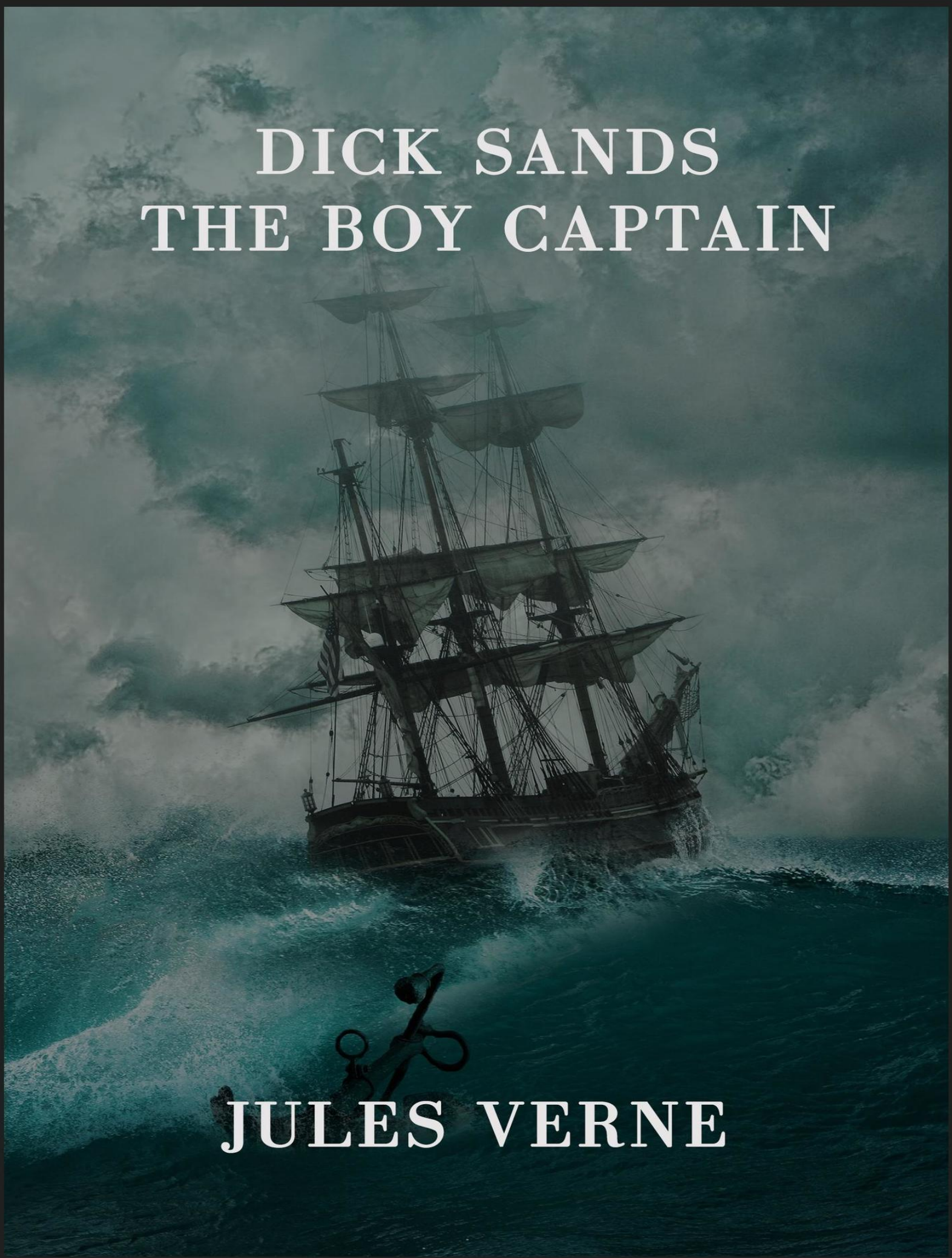
DICK SANDS
THE BOY CAPTAIN



JULES VERNE

Dick Sands the Boy Captain

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DICK SANDS THE BOY CAPTAIN

Jules Verne

CHAPTER I.

THE "PILGRIM."

