

***JOHN
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***THE ISLAND
TREASURE***

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The Island Treasure

EAN 8596547372240

DigiCat, 2022

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Chapter One.

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Off the Tuskar Light.

“All hands take in sail!”

“Stand by y’r tops’l halliards!”

“Let go!”

Sharply shouted out in quick succession came these orders from Captain Snaggs, the hoarse words of command ringing through the ship fore and aft, and making even the ringbolts in the deck jingle—albeit they were uttered in a sort of drawling voice, that had a strong nasal twang, as if the skipper made as much use of his nose as of his mouth in speaking. This impression his thin and, now, tightly compressed lips tended to confirm; while his hard, angular features and long, pointed, sallow face, closely shaven, saving as to the projecting chin, which a sandy-coloured billy-goat beard made project all the more, gave him the appearance of a man who had a will of his own, aye, and a temper of his own, too, should anyone attempt to smooth him down the wrong way, or, in sea parlance, “run foul of his hawse!”

Captain Snaggs did not look particularly amiable at the present moment.

Standing by the break of the poop, with his lean, lanky body half bent over the rail, he was keeping one eye out to windward, whence he had just caught sight in time of the coming squall, looking down below the while at the hands in

the waist jumping briskly to their stations and casting off the halliards with a will, almost before the last echo of his shout 'let go!' had ceased to roar in their ears; and yet the captain's gaze seemed to gleam beyond these, over their heads and away forwards, to where Jan Steenbock, the second-mate, a dark-haired Dane, was engaged rousing out the port watch, banging away at the fo'c's'le hatchway and likewise shouting, in feeble imitation of the skipper's roar,—

"All ha-and, ahoy! Doomble oop, my mans, and take in ze sail! Doomble oop!"

But the men, who had only been relieved a short time before by the starboard watch, and had gone below for their dinner when 'eight bells' were struck, seemed rather loth at turning out again so soon for duty, the more especially as their caterer had just brought from the cook's galley the mess kid, full of some savoury compound, the appetising odour of which filled the air, and, being wafted upwards from below, made even the swarthy second-mate feel hungry, as he peered down the hatchway and called out to the laggards to come on deck.

"It vas goot, ja," murmured Jan Steenbock to himself, wiping his watering mouth with the back of his jacket sleeve and sniffing up a prolonged sniff of the odorous stew. "It vas goot, ja, and hart to leaf ze groob; but ze sheeps cannot wait, my mans; zo doomble oop dere! Doomble oop!"

Captain Snaggs, however, his watchful weather eye and quick intelligence taking in everything at a glance, liked the second-mate's slowness of speech and action as little as he relished the men's evident reluctance at hurrying up again on deck; for, although barely a second or two had elapsed

from his first order to the crew, he grew as angry as if it had been a “month of Sundays,” his sallow face flushing with red streaks and his sandy billy-goat beard bristling like wire, every hair on end, just as a cat’s tail swells at the sight of a strange dog in its immediate vicinity when it puts up its back.

“Avast thaar, ye durned fule!” he screamed in his passion, dancing about the poop and bringing his fist down with a resounding thump on the brass rail, as if the inanimate material represented for the nonce the back of the mate, whom he longed to belabour. “Guess one’d think ye wer coaxin’ a lot o’ wummen folk to come to a prayer-meetin’! Why don’t ye go down in the fo’c’s’le an’ drive ’em up, if they won’t come on deck when they’re hailed? Below thaar, d’ye haar?—all hands reef tops’ls!”

This shout, which the captain yelled out in a voice of thunder, finally fetched the dawdlers on deck, first one and then another crawling up the hatchway with lingering feet, in that half-hearted, dilatory, aggravating way that sailors—and some shore people, too for that matter—know well how to put on when setting to a task that runs against their grain and which they do not relish; though they can be spry enough, and with ten times the smartness of any landsmen, when cheerfully disposed for the work they have in hand, or in the face of some real emergency or imminent peril, forgetting then their past grievances, and buckling to the job right manfully, in true ‘shellback’ fashion, as if many-handed, like Briareus, with every hand a dozen fingers on it, and each finger a hook!

So it could be seen now.

The *Denver City*, a ship-rigged vessel of about thirteen hundred tons burthen, bound from Liverpool to San Francisco with a general cargo, had been two days out from the Mersey, battling against bad weather all the way from the start, with a foul wind, that shifted from the west to south-west and back again to the west, dead in her teeth, as she essayed to shape her course down Saint George's Channel to the Atlantic.

First, beating to the westward with the ebb tide, so as to give Great Orme's Head a wide berth, and then making a short board south when she had cleared Anglesey; what with the currents and the thick fog, accompanied with driving rain, that she met on nearing the Welsh coast, she nearly came to grief on the Skerries, the water shoaling rapidly on the lead being hove, shortly before the bright fixed light showing above the red on the Platters rocks loomed close in on the starboard bow. This made it a case of 'bout ship at once, Captain Snaggs thenceforth hugging the Irish side of the channel way and keeping it well on board on the port tack; and so on this second morning after leaving Liverpool, the ship was some six miles south of the Tuskar Light, with a forty-fathom bottom under her and the wind still to the southward and westward, right ahead of her true course, but shifting and veering from one point to another, and with a sudden sharp squall coming every now and then, by way of a change, to increase the labour of the men, already pretty well worn out by forty-eight hours tacking to and fro in the captain's endeavours to beat to windward in the face of the foul weather.

