim had no time to watch him, nor oppor-

tunity of assisting, for the horde of men threw themselves on him and his comrades furiously. One managed to come to close quarters with him and struck with his knife; but the blade did not reach his person. A quick leap to one side saved him. Then the staff swung downwards and the man collapsed.

"A rare blow, lad. A rare one!" shouted the captain. "Boys, we'll be moving forward."

But the command was easier to give than to obey. Not all the efforts of the little party could make an impression. It seemed as if the captain would be defeated in his efforts to control the boats. But suddenly others arrived on the scene. It was the engine hands, headed by an enormous negro. Was it wonderful that Tom should itch to join in the fray? He had seen his mistress into a place of safety and had left Ching to guard her. Then, realizing that instant victory in this struggle could alone save everyone on board, he had led the engineering staff down the companion.

"By de poker! not stand quiet and 'low boats to be hoisted out," he bellowed, forcing his way to the front. "Not 'bey de captain and help when de ship sinkin'. By de poker, but dis not go on! Yo, what yo doin'?"

He seized a man who rushed at him, as if he were merely a child, twisted him round till his feet were in the air, and threw him back at his comrades. Then, smiling all the while, he rushed at the attackers, regardless of their knives, striking them down in all directions.

"Hooray! Now, boys," shouted the captain,

"that darkie's done it for us fine. Beat 'em back; there's still time to mend matters."

Bunched together, and led by Tom, the little party threw themselves upon the Spaniards, striking right and left remorselessly. And in the space of a few seconds they had borne them back as far as the bulkhead, above which was the poop.

"If some of you men don't drop those knives precious quick I'll know why," commanded the skipper.

"By de poker—yes! Tom know why, yo bet!"

The huge negro strode in front of all, his big fists doubled, his head thrust forward as if he were a bull about to charge. His eye fell upon the rascal who had begun the attack, and who, meanwhile, had recovered his senses. There was a dagger in the villain's hand, and Tom did not fail to see it. In a trice he had pounced upon the man.

"What yo not obey for?" he demanded wrathfully. "Yo not hear de cap'n say yo to drop all knives? By de poker, but in two seconds yo sorry yo ever born! Yo drop that knife."

There was no disobeying such an order. Tom seized the Spaniard, gripped him with both powerful hands, and shook him till the man's head threatened to fall from his shoulders. Then he turned and grinned at the captain.

"Ready now to do as yo order, Cap'n," he smiled. "S'pose yo say fall in half here and half dere, get ready to haul on tackle. Dey ready to do as yo say."

"George, you're a real treasure! You're a brave man, Tom. Jest get 'em ranged up in order, and quick with it. Young sir, I'll be obliged ef you'll help him."

He nodded to Jim, left three of the men to stand by him, and at once turned to the boats. As for the Spaniards, Tom's huge frame and the prowess he had already displayed seemed to cow them. They obeyed his orders with alacrity, and were soon ranged up in two lines. By then their aid was wanted.

"Yo jest get to dem tackles yo in dat row," commanded Tom. "Haul when you told. If one ob yo try to get into de boats before I say yo can, me carve yo into little pieces—so."

He brandished an enormous knife, which he had picked up from the deck, and showed his teeth. The result might have been anticipated, for the passengers who had been fighting like a pack of beasts but a few moments before were absolutely cowed. They would rather face drowning than the anger of this terrible negro. It followed, therefore, that, now that they were helping in the task, the boats were swiftly swung out.

"Put the women aboard this one," said the captain. "We'll lower them with the boat. The others can go down by a rope ladder; it's smooth, thank goodness, or things would be worse. Now, lads, quick with it; she won't swim much longer."

Riot and fury had now been replaced by order and calm method. One by one the boats were lowered, passengers entered, and a crew was placed aboard. Moreover the purser and his men found time to make a raid on the stores, so that each boat was victualled. As for Sadie, she and Ching sat in the boat lowered from amidships, and waited anxiously for her brother and the others. Presently they came, the captain being the last to step over the rail. By then the

decks forward were awash, while the stern of the vessel was pitched high in the air. Her propeller was plainly visible, lifted clear of the water.