On the 2nd of February, 1873, the "Pilgrim," a tight little craft of 400 tons burden, lay in lat. 43° 57', S. and long. 165° 19', W. She was a schooner, the property of James W. Weldon, a wealthy Californian ship-owner who had fitted her out at San Francisco, expressly for the whale-fisheries in the southern seas.

James Weldon was accustomed every season to send his whalers both to the Arctic regions beyond Behring Straits, and to the Antarctic Ocean below Tasmania and Cape Horn; and the "Pilgrim," although one of the smallest, was one of the best-going vessels of its class; her sailing-powers were splendid, and her rigging was so adroitly adapted that with a very small crew she might venture without risk within sight of the impenetrable ice-fields of the southern hemisphere: under skilful guidance she could dauntlessly thread her way amongst the drifting ice-bergs that, lessened though they were by perpetual shocks and undermined by warm currents, made their way northwards as far as the parallel of New Zealand or the Cape of Good Hope, to a latitude corresponding to which in the northern hemisphere they are never

seen, having already melted away in the depths of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.

For several years the command of the "Pilgrim" had been entrusted to Captain Hull, an experienced seaman, and one of the most dexterous harpooners in Weldon's service. The crew consisted of five sailors and an apprentice. This number, of course, was quite insufficient for the process of whale-fishing, which requires a large contingent both for manning the whale-boats and for cutting up the whales after they are captured; but Weldon, following the example of other owners, found it more economical to embark at San Francisco only just enough men to work the ship to New Zealand, where, from the promiscuous gathering of seamen of well-nigh every nationality, and of needy emigrants, the captain had no difficulty in engaging as many whalemen as he wanted for the season. This method of hiring men who could be at once discharged when their services were no longer required had proved altogether to be the most profitable and convenient.

The "Pilgrim" had now just completed her annual voyage to the Antarctic circle. It was not, however, with her proper quota of oil-barrels full to the brim, nor yet with an ample cargo of cut and uncut whalebone, that she was thus far on her way back. The time, indeed, for a good haul was past; the repeated and vigourous attacks upon the cetaceans had made them very scarce; the whale known as "the Right whale," the "Nord-kapper" of the northern fisheries, the "Sulpher-boltone" of the southern, was hardly ever to be seen; and latterly the

whalers had had no alternative but to direct their efforts against the Finback or Jubarte, a gigantic mammal, encounter with which is always attended with considerable danger.

So scanty this year had been the supply of whales that Captain Hull had resolved next year to push his way into far more southern latitudes; even, if necessary, to advance to the regions known as Clarie and Adélie Lands, of which the discovery, though claimed by the American navigator Wilkes, belongs by right to the illustrious Frenchman Dumont d'Urville, the commander of the "Astrolabe" and the "Zélee."

The season had been exceptionally unfortunate for the "Pilgrim." At the beginning of January, almost in the height of the southern summer, long before the ordinary time for the whalers' return, Captain Hull had been obliged to abandon his fishing-quarters. His hired contingent, all men of more than doubtful character, had given signs of such insubordination as threatened to end in mutiny; and he had become aware that he must part company with them on the earliest possible opportunity. Accordingly, without delay, the bow of the "Pilgrim" was directed to the northwest, towards New Zealand, which was sighted on the 15th of January, and on reaching Waitemata, the port of Auckland, in the Hauraki Gulf, on the east coast of North Island, the whole of the gang was peremptorily discharged.

The ship's crew were more than dissatisfied. They were angry. Never before had they returned with so meagre a haul. They ought to have had at least two hundred barrels more. The captain himself

experienced all the mortification of an ardent sportsman who for the first time in his life brings home a half-empty bag; and there was a general spirit of animosity against the rascals whose rebellion had so entirely marred the success of the expedition.

Captain Hull did everything in his power to repair the disappointment; he made every effort to engage a fresh gang; but it was too late; every available seaman had long since been carried off to the fisheries. Finding therefore that all hope of making good the deficiency in his cargo must be resigned, he was on the point of leaving Auckland, alone with his crew, when he was met by a request with which he felt himself bound to comply.

