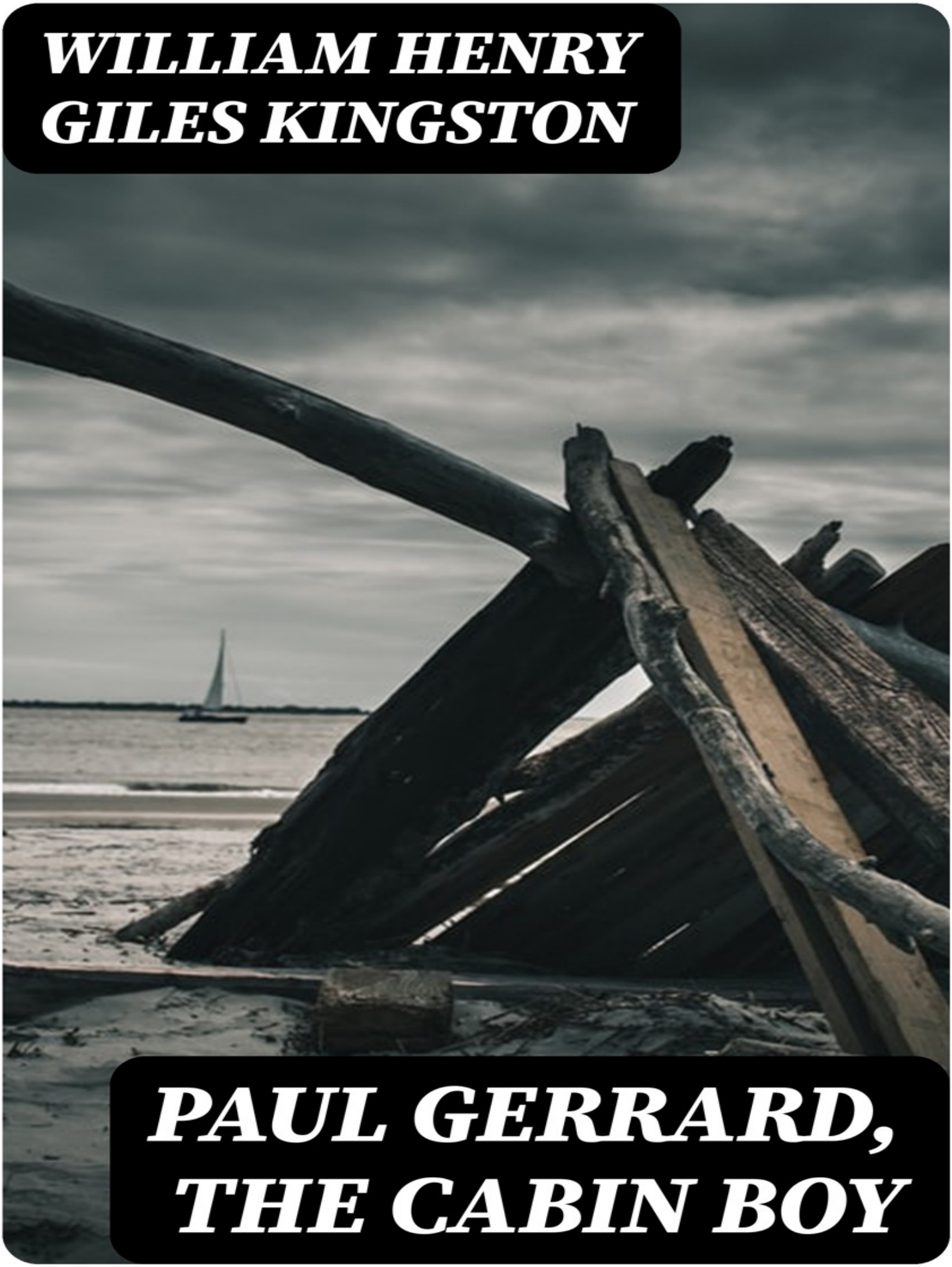
WILLIAM HENRY GILES KINGSTON



PAUL GERRARD, THE CABIN BOY

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W.H.G. Kingston

"Paul Gerrard"

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Chapter One.

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Darkness had set in. The wind was blowing strong from the southwest, with a fine, wetting, penetrating rain, which even tarpaulins, or the thickest of Flushing coats, would scarcely resist. A heavy sea also was running, such as is often to be met with in the chops of the British Channel during the month of November, at which time of the year, in the latter part of the last century, a fine frigate was struggling with the elements, in a brave attempt to beat out into the open ocean. She was under close-reefed topsails; but even with this snug canvas she often heeled over to the blast, till her lee-ports were buried in the foaming waters. Now she rose to the summit of a white-crested sea; now she sunk into the yawning trough below; and ever and anon as she dashed onward in spite of all opposition, a mass of water would strike her bows with a clap like that of thunder, and rising over her bulwarks, would deluge her deck fore and aft, and appear as if about to overwhelm her altogether. A portion of the officers and crew stood at their posts on deck, now and then shaking the water from their hats and coats, after they had been covered with a thicker shower than usual of rain or spray, or looking up aloft at the

straining canvas, or out over the dark expanse of ocean; but all of them taking matters very composedly, and wishing only that their watch were over, that they might enjoy such comforts as were to be found below, and take part in the conviviality which, in spite of the gale, was going forward.