"She'll plunge in a few moments. Best get clear away," said the captain. "The other ship, I hear, is foundering also. We'll have to stand by till morning. Is everyone with us?"

The answer had hardly left the mate's lips when there came a cry from Sadie. Her finger shot out, and in a moment all saw the object which had attracted her attention. It was the figure of a man standing on the sinking steamer. Instantly a groan escaped the captain.

"Couldn't risk going back for him," he said; "he must swim for it."

"But he's disabled; he's the man with a broken arm," sang out Jim. "He couldn't swim if you paid him to."

"Can't help it; I've the boat's crew to think of," declared the captain, shaking his head sadly. "That ship's on the point of diving; we're too close as it is. If I go nearer we risk the lives of all, your sister's into the bargain."

"A fact," cried the mate emphatically. "The skipper's saying only what's true."

"Ah! I thought she was going then!" shouted one of the crew aboard the boat, seeing the steamer lurch suddenly. "'Tain't more'n a matter of seconds."

"Then I'll chance being in time; I'm going for him."

Jim tore off his coat, and kicked his shoes away. Before they realized his intentions he had stepped on to the gunwale, and had plunged head foremost into the sea.

CHAPTER III

Jim Partington shows his Mettle

"COME back, lad," shouted the captain, as Jim's heels disappeared beneath the surface of the ocean. Then he rose quickly to his feet, and, gripping the gunwale of the rocking boat with both hands, he stared through the gloom at the sinking ship, and at the solitary figure now clinging to the rail amidships. Indeed the unhappy individual who had been accidentally left on the foundering vessel showed that he was in almost as frantic a condition as had been the Spanish workmen, when fighting in the waist for possession of the boats. He was waving the one arm which was uninjured vigorously, and as Jim set out in his direction he was seen to throw one leg over the rail, to clamber with difficulty upon it, then to sit there holding desperately, and looking as though every movement of the ship would cast him into the water.

"She's a going! Gee! did yer see her lurch then? My, I thought she was under!"

The deck hand who had shouted the words threw up his hands in the direction of the steamer, and turned a pair of startled, staring eyes upon her. There was good reason for his alarming observation, for at that moment the foundering vessel rolled

heavily from side to side, as if she found her position irksome. Then she dipped her nose still deeper into the ocean, kicking her stern clear of the water till ten feet of her dripping keel were visible, and until her decks were at such a steep angle that none but an acrobat could have retained his position on them. Indeed the unfortunate individual clinging to the rail was swung from his insecure seat, and, falling backwards, crashed on to the deck and slithered down it till one of the bridge pillars arrested his progress.

"Holy poker, but dat near shave, I guess! Massa Jim, what yo doin' dat for? Yo's mad! Yo's goin' to drown yo'self!" shouted Tom, rising to his feet so rapidly that his huge bulk set the ship's boat rocking dangerously.

"Drown himself! He's jest committing suicide! I tell you, he's bound to go under," growled the captain, who, if the truth had only been known, felt himself so strongly impelled to leap into the sea and help in this foolhardy but gallant effort at rescue that it was only by exercising the greatest self-control that he was able to hold himself in check.

"If I wasn't skipper I'd do it," he cried. "But it would be a fool's game. Besides, I've got to remember that I'm in charge of this expedition."

Meanwhile Jim's head had burst from the surface of the water, and the plucky lad was forcing his way towards the sinking vessel with powerful strokes. He gave no heed to the shouts and calls of those behind him, not even when Sadie, beside herself with anxiety, rose from her seat in the stern of the boat and shrieked to him to return instantly.

"I'll do it, or go under," he told himself grimly. "A sinking ship ain't going to frighten me. Guess a chap couldn't float out there in safety and see a man drowned before his eyes, especially a man that's unable to fend for himself."

Though the water dripped into his eyes from his hair, and made seeing difficult, he, too, had observed the terrific lurch which the foundering vessel had just given; and if he had had any doubts as to her true condition they were instantly set aside by the mass of her stern elevated in such an ungainly manner into the air.

"Aboard there!" he shouted; "jump over into the water. She is going down."