It had chanced that James Weldon, on one of those journeys which were necessitated by the nature of his business, had brought with him his wife, his son Jack, a child of five years of age, and a relation of the family who was generally known by the name of Cousin Benedict. Weldon had of course intended that his family should accompany him on his return home to San Francisco; but little Jack was taken so seriously ill, that his father, whose affairs demanded his immediate return, was obliged to leave him behind at Auckland with his wife and Cousin Benedict.

Three months had passed away, little Jack was convalescent, and Mrs. Weldon, weary of her long separation from her husband, was anxious to get home as soon as possible. Her readiest way of reaching San Francisco was to cross to Australia, and thence to take a passage in one of the vessels of the "Golden Age" Company, which run between

Melbourne and the Isthmus of Panama: on arriving in Panama she would have to wait the departure of the next American steamer of the line which maintains a regular communication between the Isthmus and California. This route, however, involved many stoppages and changes, such as are always disagreeable and inconvenient for women and children, and Mrs. Weldon was hesitating whether she should encounter the journey, when she heard that her husband's vessel, the "Pilgrim," had arrived at Auckland. Hastening to Captain Hull, she begged him to take her with her little boy, Cousin Benedict, and Nan, an old negress who had been her attendant from her childhood, on board the "Pilgrim," and to convey them to San Francisco direct.

"Was it not over hazardous," asked the captain, "to venture upon a voyage of between 5000 and 6000 miles in so small a sailing-vessel?"

But Mrs. Weldon urged her request, and Captain Hull, confident in the sea-going qualities of his craft, and anticipating at this season nothing but fair weather on either side of the equator, gave his consent.

In order to provide as far as possible for the comfort of the lady during a voyage that must occupy from forty to fifty days, the captain placed his own cabin at her entire disposal.

Everything promised well for a prosperous voyage. The only hindrance that could be foreseen arose from the circumstance that the "Pilgrim" would have to put in at Valparaiso for the purpose of unlading; but that business once accomplished, she would continue

her way along the American coast with the assistance of the land breezes, which ordinarily make the proximity of those shores such agreeable quarters for sailing.

Mrs. Weldon herself had accompanied her husband in so many voyages, that she was quite inured to all the makeshifts of a seafaring life, and was conscious of no misgiving in embarking upon a vessel of such small tonnage. She was a brave, high-spirited woman of about thirty years of age, in the enjoyment of excellent health, and for her the sea had no terrors. Aware that Captain Hull was an experienced man, in whom her husband had the utmost confidence, and knowing that his ship was a substantial craft, registered as one of the best of the American whalers, so far from entertaining any mistrust as to her safety, she only rejoiced in the opportuneness of the chance which seemed to offer her a direct and unbroken route to her destination.

Cousin Benedict, as a matter of course, was to accompany her. He was about fifty; but in spite of his mature age it would have been considered the height of imprudence to allow him to travel anywhere alone. Spare, lanky, with a bony frame, with an enormous cranium, and a profusion of hair, he was one of those amiable, inoffensive savants who, having once taken to gold spectacles, appear to have arrived at a settled standard of age, and, however long they live afterwards, seem never to be older than they have ever been.

Claiming a sort of kindredship with all the world, he was universally known, far beyond the pale of his own connexions, by the name of "Cousin Benedict." In the ordinary concerns of life nothing

would ever have rendered him capable of shifting for himself; of his meals he would never think until they were placed before him; he had the appearance of being utterly insensible to heat or cold; he vegetated rather than lived, and might not inaptly be compared to a tree which, though healthy enough at its core, produces scant foliage and no fruit. His long arms and legs were in the way of himself and everybody else; yet no one could possibly treat him with unkindness. As M. Prudhomme would say, "if only he had been endowed with capability," he would have rendered a service to any one in the world; but helplessness was his dominant characteristic; helplessness was ingrained into his very nature; yet this very helplessness made him an object of kind consideration rather than of contempt, and Mrs. Weldon looked upon him as a kind of elder brother to her little Jack.