It was Saturday night, and fore and aft the time-honoured toast of “sweethearts and wives” was being enthusiastically drunk,—nowhere more enthusiastically than in the midshipmen’s berth; and not the less so probably, that few of its light-hearted inmates had in reality either one or the other. What cared they for the tumult which raged above their heads? They had a stout ship and trusted officers, and their heads and insides were well accustomed to every possible variety of lurching and pitching, in which their gallant frigate the *Cerberus* was at that moment indulging. The *Cerberus*, a fine 42-gun frigate, commanded by Captain Walford, had lately been put in commission, and many of her officers and midshipmen had only joined just before the ship sailed, and were thus comparatively strangers to each other. The frigate was now bound out to a distant station, where foes well worthy of her, it was hoped, would be encountered, and prize-money without stint be made.

The midshipmen’s berth of the *Cerberus* was a compartment of somewhat limited dimensions,—now filled to overflowing with mates, midshipmen, masters’-assistants, assistant-surgeons, and captain’s and purser’s clerks,—some men with grey heads, and others boys scarcely in their teens, of all characters and dispositions, the sons of nobles of the proudest names, and the offspring of plebeians, who had little to boast of on that score, or on any

other; but the boys might hope, notwithstanding, as many did, to gain fame and a name for themselves. The din of tongues and shouts of laughter which proceeded out of that narrow berth, rose even above the creaking of bulkheads, the howling of the wind, and the roar of the waves.

The atmosphere was somewhat dense and redolent of rum, and could scarcely be penetrated by the light of the three purser's dips which burned in some battered tin candlesticks, secured by lanyards to the table. At one end of the table over which he presided as caterer, sat Tony Noakes, an old mate, whose grog-blossomed nose and bloodshot eyes told of many a past debauch.

"Here's to my own true love, Sally Pounce," he shouted in a husky voice, lifting to his lips a stiff glass of grog, which was eyed wistfully by Tilly Blake, a young midshipman, from whose share of rum he had abstracted its contents.

"Mrs Noakes that is to be," cried out Tilly in a sharp tone. "But I say, she'll not stand having her grog drunk up."

"That remark smells of mutiny, youngster," exclaimed Noakes, with a fierce glance towards the audacious midshipman.

"By the piper, but it's true, though," put in Paddy O'Grady, who had also been deprived of the larger portion of his grog.

Most of the youngsters, on finding others inclined to stand up for their rights, made common cause with Blake and O'Grady. Enraged at this, Noakes threatened the malcontents with condign punishment.

"Yes, down with all mutiny and the rights of man or midshipmen," exclaimed in a somewhat sarcastic tone a

good-looking youth, who himself wore the uniform of a midshipman.

“Well said, Devereux. We must support the rights and dignity of the oldsters, or the service will soon go to ruin,” cried the old mate, whose voice grew thicker as he emptied glass after glass of his favourite liquor. “You show your sense, Devereux, and deserve your supper, but—there’s no beef on the table. Here boy—boy Gerrard—bring the beef; be smart now—bring the beef. Don’t stand staring there as if you saw a ghost.”

The boy thus summoned was a fine lad of about fourteen, his shirt collar thrown back showing his neck, which supported a well-formed head, with a countenance intelligent and pleasant, but at that moment very pale, with an expression denoting unhappiness, and a feeling of dislike to, or dread of, those on whom he was waiting. A midshipmen’s boy has seldom a pleasant time of it under any circumstances. Boy Gerrard, as he was called, did his best, though often unsuccessfully, to please his numerous masters.

“Why do you stand there, staring like a stuffed pig?” exclaimed Devereux, who was near the door. “It is the beef, not your calf’s head we want. Away now, be smart about it.”

The sally produced a hoarse laugh from all those sufficiently sober to understand a joke.

“The beef, sir; what beef?” asked boy Gerrard in a tone of alarm.

“Our beef,” shouted old Noakes, heaving a biscuit at the boy’s head. It was fortunate that no heavy missile was in his hand. “Take that to sharpen your wits.”

Devereux laughed with others at the old mate’s roughness. The boy gave an angry glance at him as he hurried off to the midshipmen’s larder to execute the order.