Thanks to an oil lantern which still hung amidships, below the bridge, he could see the man for whose rescue he was striving, and as he thrust his way strenuously through the water he watched the injured passenger pick himself up on hand and knees and struggle towards the rail. He wedged his feet against a stanchion supporting the latter, and as Jim arrived within a few yards of the vessel, the man was again endeavouring to clamber over the rail.

Then there came, of a sudden, another sluggish lurch. The ship appeared to shiver throughout her framework, and rolled heavily from side to side. A moment later her bows rose rapidly from the ocean in which they had been submerged, while the stern regained almost its normal position. It looked, in fact, as if she were making one last gallant effort to float upon the surface. But again she rolled heavily from side to side, till her decks were slanting at a sickening angle, greater indeed than that to which

Jim and his mates had become accustomed when cruising to the south along the Caribbean coast.

"By de power, but dat terrific, dat 'nough to shake de life out of anybody," muttered Tom, whose eyes all this while had been staring into the gloom, endeavouring to follow every movement of his young American master. Indeed, so acute was the vision of the dusky giant that details were visible to him, and to Sam, his diminutive brother, which others aboard the boat had no idea of. "Lummy, but Tom not like to see dat ship shake herself so! She go down with a bust in one little moment, and den—and den, what happen to Massa Jim?"

The very thought of the disaster which would follow drove the negro into a condition almost of frenzy. His eyes bulged from their sockets and looked as though they would tumble from his head. A whimper from Sadie set Tom's honest heart throbbing and palpitating. It was real pain to the fine fellow to know that his little mistress was in trouble. That and his own courageous, impetuous nature made it impossible to stay any longer inactive in the boat. Every muscle in his body trembled, while his breath came quick and deep.

"I's goin' ter help!" he shouted. "Nebber yo fear, missie; soon hab Massa Jim back safe and sound."

With that he floundered overboard, causing the boat to rock once more till her gunwale dipped beneath the oily surface of the ocean, a mass of water flooding the interior instantly. His head had hardly bobbed up in view again when there came a sudden exclamation from Sam, and a moment later the little

fellow had slipped away to help his dusky brother in his gallant task.

"Jemima! But if that don't take it!" bellowed one of the crew of the boat, looking himself as if he were about to follow. "Every mother's son of 'em'll go down. That ship'll suck 'em under sure. Ain't we going nearer?"

In his eagerness he seized an oar, banged it into the rowlock, and proceeded to bear upon it; but a stern order from the captain at once arrested the movement.

"Belay there!" he cried sharply. "I ain't going to risk the lives of all aboard for those in the water. We're too close to that ship by a long way, much too close to my liking. Drop another oar in there, Macdougal, and pull us away a bit. Harvey, jest get to at bailing; she's taken a bit of water aboard. Miss Sadie, it's the right thing we're doing. It'll help them best in the end."

But there was mutiny in the eye of Macdougal. In the excitement of the moment the eager fellow could not in his own mind differentiate between the safety of those aboard the boat and those who had plunged into the water.

"What's that?" he growled. "Go farther away! Desert them as is wanting our help! Wall, if I ain't jiggered! We calls ourselves white men, and——"

"Stop!" commanded the skipper sternly. "Get down on that seat and pull, Macdougal. You're a fool, I'm thinking. Jest remember that I'm your skipper still, and taking orders from no one. I'm working in the interest of all."

"Aye, aye, sir. Macdougal, get to at it!" growled the mate, scowling at the sailor, and clenching a pair of brawny fists. Not that this officer was really angry with Macdougal. In his heart of hearts he rather admired the man; but discipline was discipline, and the skipper had many a time proved his own courage and discretion. Still, even his persuasion did not make of the sailor a willing man; for the moment Macdougal was obedient, though mutiny and smouldering anger flashed from his eyes.

Meanwhile the sinking vessel had displayed another series of erratic movements. That sickening roll from side to side had been replaced by a gentle pitching fore and aft, and as the seconds fled swiftly by, the pitching had become slowly and almost imperceptibly greater. Then, suddenly, the vessel tossed her bows into the air till her watermarks were visible to those swimming in the ocean. But it was only for a little while. The bows came down again with a heave, which sent her forecastle beneath the surface, till she looked as though she were in the act of plunging to the bottom. Up she came again, displacing a huge mass of water, and raising a wave which spread quickly across the sea till it reached the boat hovering at a distance and rocked it. She canted heavily to port, showing the whole of her length of deck, and with such a violent movement that the passenger aboard was flung clear of the rail right out into the water. Then souse went her bows once more, raising the stern like a pinnacle into the gloom which surrounded everything.