It must not be supposed, however, that Cousin Benedict was either idle or unoccupied. On the contrary, his whole time was devoted to one absorbing passion for natural history. Not that he had any large claim to be regarded properly as a natural historian; he had made no excursions over the whole four districts of zoology, botany, mineralogy, and geology, into which the realms of natural history are commonly divided; indeed, he had no pretensions at all to be either a botanist, a mineralogist, or a geologist; his studies only sufficed to make him a zoologist, and that in a very limited sense. No Cuvier was he; he did not aspire to decompose animal life by analysis, and to recompose it by synthesis; his enthusiasm had not made him at all deeply versed in vertebrata, mollusca, or radiata; in fact, the vertebrata-animals, birds, reptiles, fishes-had had no place in his

researches; the mollusca-from the cephalopoda to the bryozia-had had no attractions for him; nor had he consumed the midnight oil in investigating the radiata, the echmodermata, acalephæ, polypi, entozoa, or infusoria.

No; Cousin Benedict's interest began and ended with the articulata; and it must be owned at once that his studies were very far from embracing all the range of the six classes into which "articulata" are subdivided; viz, the insecta, the mynapoda, the arachnida, the crustacea, the cinhopoda, and the anelides; and he was utterly unable in scientific language to distinguish a worm from a leech, an earwig from a sea-acorn, a spider from a scorpion, a shrimp from a frog-hopper, or a galley-worm from a centipede.

To confess the plain truth, Cousin Benedict was an amateur entomologist, and nothing more.

Entomology, it may be asserted, is a wide science; it embraces the whole division of the articulata; but our friend was an entomologist only in the limited sense of the popular acceptation of the word; that is to say, he was an

[Illustration: Cousin Benedict]

observer and collector of insects, meaning by "insects" those articulata which have bodies consisting of a number of concentric movable rings, forming three distinct segments, each with a pair of legs, and which are scientifically designated as hexapods.

To this extent was Cousin Benedict an entomologist; and when it is remembered that the class of insecta of which he had grown up to be the enthusiastic student comprises no less than ten [Footnote: These ten orders are (1) the orthoptera, e.g. grasshoppers and crickets; (2) the neuroptera, e.g. dragon-flies; (3) the hymenoptera, e.g. bees, wasps, and ants; (4) the lepidoptera, e.g. butterflies and moths; (5) the hemiptera, e.g. cicadas and fleas; (6) the coleoptera, e.g. cockchafers and glow-worms; (7) the diptera, e.g. gnats and flies; (8) the rhipiptera, e.g. the stylops; (9) the parasites, e.g. the acarus; and (10) the thysanura, e.g. the lepisma and podura.] orders, and that of these ten the coleoptera and diptera alone include 30,000 and 60,000 species respectively, it must be confessed that he had an ample field for his most persevering exertions.

Every available hour did he spend in the pursuit of his favourite science: hexapods ruled his thoughts by day and his dreams by night. The number of pins that he carried thick on the collar and sleeves of his coat, down the front of his waistcoat, and on the crown of his hat, defied computation; they were kept in readiness for the capture of specimens that might come in his way, and on his return from a ramble in the country he might be seen literally encased with a covering of insects, transfixed adroitly by scientific rule.

This ruling passion of his had been the inducement that had urged him to accompany Mr. and Mrs. Weldon to New Zealand. It had appeared to him that it was likely to be a promising district, and now having been successful in adding some rare specimens to his

collection, he was anxious to get back again to San Francisco, and to assign them their proper places in his extensive cabinet.

Besides, it never occurred to Mrs. Weldon to start without him. To leave him to shift for himself would be sheer cruelty. As a matter of course whenever Mrs. Weldon went on board the "Pilgrim," Cousin Benedict would go too.

Not that in any emergency assistance of any kind could be expected from him; on the contrary, in the case of difficulty he would be an additional burden; but there was every reason to expect a fair passage and no cause of misgiving of any kind, so the propriety of leaving the amiable entomologist behind was never suggested.

Anxious that she should be no impediment in the way of the due departure of the "Pilgrim" from Waitemata, Mrs. Weldon made her preparations with the utmost haste, discharged the servants which she had temporarily engaged at Auckland, and accompanied by little Jack and the old negress, and followed mechanically by Cousin Benedict, embarked on the 22nd of January on board the schooner.