Before long, boy Gerrard was seen staggering along the deck towards the berth with a huge piece of salt beef in his hands, and endeavouring to keep his legs as the frigate gave a heavy lurch or pitched forward, as she forced her way over the tumultuous seas. Boy Gerrard gazed at the berth of his many masters. He thought that he could reach it in another run. He made the attempt, but it was down hill, and before he could save himself he had shot the beef, though not the dish, into the very centre of the table, whence it bounded off and hit O’Grady, the Irish midshipman, a blow on the eye, which knocked him backward. Poor Gerrard stood gazing into the berth, and prepared for the speedy punishment which his past experience had taught him would follow.

“By the piper, but I’ll teach you to keep a taughter gripe of the beef for the future, you spalpeen,” exclaimed O’Grady, recovering himself, and about to hurl back the joint at the head of the unfortunate boy, when his arm was grasped by Devereux, who cried out, laughing,—“Preserve the beef and your temper, Paddy, and if boy Gerrard, after proper trial, shall be found to have purposely hurled the meat at your wise caput, he shall be forthwith delivered over to condign punishment.”

“Oh, hang your sea-lawyer arguments; I’ll break the chap’s head, and listen to them afterwards,” cried O’Grady, attempting to spring up to put his threat into execution.

Devereux again held him back, observing, “Break the boy’s head if you like; I have no interest in preserving it, except that we may not find another boy to take his place; but you must listen to my arguments before you commence operations.”

“Hear, hear! lawyer Devereux is about to open his mouth,” cried several voices.

“Come, pass me the beef, and let me put some of it into my mouth, which is open already,” exclaimed Peter Bruff, another of the older mates, who having just descended from the deck, and thrown off his dripping outer coat, had taken his seat at the table. His hair and whiskers were still wet with spray, his hands showed signs of service, and his fine open countenance—full of good-nature, and yet expressive of courage and determination, had a somewhat weather-worn appearance, though his crisp, curling, light hair showed that he was still in the early prime of manhood.

“Listen, gentlemen of the jury, and belay your jaw-tackles you who have no business in the matter, and Bruff being judge, I will plead boy Gerrard’s cause against Paddy O’Grady, Esquire, midshipman of his Majesty’s frigate *Cerberus*,” cried Devereux, striking the table with his fist, a proceeding which obtained a momentary silence. “To commence, I must go back to first causes. You understand, gentlemen of the jury, that there is a strong wind blowing, which has kicked up a heavy sea, which is tossing about our stout ship in a way to make it difficult for a seaman, and much more for a ship’s boy, to keep his legs, and therefore I suggest—”

“Belay all that, Master Long-tongue,” shouted Noakes; “if the boy is to be cobbed, why let’s cob him; if not, why let him fill the mustard-pot, for it’s empty.”

Others now joined in; some were for cobbing poor Gerrard forthwith; others, who had not had their supper, insisted on the mustard-pot being first replenished.

Devereux had gained his point in setting his messmates by the ears, and Peter Bruff seeing his object, sent off Gerrard for a supply of the required condiment. It was O’Grady’s next watch on deck; and thus before Gerrard returned, he had been compelled to leave the berth. Devereux, however, immediately afterwards turned on Gerrard and scolded him harshly for not keeping steady while waiting at the door of the berth. At length the master-at-arms came round, the midshipmen were sent to their hammocks, and Paul Gerrard was allowed to turn into his. He felt very sick and very miserable. It was the commencement of his sea life, a life for which he had long and enthusiastically yearned, and this was what it proved to be. How different the reality from what he had expected! He could have cried aloud for very bitterness of heart, but that he was ashamed to allow his sobs to be heard.

“He treat me thus! he by birth my equal! to speak to me as if I was a slave! he who might have been in my place, had there been justice done us, while I should have been in his. A hard fate is mine; but yet I chose it, and I’ll bear it.”

With such thoughts passing through his mind, the young ship-boy fell asleep, and for a time forgot his cares and suffering. He dreamed of happier times, when he with his parents and brothers and sisters enjoyed all the luxuries

which wealth could give, and he was a loved and petted child. Then came a lawsuit, the subject of which he could not comprehend. All he knew was, that it was with the Devereux family. It resulted in the loss to his father of his entire fortune, and Paul remembered hearing him say that they were beggars. “That is what I will not be,” he had exclaimed; “I can work—we can all work—I will work.”

Paul was to be tried severely. His father died broken-hearted. It seemed too probable that his mother would follow him ere long. Paul had always desired to go to sea. He could no longer hope to tread the quarter-deck as an officer, yet he still kept to his determination of following a life on the ocean.

“I will enter as a cabin-boy; I will work my way upwards. Many have done so, why should not I?” he exclaimed with enthusiasm; “I will win wealth to support you all, and honours for myself. ‘Where there’s a will there’s a way.’ I don’t see the way very clearly just now; but that is the opening through which I am determined to work my way onward.”