"Yo grip him and get away back, quick as yo can," bellowed Tom, his mouth almost submerged,

his powerful arms bearing him swiftly to help in the rescue. "I's close behind yo, Massa Jim."

But he might have shouted to a log of wood for all the use his words were. Jim heard not a syllable of his warning, for his eyes and all his attention were fixed upon the injured man who had been thrown from the vessel. He reached him in the course of a few seconds, and turning him upon his back supported his head.

"I'm fine," he heard the man say faintly. "This arm of mine don't give me no more than a dog's chance of swimming. You clear off, young chap. You've the right stuff in you, there ain't a doubt; but I'm fine. Don't you get worrying."

The last words were almost cut off by water lapping into his mouth. The huge wave raised by the sudden lifting of the vessel caught them both, and for a moment the two were hidden from sight by a mass of surging green foam. Jim kicked frantically, bearing himself and the man to the surface. Something struck hard against his chest, and, gripping at it with the one hand he had free, he swiftly realized that fortune had been good to him, for it was a buoy, cast loose by the injured passenger himself but a little while before, and now swept to hand at a most opportune moment. He looped his arm over it, and, slipping the other deeper down, hugged the man closer, drawing his head well up on to his own shoulder.

It was as well that he had made this hasty preparation, for, of a sudden, the ship beside which they floated soused her bows deep again, and slid farther beneath the surface. She seemed to hesi-

tate, to make one other effort. There came a loud explosion, accompanied by the sound of splintering and rending wood. Air gushed from a mighty aperture which had made its appearance at the point where but a little while before the Spanish passengers had been fighting so frantically; then she plunged to her bed in the ocean. Swift as a dart she shot beneath the surface, leaving in her wake a swirling whirlpool, a twisting vortex into which everything — splinters of wood, spars, and human beings—were sucked with alarming swiftness, and with such force that none could resist it. So it happened that Jim and the passenger once more disappeared from the ken of those who were watching so eagerly.

How frantically Jim kicked; how desperately he clung to the buoy and to the man at whose rescue he aimed. The swirling water bearing them both down beneath the surface of the Caribbean in the wake of the vessel almost tore them apart in the course of that desperate struggle.

At one moment the pull on the buoy was so intense that he felt as if his arm would be dragged from its socket. An instant later a recoil of the waters swept it back against his face with such violence that his jaw was all but broken.

"Done for," he thought. "I can't stand much more of this. My lungs are bursting, my head feels as if it will explode."

The sound of seething, gushing water deafened him at first, but when he had been a little while immersed the thunderous notes, so distressing a moment ago, seemed to become lessened in intensity.

The buzzing was now, if anything, rather pleasant, while his mind, acutely active but a second before, became blissfully content, as if absorbed in paying attention to that curious singing in his ears. But if he himself were unconscious of other things, nature still urged him to struggle on for existence. Jim had no idea of the frantic kicks he gave, of the grim force with which he clung to the man and to the buoy. Then something revived his senses and caused his wandering wits to take notice of his surroundings. A breeze blew in his face, while someone shouted in his ear. He opened his eyes, and in the gloom that pervaded everything made out the grinning features of Tom.

"Yo's dere, den; yo's safe," he heard the negro exclaim. "By lummy, but dat extra near squeak, so I tell yo! Let go ob de man. Me take him for de moment. Yo puffed, blowin' like an engine."

Jim was exhausted; his breath was coming in quick, painful gasps. He could not spare any for an answer, and, indeed, had so little strength left in him that he did not even resent Tom's movement to take the injured passenger from his care. Instead, he clung to the buoy, fighting for air, wondering vaguely exactly what had happened.