The amateur, however, kept his eye very scrupulously upon his own special box. Amongst his collection of insects were some very remarkable examples of new staphylins, a species of carnivorous coleoptera with eyes placed above their head; it was a kind supposed to be peculiar to New Caledonia. Another rarity which had been brought under his notice was a venomous spider, known among the Maoris as a "katipo;" its bite was asserted to be very often fatal. As a

spider, however, belongs to the order of the arachnida, and is not properly an "insect," Benedict declined to take any interest in it. Enough for him that he had secured a novelty in his own section of research; the "Staphylin Neo-Zelandus" was not only the gem of his collection, but its pecuniary value baffled ordinary estimate; he insured his box at a fabulous sum, deeming it to be worth far more than all the cargo of oil and whalebone in the "Pilgrim's" hold.

Captain Hull advanced to meet Mrs. Weldon and her party as they stepped on deck.

"It must be understood, Mrs. Weldon," he said, courteously raising his hat, "that you take this passage entirely on your own responsibility."

"Certainly, Captain Hull," she answered; "but why do you ask?"

"Simply because I have received no orders from Mr. Weldon," replied the captain.

[Illustration: Captain Hull advanced to meet Mrs. Weldon and her party.]

"But my wish exonerates you," said Mrs. Weldon.

"Besides," added Captain Hull, "I am unable to provide you with the accommodation and the comfort that you would have upon a passenger steamer."

"You know well enough, captain," remonstrated the lady "that my husband would not hesitate for a moment to trust his wife and child on board the 'Pilgrim.' "

"Trust, madam! No! no more than I should myself. I repeat that the 'Pilgrim' cannot afford you the comfort to which you are accustomed."

Mrs. Weldon smiled.

"Oh, I am not one of your grumbling travellers. I shall have no complaints to make either of small cramped cabins, or of rough and meagre food."

She took her son by the hand, and passing on, begged that they might start forthwith.

Orders accordingly were given; sails were trimmed; and after taking the shortest course across the gulf, the "Pilgrim" turned her head towards America.

Three days later strong easterly breezes compelled the schooner to tack to larboard in order to get to windward. The consequence was that by the 2nd of February the captain found himself in such a latitude that he might almost be suspected of intending to round Cape Horn rather than of having a design to coast the western shores of the New Continent.

Still, the sea did not become rough. There was a slight delay, but, on the whole, navigation was perfectly easy.

CHAPTER II.

THE APPRENTICE.

There was no poop upon the "Pilgrim's" deck, so that Mrs. Weldon had no alternative than to acquiesce in the captain's proposal that she should occupy his own modest cabin.

Accordingly, here she was installed with Jack and old Nan; and here she took all her meals, in company with the captain and Cousin Benedict.

For Cousin Benedict tolerably comfortable sleeping accommodation had been contrived close at hand, while Captain Hull himself retired to the crew's quarter, occupying the cabin which properly belonged to the chief mate, but as already indicated, the services of a second officer were quite dispensed with.

All the crew were civil and attentive to the wife of their employer, a master to whom they were faithfully attached. They were all natives of the coast of California, brave and experienced seamen, and united by tastes and habits in a common bond of sympathy. Few as they were in number, their work was never shirked, not simply from the sense of duty, but because they were directly interested in the profits of their undertaking; the success of their labours always told to their own

advantage. The present expedition was the fourth that they had taken together; and, as it turned out to be the first in which they had failed to meet with success, it may be imagined that they were full of resentment against the mutinous whalemen who had been the cause of so serious a diminution of their ordinary gains.

[Illustration: Negoro.]

The only one on board who was not an American was a man who had been temporarily engaged as cook. His name was Negoro; he was a Portuguese by birth, but spoke English with perfect fluency. The previous cook had deserted the ship at Auckland, and when Negoro, who was out of employment, applied for the place, Captain Hull, only too glad to avoid detention, engaged him at once without inquiry into his antecedents. There was not the slightest fault to be found with the way in which the cook performed his duties, but there was something in his manner, or perhaps, rather in the expression of his countenance, which excited the Captain's misgivings, and made him regret that he had not taken more pains to investigate the character of one with whom he was now brought into such close contact

Negoro looked about forty years of age. Although he had the appearance of being slightly built, he was muscular; he was of middle height, and seemed to have a robust constitution; his hair was dark, his complexion somewhat swarthy. His manner was taciturn, and although, from occasional remarks that he dropped, it was evident that he had received some education, he was very reserved on the subjects both of his family and of his past life. No one knew where he

had come from, and he admitted no one to his confidence as to where he was going, except that he made no secret of his intention to land at Valparaiso. His freedom from sea-sickness demonstrated that this could hardly be his first voyage, but on the other hand his complete ignorance of seamen's phraseology made it certain that he had never been accustomed to his present occupation. He kept himself aloof as much as possible from the rest of the crew, during the day rarely leaving the great cast-iron stove, which was out of proportion to the measurement of the cramped little kitchen; and at night, as soon as the fire was extinguished, took the earliest opportunity of retiring to his berth and going to sleep.