Paul’s mother, though a well-educated and very excellent person, knew nothing whatever of the world. She would, indeed, have hesitated, had she known the real state of the case, and what he would have to go through, ere she allowed her son to enter before the mast on board a man-of-war; but she had no one on whom she could rely, to consult in the matter. Mrs Gerrard had retired to the humble cottage of a former servant in a retired village, where she hoped that the few pounds a year she had left her would enable her to support herself and her children, with the aid of such

needlework as she might obtain. Little did she think, poor woman, to what trying difficulties she would be exposed. Not only must she support herself, but educate her children. She had saved a few books for this purpose, and some humble furniture for her little cottage; everything else had been sold to raise the small sum on the interest of which she was to live.

“Mother! mother! do let me at once go to sea!” exclaimed Paul, who understood tolerably well the state of affairs. “I can do nothing at home to help you, and only eat up what should feed others; if I go to sea, I shall get food and clothing, and pay and prize-money, and be able to send quantities of gold guineas home to you. Reuben Cole has been telling me all about it; and he showed me a purse full of great gold pieces, just the remains of what he came ashore with a few weeks ago. He was going to give most of it to his sister, who has a number of children, and then go away to sea again, and, dear mother, he promised to take me with him if you would let me go. Mary and Fred will help all the better, when I am away, to teach Sarah and John and Ann, and Fred is so fond of books that he is certain to get on some day, somehow or other.”

What could the poor widow say to these appeals often repeated? What could she hope to do for her boy? There was a romance attached in those times to a sea life felt by all classes, which scarcely exists at the present day. She sent for Reuben Cole, who, though a rough sailor, seemed to have a kind heart. He promised to act the part of a father towards the boy to the best of his power, undertaking to find a good ship for him without delay. The widow yielded, and

with many an earnest prayer for his safety, committed Paul to the charge of Reuben Cole. The honest sailor was as good as his word. He could scarcely have selected a better ship than the *Cerberus*. He volunteered to join, provided Paul was received on board; his terms were accepted, and he thought that he was doing well for his young charge when he got him the appointment of midshipmen's boy. The employment was very different from what Paul had expected, but he had determined to do his duty in whatever station he might be placed. The higher pay and perquisites would be of value to him, as he might thus send more money to his mother, and he hoped soon to become reconciled to his lot. One day, however, the name of a midshipman who had just joined struck his ear,—it was that of Devereux, the name of the family with whom his father had so long carried on the unsuccessful lawsuit.

From some remarks casually made by one of the other midshipmen while he was waiting in the berth, Paul was convinced that Gilbert Devereux was a son of the man who had, he conceived, been the cause of his father's ruin and death. Paul, had he been asked, would have acknowledged how he ought to feel towards young Devereux, but he at times allowed himself to regard him with bitterness and dislike, if not with downright hatred. He well knew that this feeling was wrong, and he had more than once tried to overcome the feeling when, perhaps, some careless expression let drop by Gilbert Devereux, or some order given by him, would once more arouse it. "I could bear it from another, but not from him," Paul over and over again had said to himself after each fresh cause of annoyance

given by young Devereux, who all the time was himself utterly ignorant that he had offended the boy. Of course he did not suspect who Paul was; Paul had determined to keep his own secret, and had not divulged it even to Reuben. Reuben was somewhat disappointed with Paul. “I cannot make out what ails the lad,” he said to himself, “he was merry and spirited enough on shore; I hope he’s not going to be afraid of salt-water.”

Poor Paul was undergoing a severe trial. It might prove for his benefit in the end. While the frigate was in harbour, he bore up tolerably well, but he had now for the first time in his life to contend with sea-sickness; while he was also at the beck and call of a dozen or more somewhat unreasonable masters. It was not, however, till that Saturday night that Paul began really to repent that he had come to sea. Where was the romance? As the serpent, into which Aaron’s rod was changed, swallowed up the serpents of the Egyptian magicians, so the stern reality had devoured all the ideas of the romance of a sea life, which he had till now entertained.

Yet sleep, that blessed medicine for human woes, brought calm and comfort to his soul. He dreamed of happier days, when his father was alive, and as yet no cares had visited his home. He was surrounded by the comforts which wealth can give. He was preparing, as he had long hoped to do, for sea, with the expectation of being placed as a midshipman on the quarter-deck. His uniform with brass buttons, his dirk and gold-laced hat, lay on a table before him, with a bright quadrant and spy-glass; and there was his sea-chest ready to be filled with his new wardrobe, and all