"Yo hang dere quiet and easy," said Tom, one hand on the buoy and his muscular arm about the half-drowned man. "Yo puffin' like a grampus now, but in a little bit yo be better, not make such a noise, have plenty strength again. Den take de man and swim back with him. Tom only come to look on and see dat all well."

It was like the gallant fellow to make light of his

own adventure, to stand aside now that he was sure that Jim was safe, so as not to rob him of the honour which would follow. Tom was indeed a very honest negro, a man with a wide, big heart, which held a large corner for Jim and his sister. He grinned in Jim's face, then suddenly turned and looked over his shoulder.

"By de poker, but here someone else!" he muttered. "Who dar? We's safe and sound. Yo hab no cause to worry."

"And I ain't worryin'," came a well-known voice through the darkness. "I comed along here jest to see what's happenin'. Is Massa Jim right and well?"

A growl burst from Tom's lips as he recognized the voice, and at once he turned a pair of blazing eyes upon the culprit who had dared to follow him.

"Dat yo, Sam?" he demanded. "Den what fo yo dare to leave de missie? Yo get back right now, or by de poker, me knock you into twenty cocked hat! What fo yo jump overboard and risk gettin' drowned?"

The question brought a gurgle from the jolly little Sam. He laughed outright beneath the nose of the irate Tom, and, reaching the buoy, clung to it for a moment or so before he deigned to reply.

"Yo's one great big donkey, yo am, Tom," he roared, shaking with laughter. "Yo tinks yo de only man allowed to jump into de water; but dat not so. De young massa place yo in charge of de missie, and yo no right to leave. Me knows dat; me comes along right out here to haul yo back. Yo one great big blackguard."

To the astonishment of Tom and Jim the little fellow burst into violent sobs, though his words had conveyed anything but an idea of sorrow. Sam shook from the top of his woolly head to his shoeless toes, and set the buoy rocking. Big tears coursed down his cheeks, though the water dripping from his hair almost cloaked them, and when he tried to speak again he gulped at the words and failed to express them. It was, in fact, a strange if comical procedure, and for the moment Jim's muddled condition did not help him to arrive at the meaning. But he grasped the truth a moment later, for Tom helped him.

"Yo—yo one little rascal, yo!" he heard the huge fellow exclaim, though there was no anger in his voice, no resentment for the words which Sam had hurled at him. Rather there was a strange trembling which denoted friendly feeling, accompanied by a sudden gripping of hands between the two darkies which seemed to say that they were perfectly agreed. Then Jim gathered the full meaning of Sam's tears, of Tom's magnanimous action. It was joy for his, Jim's, safety that had set Sam howling, and the tears coursing down his cheeks. It was that same feeling which induced Tom to overlook the high-flown language of his small brother and grip his hand so warmly.

"You're just two great grown-up babies," he laughed across at them. "You seem to imagine that no one can do anything without you, that I'm like a piece of china, liable to break on the smallest occasion. See here, Tom and Sam, shake hands. Guess you're both of you white right away through

from head to toe. I owe you both a heap for coming out after me; but mind what I've said—I ain't a piece of china. Guess I'm old enough and ugly enough to look after myself."

Tom grinned back at his young master and hung to the buoy for a while, still clinging to the hand he had offered. Then he dropped it, moved to the farther side, as if to place himself in a position of safety, and presently made his reply.

"Sah," he said, "p'raps you old enough, as yo say, p'raps no. Ugly 'nough: yes, I tink so. Yo's ugly 'nough to do one ob de stupidest tings as ever I seed. What fo yo jump into de sea like dat and swim toward a ship dat was sinking? S'pose she drag yo down? S'pose yo neber come up agin. Who den take care of missie?"

Even behind his fun there was a deal of truth. Who indeed would be left to care for the sister? But Jim had come up again, and, feeling better, he promptly made his presence felt.

"Jest swim back quick," he commanded Sam, "and tell 'em we're all right. Tell 'em to come along. We'll hang to the buoy. Now, Tom, set to splashing with your legs. There'll be sharks about here, and they're extra fond of darkies."