It has been already stated that the crew of the "Pilgrim" consisted of five seamen and an apprentice. This apprentice was Dick Sands.

Dick was fifteen years old; he was a foundling, his unknown parents having abandoned him at his birth, and he had been brought up in a public charitable institution. He had been called Dick, after the benevolent passer-by who had discovered him when he was but an infant a few hours old, and he had received the surname of Sands as a memorial of the spot where he had been exposed, Sandy Hook, a point at the mouth of the Hudson, where it forms an entrance to the harbour of New York.

As Dick was so young it was most likely he would yet grow a little taller, but it did not seem probable that he would ever exceed middle height, he looked too stoutly and strongly built to grow much. His complexion was dark, but his beaming blue eyes attested, with

scarcely room for doubt, his Anglo-Saxon origin, and his countenance betokened energy and intelligence. The profession that he had adopted seemed to have equipped him betimes for fighting the battle of life.

Misquoted often as Virgil's are the words

"Audaces fortuna juvat!"

but the true reading is

"Audentes fortuna juvat!"

and, slight as the difference may seem, it is very significant. It is upon the confident rather than the rash, the daring rather than the bold, that Fortune sheds her smiles; the bold man often acts without thinking, whilst the daring always thinks before he acts.

And Dick Sands was truly courageous; he was one of the daring. At fifteen years old, an age at which few boys have laid aside the frivolities of childhood, he had acquired the stability of a man, and the most casual observer could scarcely fail to be attracted by his bright, yet thoughtful countenance. At an early period of his life he had realized all the difficulties of his position, and had made a resolution, from which nothing tempted him to flinch, that he would carve out for himself an honourable and independent career. Lithe and agile in his movements, he was an adept in every kind of athletic exercise; and so

marvellous was his success in everything he undertook, that he might almost be supposed to be one of those gifted mortals who have two right hands and two left feet.

Until he was four years old the little orphan had found a home in one of those institutions in America where forsaken children are sure of an asylum, and he was subsequently sent to an industrial school supported by charitable aid, where he learnt reading, writing, and arithmetic. From the days of infancy he had never deviated from the expression of his wish to be a sailor, and accordingly, as soon as he was eight, he was placed as cabin-boy on board one of the ships that navigate the Southern Seas. The officers all took a peculiar interest in him, and he received, in consequence, a thoroughly good grounding in the duties and discipline of a seaman's life. There was no room to doubt that he must ultimately rise to eminence in his profession, for when a child from the very first has been trained in the knowledge that he must gain his bread by the sweat of his brow, it is comparatively rare that he lacks the will to do so.

Whilst he was still acting as cabin-boy on one of those trading-vessels, Dick attracted the notice of Captain Hull, who took a fancy to the lad and introduced him to his employer. Mr. Weldon at once took a lively interest in Dick's welfare, and had his education continued in San Francisco, taking care that he was instructed in the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, to which his own family belonged.

Throughout his studies Dick Sands' favourite subjects were always those which had a reference to his future profession; he mastered the

details of the geography of the world; he applied himself diligently to such branches of mathematics as were necessary for the science of navigation; whilst for recreation in his hours of leisure, he would greedily devour every book of adventure in travel that came in his way. Nor did he omit duly to combine the practical with the theoretical; and when he was bound apprentice on board the "Pilgrim," a vessel not only belonging to his benefactor, but under the command of his kind friend Captain Hull, he congratulated himself most heartily, and felt that the experience he should gain in the southern whale-fisheries could hardly fail to be of service to him in after-life. A first-rate sailor ought to be a first-rate fisherman too.