sorts of little comforts which a fond mother and sisters were likely to have prepared for him. He heard the congratulations of friends, and the prophecies that he would some day emulate the deeds of England's greatest naval heroes. He dreamed on thus till the late events of his life again came into his thoughts, and he recollected that it was not his own, but the outfit of another lad about to go to sea which he had long ago inspected with such interest, and at length the poor ship-boy was awakened to the stern reality of his present condition by the hoarse voice of a boatswain's mate summoning all hands on deck. Paul felt so sea-sick and so utterly miserable that he thought that he would rather die where he lay in his hammock than turn out and dress. The ship was tumbling about more violently than ever; the noise was terrific; the loud voices of the men giving utterance to coarse oaths as they awoke from their sleep; their shouts and cries; the roaring of the wind as it found its way through the open hatches down below; the rattling of the blocks; the creaking of timbers and bulkheads, and the crash of the sea against the sides of the ship, made Paul suppose that she was about to sink into the depths of the ocean. "I'll die where I am," he thought to himself. "Oh, my dear mother and sisters, I shall never see you more!" But at that instant a kick and a blow inflicted by Sam Coulson, one of the boatswain's mates, made him spring up.

"What, skulking already, you young hedgehog," exclaimed the man; "on deck with your or your shoulders shall feel a taste of my colt."

Although Paul was as quick in his movements as his weak state would allow, a shower of blows descended on his back, which brought him on his knees, when, ordering him to pick himself up and follow, on pain of a further dose of the colt, Sam Coulson passed on. The sharp tattoo of a drum beaten rapidly sounded at the same time through the ship; but what it signified Paul in his ignorance could not tell, nor was there any one near him to ask. Bewildered and unable to see in the darkness, he tried in vain to gain the hatchway. He groped his way aft as fast as he could, for fear of encountering the boatswain's mate. "If the ship sinks I must go down with her; but anything is better than meeting him," he thought to himself. "Besides, I cannot be worse off than those on deck, I should think."

He worked his way aft till he found himself near the midshipmen's chests; there was a snug place between two of them in which he had more than once before ensconced himself when waiting to be summoned by his masters. "Here I'll wait till I find out what is happening," he said to himself as he sank down into the corner. The din continued, the frigate tumbled about as much as before, but he was very weary, and before long he forgot where he was, and fell fast asleep.

He was at length awoke by a crashing sound, as if the timbers were being rent apart. What could it be? He started up, scarcely knowing where he was. Had the ship struck on a rock, or could she be going down? There was then a loud report; another and another followed. The reports became louder; they were directly over his head. The main-deck guns were being fired. The ship must be engaged with an

enemy, there could be no doubt about that. The light from a ship's lantern fell on the spot where he lay. The gunner and his crew were descending to the magazine. His duty he had been told would be in action to carry up powder to the crew; he ought to arouse himself. The surgeon and his assistants now came below to prepare the cockpit for the reception of the wounded. More lights appeared. The carpenter and his crew were going their rounds through the wings. Men were descending and ascending, carrying up shot from the lockers below. All were too busy to discover Paul. The sea had by this time gone down, and the ship was less tumbled about than before. Sleep, too, had somewhat restored his strength, and with it his spirits and courage.

"What am I about, skulking here? I ought to be ashamed of myself; have all my once brave thoughts and aspirations come to this? I will be up and do my duty, and not mind Sam Coulson, or the enemy's shot, or anything else." Such were the thoughts which rapidly passed through his mind; he sprang to his feet, and, as he hoped, unobserved reached the main-deck. He fortunately remembered that his friend Reuben Cole was captain of one of the main-deck guns, and that Reuben had told him that that was the gun he was to serve. The deck was well lighted up by the fighting-lanterns, and he had thus no difficulty in finding out his friend. The men, mostly stripped to their waists, stood grouped round their guns with the tackles in their hands, the captains holding the slow matches ready to fire. Paul ran up to Reuben, who was captain of his gun.

"What am I to do?" he asked; "you said you would tell me."

“So I will, lad; and I am glad to see you, for I was afraid that you had come to harm,” answered Reuben, in a kind tone. “I said as how I was sure you wasn’t one to skulk. Where was you, boy?”

Paul felt conscience-stricken, and he dared not answer; for utter a falsehood to excuse himself he would not. “Tell me what I am to do, and I’ll try to do it,” he said, at length.

“Why, then, do you go down with Tom Buckle to the powder-magazine with that tub there, and get it filled and come back and sit on it till we wants it,” replied his friend, who possibly might have suspected the truth.

“Then I am about to take part in a real battle,” thought Paul, as, accompanying the boy Tom Buckle, he ran down to the magazine. In a moment, sickness, fatigue, and fear were banished. He was the true-hearted English Boy, and he felt as brave as he could wish, and regardless of danger. Paul knew he was doing his duty. His tub was quickly filled, and he was soon again at Reuben’s gun, behind which he was told to sit—one of a row of boys employed in the same manner. Many of his companions were laughing and joking, as if nothing unusual was occurring, or as if it was impossible that a shot could find them out.