Tom paled for a moment under his dark skin and looked the reverse of comfortable. Then he laughed uproariously, shouted to Sam to hurry his departure, and promptly did as Jim had ordered. For it was as well to be cautious: both knew that sharks abounded in that corner of the Caribbean Sea, and some of the brutes might very well be in the vicinity. They kicked continuously, therefore, till the boat

came up with a rush, and they and the injured man were lifted aboard.

"Young man, you can jest give me a grip of yer hand," cried the skipper of the foundered vessel when all were safely in the boat, stretching across to the triumphant Jim. "I guessed when you came up alongside us on the ship, telling me that you had fixed matters for your sister, and were ready to help us out with the trouble those Spaniards were giving, that you had got stuff behind you—the right sort of stuff, too. Then you tackled the hounds in proper style, so that I knew I had a man with me; a man, siree, not jest a boy. But this last thing's better than all. Guess this gentleman owes you a life. Guess he'll be for ever in your debt. Young man, I'm pleased to have met you."

It was a glowing tribute to our hero's courage, and he went crimson from the top of his dripping head to his stockinged toes as he listened to the words. Not that anyone could tell, for the gloom shrouded everything. However, Sadie, sitting beside him, clinging to his arm as if loath to part again with her protector, guessed his pleasure, while her own courageous little heart felt as if it would burst with pride.

"I'm glad you did it, Jim," she whispered, "though I was terrified. And Tom and Sam were really brave; they are so devoted. Can you believe, I had the greatest difficulty to keep Ching with me? He hates swimming, as you know, but he was very nearly following."

"Brave, honest fellows!" answered Jim with a gulp, for such devotion touched him. "They are, indeed, true friends to us."

However, he had no time for further conversation; for now that the captain had given his decision on events so recent, the mate and crew of the boat were determined to make their own voices heard.

"A right proper thing to have done: wish you was my own son," declared the former. "Shake, young man. It's a treat to meet one who's a true American."

"One of the very right sort," growled Macdougal, still trembling with excitement. "See here, young feller, I've nigh lost a job through you. I was for kicking up a rumpus direct against the old man's orders. Chief, I'm main sorry for them words and looks; but there's a time when a man has to kick. I thought you was funking."

"Funking!" exploded the mate, though the captain sat rigidly in his place, making no response. "Him funking! The man you and I have sailed with these past three years and never known to fail us. You guessed that the chief who led us against those Spaniards was funking! Gee! I've a mind to smash your head in with this oar."

There was real anger in the voice. The mate was furious, and his huge doubled fists showed that he was ready for anything; but the skipper quickly quietened him.

"Belay there, Mr. Jarvis," he said in his ordinary tones. "Macdougal's a fool, as I've already told him; and if he never knew it before he does now. I'm not afraid of anyone's criticisms. There's a motto I'm always a believer in. It runs: 'By their works shalt thou know them'. Guess I've never done a thing to allow any man to think I was funk-

ing. Macdougal was too excited to be responsible for his thoughts; it's just the man's bluntness which has made him tell us so honestly. But take the lesson to heart, Macdougal; keep a clear, steady head always and it'll carry you through heaps of difficulties. Watch the men you work with, and get to know all about them: moments of excitement aren't the times for coming to conclusions. Now let's get on to other matters. How's that gentleman?"

"Fine," came in shaky tones from the bows of the boat in which the rescued passenger had been laid. "Guess I know everything. I've been lying here these last few minutes wondering whether I was alive or dead, and what had been happening. Is that the skipper?"

"It is, sir."

"Then allow me to say that you've as fine a crew as ever I set eyes on. It wasn't their fault that I was left aboard the ship. The collision knocked me silly, and guess I lay away there on the decks out of sight; but I never reckoned you'd have men aboard ready to take such risks to rescue a passenger. That young chap who swam out for me wellnigh went down with the vessel. I held my breath as we went under till I thought I should bust. And all the time I could feel him holding tighter to me and kicking. Gee, he's a full-blooded lad! He's got pluck if you like. And those coloured men come close after him. When I'm feeling better, guess I'd like to take a grip of their hands."

It was evident that he considered Jim to be one of the crew, and his gallant action undertaken in the course of duty; but the captain undeceived him.

"That young chap's a passenger like yourself, sir," he said. "And the darkies are ditto. I allow that you have every reason to want to thank them; you owe them your life. But let us see to the other vessel; this affair has taken her wellnigh out of my head."