It was a matter of the greatest pleasure to Dick Sands when he heard to his surprise that Mrs. Weldon was about to become a passenger on board the "Pilgrim." His devotion to the family of his benefactor was large and genuine. For several years Mrs. Weldon had acted towards him little short of a mother's part, and for Jack, although he never forgot the difference in their position, he entertained well-nigh a brother's affection. His friends had the satisfaction of being assured that they had sown the seeds of kindness on a generous soil, for there was no room to doubt that the heart of the orphan boy was overflowing with sincere gratitude. Should the occasion arise, ought he not, he asked, to be ready to sacrifice everything in behalf of those to whom he was indebted not only for his start in life, but for the knowledge of all that was right and holy?

Confiding in the good principles of her protégé, Mrs. Weldon had no hesitation in entrusting her little son to his especial charge. During the frequent periods of leisure, when the sea was fair, and the sails required no shifting, the apprentice was never weary of amusing Jack by making him familiar with the practice of a sailor's craft; he made him scramble up the shrouds, perch upon the yards, and slip down the back-stays; and the mother had no alarm; her assurance of Dick Sands' ability and watchfulness to protect her boy was so complete that she could only rejoice in an occupation for him that seemed more than anything to restore the colour he had lost in his recent illness.

Time passed on without incident; and had it not been for the constant prevalence of an adverse wind, neither passengers nor crew could have found the least cause of complaint. The pertinacity, however, with which the wind kept to the east could not do otherwise than make Captain Hull somewhat concerned; it absolutely prevented him from getting his ship into her proper course, and he could not altogether suppress his misgiving that the calms near the

[Illustration: Dick and little Jack.]

Tropic of Capricorn, and the equatorial current driving him on westwards, would entail a delay that might be serious.

It was principally on Mrs. Weldon's account that the Captain began to feel uneasiness, and he made up his mind that if he could hail a vessel proceeding to America he should advise his passengers to embark on her; unfortunately, however, he felt that they were still in a

latitude far too much to the south to make it likely that they should sight a steamer going to Panama; and at that date, communication between Australia and the New World was much less frequent than it has since become.

Still, nothing occurred to interrupt the general monotony of the voyage until the 2nd of February, the date at which our narrative commences.

It was about nine o'clock in the morning of that day that Dick and little Jack had perched themselves together on the top-mast-yards. The weather was very clear, and they could see the horizon right round except the section behind them, hidden by the brigantine-sail on the main-mast. Below them, the bowsprit seemed to lie along the water with its stay-sails attached like three unequal wings; from the lads' feet to the deck was the smooth surface of the fore-mast; and above their heads nothing but the small top-sail and the top-mast. The schooner was running on the larboard tack as close to the wind as possible.

Dick Sand was pointing out to Jack how well the ship was ballasted, and was trying to explain how it was impossible for her to capsize, however much she heeled to starboard, when suddenly the little fellow cried out,-

"I can see something in the water!"

"Where? what?" exclaimed Dick, clambering to his feet upon the yard.

"There!" said the child, directing attention to the portion of the sea-surface that was visible between the stay-sails.

Dick fixed his gaze intently for a moment, and then shouted out lustily,-

"Look out in front, to starboard! There is something afloat. To windward, look out!"

CHAPTER III.

A RESCUE.

At the sound of Dick's voice all the crew, in a moment, were upon the alert. The men who were not on watch rushed to the deck, and Captain Hull hurried from his cabin to the bows. Mrs. Weldon, Nan, and even Cousin Benedict leaned over the starboard taffrails, eager to get a glimpse of what had thus suddenly attracted the attention of the young apprentice. With his usual indifference, Negoro did not leave his cabin, and was the only person on board who did not share the general excitement.

Speculations were soon rife as to what could be the nature of the floating object which could be discerned about three miles ahead. Suggestions of various character were freely made. One of the sailors declared that it looked to him only like an abandoned raft, but Mrs. Weldon observed quickly that if it were a raft it might be carrying some unfortunate shipwrecked men who must be rescued if possible. Cousin Benedict asserted that it was nothing more nor less than a huge sea-monster; but the captain soon arrived at the conviction that it was the hull of a vessel that had heeled over on to its side, an opinion with which Dick thoroughly coincided, and went so far as to

say that he believed he could make out the copper keel glittering in the sun.