Paul was now, for the first time, able to make inquiries as to the state of affairs. Reuben told him that, at about midnight, the lights of two ships had been seen. It was possible that they might be those of the look-out frigates of an enemy’s squadron, at the same time as they might be British, and as Captain Walford had resolved that nothing should drive him back, the *Cerberus* was kept on her course. Whatever they were, the strangers seemed determined to

become better acquainted. As they drew nearer, signals were exchanged; but those of the stranger's were not understood. The drum on this beat to quarters, and the ship was prepared for battle. The two ships approached, and soon gave the *Cerberus* a taste of their quality by pouring their broadsides into her; but, in consequence of the heavy sea which was then running, very few of their shot had taken effect. Two, however, which had struck her hull, had passed through the bulwarks and killed two of her men, whose bodies now lay stark and stiff on the main-deck, near where they had stood as their mates were now standing, full of life and manly strength. Paul's eyes fell on them. It was the first time he had seen death in its most hideous form. He shuddered and turned sick. Reuben observed the direction in which his glance was turned.

"Paul, my lad, you mustn't think of them now," he cried out. "They've done their duty like men, and it's our business to try to do ours. We've got some pretty sharp work before us; but it's my belief that we'll beat off our enemies, or take one or both of them, maybe. Hurrah! lads. That's what we've got to do."

The crews of the guns within hearing uttered a cheerful response. "All ready!"

"Let 'em come on!"

"The more the merrier!"

"We'll give 'em more than we'll take!"

These, and similar expressions, were heard from the seamen, while now and then a broad joke or a loud laugh burst from the lips of the more excited among them. But there was no Dutch courage exhibited. One and all showed

the most determined and coolest bravery. The officers whose duty it was to be on the main-deck kept going their rounds, to see that the men were at their stations, and that all were supplied with powder and shot and all things necessary. Then the first-lieutenant, Mr Order, came down.

“My lads,” he exclaimed, “the captain sends to you to say that we have, perhaps, tough work before us; but that he is sure you all will do your duty like men, and will help him to thrash the enemy, as he hopes to do by daylight, when he can see them better.”

A loud cheer rang out from the throats of the seamen, fore and aft. Mr Order felt satisfied that they were in the right temper for work. He returned again on deck. It was still very dark, and nothing could be seen through the open ports. Every now and then, however, the crest of a sea washed in and deluged the decks, washing from side to side till it could escape through the scuppers. Any moment the order to fire might be heard, or the shot of the enemy might come crashing through the sides. It was a trying time for old salts, who had fought in many a previous battle; much more so for young hands. Paul sat composedly on his tub. Not far off from him stood Gilbert Devereux, in command of a division of guns.

“If a shot were to take his head off, there would be one of our enemies out of the way,” thought Paul; but directly afterwards his conscience rebuked him. “No, no; that is a wicked feeling,” it said; “I would rather be killed myself, if it were not for my poor mother and all at home—they would be so sorry.”

Still, Paul could not help eyeing the aristocratic-looking young midshipman, who, with a firm, proud step, trod the deck, eager for the fight, and little aware that he was watched with so much interest by the humble ship's boy. Peter Bruff, who had the next division of guns under his charge, came up to Gilbert.

"Well, Devereux, how do you like this fun?" he asked. "Have you ever before been engaged?"

"Never; but I like the idea of the sport well enough to wish to begin," answered Devereux. "Where are our enemies?"

"Not far off, and they will not disappoint us," answered Bruff. "We shall have pretty tough work of it, depend on that."

"The tougher the better," answered Devereux, in a somewhat affected tone. "I've never been in a battle, and I really want to see what it is like."

"He's wonderfully cool," thought Paul. "He hasn't seen the dead men there, forward. It would be some satisfaction if he would show himself to be a coward, after all. I could throw it in his teeth when he attempts to tyrannise over me."

Paul's feelings were very far from right; but they were natural, unfortunately. Gilbert's firm step and light laugh showed that there was little chance of Paul's wishes being realised. Now a rumour spread from gun to gun that the enemy were again drawing near. The men took a firmer hold of the gun-tackles, hitched up their trousers, drew their belts tighter round their waists, or gave some similar sign of preparation for the coming struggle.

“Silence, fore and aft!” cried the officer in command of the deck.

He was repeating the order which the captain had just given above. The frigate plunged on heavily through the seas. The awful moment was approaching. There was neither jest nor laughter now. The men were eagerly looking through the ports. The lights from two ships were seen on the weather beam. In smooth water the enemy having the weather-gauge would have been to the disadvantage of the *Cerberus*; but with the heavy sea which then ran it mattered, fortunately, less.

“Starboard guns! Fire! fire!” was shouted by the officers.

“Hurrah, lads! We have the first of it this time, and it’s my belief we hit the mounseer,” cried Reuben Cole, as he discharged his gun.