The oars were dipped in the water, and the boat was slowly rowed in the direction of the twinkling lights which showed the position of the other steamer. She had sheered off to some distance, but as the boat approached her it became clear that her condition was not so desperate as had been imagined.

"She's listing badly to port and is down at the head. You can tell that easily," declared the experienced captain. "We'll row right alongside and I'll go aboard. You come too, Mr. Jarvis, and we'll take that young man there."

He motioned to Jim, and, having put his helm over, so directing the boat alongside the steamer, he called to one of the hands in the bows to hold to the companion ladder which had been dropped over her side. Casting his eyes about him, Jim was able to pierce the gloom to some extent, and became aware of the fact that a number of small boats were also lying off the vessel. In fact there were at least seven of them. Another remarkable fact was the silence which pervaded everything. A little while before there had been a deal of shouting, and some amount of confusion, no doubt; but now everything was orderly.

"Fine discipline," remarked the skipper. "The chief of this boat got his passengers away first of all, and then set to work to repair damages. Guess he hadn't mad Spaniards to fight. Come along, please."

He scrambled on to the companion and ran nimbly up the steps. A tall man met him when he reached the deck, and introduced himself as the captain.

"You're chief of the ship that's foundered?" he asked.

"I am," came the rejoinder. "We were badly holed, and there wasn't a chance from the very first. Then we had a horde of mad Spaniards to fight: the hounds lost their heads and struggled for the boats. After that we found, when it was too late to go near the ship, that one passenger had been left aboard; but we saved him, thanks to the pluck of a passenger. Now, sir, I'm sorry for this collision. We'll not discuss it now; the courts ashore will deal with the evidence. I've come along to see how you fared."

"And thanks for the kind thought, sir," came the answer. "Reckon the question of who's to blame can be dealt with as you say. I congratulate you on the way you managed to come out of a difficulty. I'd have sent along; but then, you see, I wasn't sure that we weren't foundering too. There's a hole as big as three rum casks punched in our bows, and you can see that we've shipped no end of water; but our water-tight bulkheads were closed right away and that's saved us. We've the carpenters at work this instant, and as soon as they've plugged the gap with planks and oakum we'll be able to put matters a little more shipshape. Our pumps are just holding the water now; when the gap is plugged we shall gain on it. I reckon to have my passengers aboard in half an hour; you'll bring yours along, and welcome."

Half an hour later, in fact, found Jim and his

friends, together with all the passengers and crew of the sunken steamer, aboard; while some twenty-four hours later the port of Colon had been reached.

"And here we have to start right off again," said Jim, discussing affairs with his sister. "That five hundred dollars will have to be drawn upon for clothes and other things, seeing that we lost everything with the ship. It'll mean I shall have to be quicker in getting a job when we reach New York. But don't you fear, Sadie; somehow I've a notion that our fortune is about to improve. Things are looking brighter."

They watched the steamer slowly berthed, and then made for the gangway. Bidding farewell to the skipper and the crew, with whom they had become most friendly, they were about to make their way ashore when the man whom Jim had rescued accosted them.

"I've fixed rooms for you all," he said. "You'll not disappoint me, will you? I've a house away up on the hill, and there's heaps of room."

"But—but we're going on direct for New York," cried Jim, astonished at the proposal.

"No doubt, sir; no doubt. But then there don't happen to be a steamer for a week, and Colon's a bad place to rest in. You'll oblige me by coming. I ain't had a chance, so far, of thanking you and the others for what you did. You'll surely give me a chance to get to know you better. Come and stay for a week till the steamer puts into port."

It may be imagined that Jim eagerly accepted the invitation, and, accompanied by Sadie, Tom, Sam, and Ching, took up his quarters with this new friend.

Not for a moment did he guess that this week's delay would make a vast change in his future. His eye at the moment was fixed on New York, where he hoped to make that fortune of which he had laughingly spoken. He never imagined for one instant that the Isthmus of Panama would detain him, and that there he would join his compatriots, the Americans, and with them would take his share in that gigantic undertaking, the Panama Canal.