"Luff, Bolton, luff!" shouted Captain Hull to the helmsman; "we will at any rate lose no time in getting alongside."

"Ay, ay, sir," answered the helmsman, and the "Pilgrim" in an instant was steered according to orders.

In spite, however, of the convictions of the captain and Dick, Cousin Benedict would not be moved from his opinion that the object of their curiosity was some huge cetacean.

"It is certainly dead, then," remarked Mrs. Weldon; "it is perfectly motionless."

"Oh, that's because it is asleep," said Benedict, who, although he would have willingly given up all the whales in the ocean for one rare specimen of an insect, yet could not surrender his own belief.

"Easy, Bolton, easy!" shouted the captain when they were getting nearer the floating mass; "don't let us be running foul of the thing; no good could come from knocking a hole in our side; keep out from it a good cable's length."

"Ay, ay, sir," replied the helmsman, in his usual cheery way; and by an easy turn of the helm the "Pilgrim's" course was slightly modified so as to avoid all fear of collision.

The excitement of the sailors by this time had become more intense. Ever since the distance had been less than a mile all doubt had vanished, and it was certain that what was attracting their attention was the hull of a capsized ship. They knew well enough the established rule that a third of all salvage is the right of the finders, and they were filled with the hope that the hull they were nearing might contain an undamaged cargo, and be "a good haul," to compensate them for their ill-success in the last season.

A quarter of an hour later and the "Pilgrim" was within half a mile of the deserted vessel, facing her starboard side. Water-logged to her bulwarks, she had heeled over so completely that it would have been next to impossible to stand upon her deck. Of her masts nothing was to be seen; a few ends of cordage were all that remained of her shrouds, and the try-sail chains were hanging all broken. On the starboard flank was an enormous hole.

"Something or other has run foul of her," said Dick.

"No doubt of that," replied the captain; "the only wonder is that she did not sink immediately."

"Oh, how I hope the poor crew have been saved!" exclaimed Mrs Weldon.

"Most probably," replied the captain, "they would all have taken to the boats. It is as likely as not that the ship which did the mischief would continue its course quite unconcerned"

"Surely, you cannot mean," cried Mrs Weldon, "that any one could be capable of such inhumanity?"

"Only too probable," answered Captain Hull, "unfortunately, such instances are very far from rare"

He scanned the drifting ship carefully and continued,-

"No, I cannot see any sign of boats here, I should guess that the crew have made an attempt to get to land, at such a distance as this, however, from America or from the islands of the Pacific I should be afraid that it must be hopeless."

"Is it not possible," asked Mrs Weldon, "that some poor creature may still survive on board, who can tell what has happened?"

"Hardly likely, madam; otherwise there would have been some sort of a signal in sight. But it is a matter about which we will make sure."

The captain waved his hand a little in the direction in which he wished to go, and said quietly,-

"Luff, Bolton, luff a bit!"

The "Pilgrim" by this time was not much more than three cables' lengths from the ship, there was still no token of her being otherwise than utterly deserted, when Dick Sands suddenly exclaimed,-

"Hark! if I am not much mistaken, that is a dog barking!"

Every one listened attentively; it was no fancy on Dick's part, sure enough a stifled barking could be heard, as if some unfortunate dog had been imprisoned beneath the hatchways; but as the deck was not yet visible, it was impossible at present to determine the precise truth.

Mrs Weldon pleaded,-

"If it is only a dog, captain, let it be saved."

"Oh, yes, yes, mamma, the dog must be saved!" cried

[Illustration: Negoro had approached without being noticed by any one]

little Jack; "I will go and get a bit of sugar ready for it."

"A bit of sugar, my child, will not be much for a starved dog."

"Then it shall have my soup, and I will do without," said the boy, and he kept shouting, "Good dog! good dog!" until he persuaded himself that he heard the animal responding to his call.

The vessels were now scarcely three hundred feet apart; the barking was more and more distinct, and presently a great dog was seen clinging to the starboard netting. It barked more desperately than ever.

"Howick," said Captain Hull, calling to the boatswain, "heave to, and lower the small boat."