Scarcely had the smoke cleared off from the deck when the roar of the enemy’s guns was heard, and several shot came crashing against the side. One, coming through a port, passed close above Paul’s head, and though it sent the splinters flying about in every direction, no one was hurt.

“I’ve an idea there’ll be work for the carpenters, to plug the shot-holes,” cried Reuben, as the guns, being rapidly run in, loaded, and run out again, he stood ready for the command to fire.

It soon came, and the whole broadside of the *Cerberus* was poured, with good aim, into the bows of the leading Frenchman, which had attempted to pay her the same compliment. For a few moments at a time Paul could catch sight of the lights of the enemy’s ships through the ports; but the smoke from their own guns quickly again shut out all

objects, except the men standing close to him. Paul had plenty to do; jumping up to deliver the powder, and running down to the magazine for more when his tub was empty. He discovered that, small as he was, he was taking a very active part in the battle, and doing considerably more than the midshipmen, who had to stand still, or only occasionally to run about with orders. This gave him infinite satisfaction.

“After all, I am doing as much as he is,” he thought, looking towards Devereux.

The firing became very rapid, and the enemy were close to the frigate; for not only round-shot flew on board, but the rattle of musketry was heard, and bullets came pattering through the ports. Such a game could not be played without loss. Fore and aft the men were struck down,—some never to rise again; cut in two, or with their heads knocked off. Others were carried below; and others, binding up their wounds, returned eagerly to their guns. Now there was a cessation of firing. The smoke cleared off. There stood Devereux, unharmed, and as cool as at the commencement of the action, though smoke-begrimed as the rest of the crew; but as Paul glanced round and saw the gleam of the lanterns on the blood-stained decks, and the pale faces of the dead, and the bandaged heads and limbs of the wounded, he again turned sick, and wished, as many a person has wished before, that there was no such thing as fighting and slaughtering one’s fellow-creatures.

It was supposed that the enemy had hauled off to repair damages. The crew of the *Cerberus* were accordingly called away from their guns to repair those she had received, as far as could be done in the darkness. Not much time was

allowed them. Again their enemies returned to the attack. Each ship was pronounced to be equal in size to the *Cerberus*, if not larger than it. She had already suffered severely; the men were again ordered to their quarters. The suspense before the firing should recommence was trying,—the very silence itself was awful. This time it was broken by the enemy, but their fire was speedily returned by a broadside from the *Cerberus*. Now, as rapidly as the guns on both sides could be loaded, they were run out and fired, for the British had an enemy on either beam, and each man knew that he must exert himself to the utmost to gain the victory. When did English sailors ever fail to do that? There could be no doubt, however, that the *Cerberus* was hard pressed.

Dreadful was the scene of havoc and carnage; the thunder of the guns; the rattle of the musketry; the crashing of the enemy's shot as they tore the stout planks asunder; the roar of the seas as they dashed against the sides, and the cries of the wounded, while the shouts of the men, who, as the fight grew more bloody, were more and more excited, became louder and louder; bright flashes, and wreaths of dark smoke, and splinters flying about, and men falling, and blood starting from their wounds, made up that horrid picture. Paul had seen old Noakes carried below; O'Grady followed, badly hurt; others of his masters were killed or wounded. Devereux seemed to bear a charmed life. No! no man's life is charmed. One moment he was standing full of life, encouraging his men; the next he lay wounded and bleeding on the wet and slippery deck. As he saw the handsome youth carried writhing in agony below, Paul's

feelings of animosity instantly vanished. He would have sprung forward to help him, but he had his own duty to attend to, and he knew that he must not neglect it, even though it was only to sit on a tub.

From the exclamations of the men, Paul thought that the battle was going against them; still the crew fought on as bravely as at first. “Fire! fire!” What dreadful cry is that? “The ship is on fire!”

“All is lost!” No; the firemen leave their guns and run forward to where some hay is blazing. The enemy have discovered what has occurred and redouble their efforts. The fire must be got under in spite of shot and bullets. The men rush up to the flames fearlessly. Buckets upon buckets of water are thrown on them; the burning fragments of timber are hove overboard. The fire is reported to be got under. The British seamen cheer, and good reason have they to do so now, for flames are seen bursting from the ports and hatchways of their most determined opponent. Still all three ships tear on over the foaming ocean. Thus closes that fearful night, and so must we our first chapter.

Chapter Two.

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The *Cerberus*, stout frigate that she was, plunged onward across the foam-covered ocean. On one side was the burning ship, at which not a shot had been fired since her condition was discovered; on the other was a still active enemy. With the latter, broadside after broadside was rapidly exchanged, but without much damage being

sustained. From the burning ship a few shots continued for a short time to be fired, but as the fire increased, the crew must have deserted their guns, and as the flames gained the mastery, they burned through the ropes and attacked the sails, and the ship fell off and rolled helplessly in the trough of the sea, where the two combatants soon left her far astern.

“I wish as how we could heave-to and send a boat to help them poor fellows,” cried Reuben Cole, looking at the burning ship.

“To my mind, the mounseer out there would be doing better if he was to cry, Peccavi, and then go and look after his countrymen, instead of getting himself knocked to pieces, as he will be if he keeps on long at this game.”

The sentiment was highly applauded by his hearers. There was not a man indeed on board the frigate who was not eager to save the lives of the hapless crew of the burning ship, which they had till now striven so hard to destroy.

The firing had ceased; the grey dawn broke over the waste of waters; astern was seen the smoke from the burning ship, with bright flashes below it, and away to leeward their other antagonist making all sail to escape. The battle was over, though the victor could boast but of a barren conquest. The guns were run in and secured, and the weary crew instantly set to work to repair damages. As the wind had fallen and the sea had considerably gone down, the work was performed without much difficulty. Captain Walford had narrowly watched his flying foe, in the hopes that she might go to the assistance of her late consort. Her

royals had not long sunk below the horizon when once more the *Cerberus* was in a condition to make sail.

Captain Walford considered whether he should go in pursuit of the enemy, or attempt to save the lives of the unfortunate people from the burning ship. In the first case he might possibly capture an enemy's ship, but ought he for the chance of so doing to leave his fellow-creatures to perish miserably?

"No, I will risk all consequences," he said to his first-lieutenant after a turn on deck. And the *Cerberus* stood towards the wreck.

The wind had fallen so much that her progress was very slow. The English now wished for more wind, for every moment might be of vital consequence to their late enemies. Not a man on board felt the least enmity towards them; even the wounded and dying when told of their condition looked on them as brothers in misfortune.

War is sad work, sad for those at home, sad for those engaged in it, and the only way to mitigate its horrors is to treat the fallen or the defeated foe as we should ourselves wish to be treated.

While the frigate sailed on, the crew were repairing as far as possible the damages she had received; for at that season of the year it was probable that another gale might spring up, which she was as yet ill-prepared to encounter. The men were nearly dropping with fatigue, but they worked on bravely, as true-hearted seamen always do work when necessity demands their exertions.

Meantime Paul was summoned below. The midshipmen who were not required on deck were again assembled in the

berth; but the places of several were vacant. They were eating a hurried meal which Paul had placed on the table, and discussing the events of the fight. One or two of the youngsters were rather graver than usual, but Paul thought that the rest took matters with wonderful indifference. He was anxious to know what had happened to Devereux, whom he had seen carried below badly wounded. Nobody mentioned him; perhaps he was dead; and he did not feel sorry at the thought. After a time, though, he had some compunctions of conscience. He was thinking that he would find his way towards the sick bay, where the wounded midshipmen and other junior officers were placed, when one of the assistant-surgeons came towards the berth.

“Here, boy Gerrard, I can trust you, I think,” he exclaimed. “I want you to stay by Mr Devereux, and to keep continually moistening his lips, fomenting his wound as I shall direct. He is very feverish, and his life may depend on your attention.”

Paul felt as he had never felt before, proud and happy at being thus spoken to, and selected by the surgeon to perform a responsible office, even though it was for one whom he had taught himself to look upon in the light of an enemy. He was soon by the side of the sufferer. The sight which met his eyes was sufficient to disarm all hostility. The young midshipman, lately so joyous, with the flush of health on his cheeks, lay pale as death, groaning piteously; his side had been torn open, and a splinter had taken part of the scalp from his head. The assistant-surgeon showed him what to do, and then hurried away, for he had many

wounded to attend to, as the chief surgeon had been killed by a shot which came through one of the lower ports.

Gerrard felt greatly touched at Devereux's sufferings. "Poor fellow! he cannot possibly live with those dreadful wounds, and yet I am sure when the fight began that he had not an idea that he was to be killed, or even hurt," he said to himself more than once. Paul was unwearied in following the surgeon's directions. Devereux, however, was totally unconscious, and unaware who was attending on him. He spoke now and then, but incoherently, generally about the home he had lately left. Once Paul heard him utter the name of Gerrard.

"We beat them, though they kept us long out of our fortune, and now they are beggars as they deserve. Hard for the young ones, though, I think; but it cannot be helped—must not think about them."

Such expressions dropped at intervals from the lips of Devereux. How he came to utter them at that time Paul could not guess. Did he know him, or in any way associate his name with the family of whom he was speaking?

"He has some sympathy, at all events, poor fellow, with our misfortunes," thought Paul. "I wish that I had not thought so ill of him. I hope he won't die. I will pray that God will spare his life; even if he were my enemy I should do that."

The surgeon, when he came his rounds, expressed his approval of the way Paul had managed his patient.

"Will he live, sir?" asked Paul, in a trembling voice.

"That is more than the wisest of us can say," was the answer.