As the *Denver City*, too, reached the more open seaway, the water got rougher, a northern stream setting up the Irish Sea from Scilly meeting the incoming tide round Carnsore Point, and causing a nasty chopping sea; which, save in the sullen green hollows of the waves, was dead and lead-coloured as far as the eye could reach—as leaden, indeed, as the heavy grey sky overhead, where some fleecy floating clouds of lighter wrack, rapidly drifting across the darker background that lined the horizon all round, made the latter of a deeper tone by contrast, besides acting as the *avant courier* of a fresh squall—the wind just then tearing and shrieking through the rigging in short angry gusts and then sighing as it wailed away to leeward, like the spirit of some lost mariner chaunting the requiem of those drowned in the remorseless deep!

When the port watch had gone below at ‘eight bells,’ as mentioned before, to have their dinner, the weather had looked a little brighter, a small patch of blue sky, not quite as big as the Dutchman’s proverbial pair of breeches, showing right overhead at the zenith as the ship’s bell struck the midday hour, giving a slight promise of better things to come; and so, as Captain Snaggs had been trying to ‘carry on’ all he could from the time the vessel left the Mersey, working the hands to death, as they imagined, unnecessarily in tacking and beating about in his attempt to make a fair wind out of a foul one, instead of waiting more sensibly for a more favourable breeze, such as might reasonably be expected in another day or two at most—judging by those signs sailors know so well, as do farmers, but which are inexplicable according to any natural

meteorological laws—the hands now thought, on being so suddenly summoned again on deck, and forced to leave their untasted meal just as they were in the very act, so to speak, of putting it into their mouths, and with its tantalising taste and smell vexing them all the more, that the ‘old man’ only roused them out again from sheer malice and devilry, to make another fresh tack or short board, with the object of ‘hazing’ or driving them, as only slaves and sailors can be driven in these days by a brutal captain and hard taskmaster!

This it was that made them loth to leave their snug and warm fo’c’s’le, filled as it was with the grateful odour of the appetising lobscouse which Sam Jedfoot, the negro cook, a great favourite with the crew by reason of his careful attention to their creature comforts, had so thoughtfully compounded for them; and thus it was that they crawled up the hatchway from below so laggardly, in response to the second-mate’s pleading order and Captain Snaggs second stentorian hail, as if they were ascending a mountain, and each man had a couple of half-hundred weights tied to his legs, so as to make his movements the slower.

“Hoo-ry oop, mans!” cried the second-mate, in his queer foreign lingo. “Hoo-ry oop, or you vill have ze skipper after yous! He vas look as if he vas comin’ down ze poop ladder joost now!”

“Durn the skipper! He ain’t got no more feelin’ in his old carkiss than a Rock Island clam!” muttered the leading man of the disturbed watch, as he stepped out over the coaming of the hatchway on to the deck, as leisurely as if he were executing a step in the sword dance; but, the next moment,

as his eye took in the position of the ship and the scene around, the wind catching him at the moment, and almost knocking him backwards down the hatchway, as it met him full butt, he made a dash for the weather rigging, shouting out to his companions behind, who were coming up out of the fo'c's'le just as slowly as he had done: "Look alive, mates! Ther's a reg'lar screamer blowin' up, an' no mistake. We'll be took aback, if we don't get in our rags in time. Look smart; an' let's show the skipper how spry we ken be when we chooses!"

The captain, or 'skipper', soon supplemented this advice by another of his roaring commands, yelled out at a pitch of voice that defied alike the shriek of the wind, and the noise of the sea, and the slatting of the huge topsails as they bellied out into balloons one moment and then flapped back again with a bang against the swaying masts, that quivered again and again with the shock, as if the next blow would knock them out of the ship.

"Forrud there! Away aloft, ye lazy skunks!" cried Captain Snaggs, when he saw the watch at last turn out, gripping the brass poop rail in front of him with both hands, so as to steady himself and prevent his taking a header into the waist below, as he seemed to be on the point of doing every minute, in his excitement. "Lay out, thaar, on the yards, ye skulking lubbers! Lay out, thaar, d'ye hear? Thaar's no time to lose! Sharp's the word an' quick the motion!"

The starboard watch, which had been waiting for the others, at once rounded the weather braces, so as to take the wind out of the sails as the men raced aloft, each anxious now to be first out on the yard; and, the reef tackle

being hauled out, the spilling lines were clutched hold of, and the heavy folds of the canvas gathered up, the men at the yard-arms seeing to the earring being clear and ready for passing, with the hands facing to leeward, so as to lighten the sail and assist the weather earring being hauled out, as they held the reef-line, and again facing to windward and lightening the sail there in the same fashion, so as to haul out the lee-earring before the signal was given by those out at the end of the yard-arms to “toggle away!”

It was risky work, especially as the ship was rather shorthanded, to attempt reefing the three topsails all at once, but the job was at last accomplished to the captain’s apparent satisfaction, for he sang out for them to come down from aloft; when, the topsail halliards being brought to the capstan, the yards were bowsed again, the slack of the ropes coiled down, and everything made comfortable.

Captain Snaggs, however, had not done with them yet.

“Clew up an’ furl the mainsail!”

“Man the jib down-haul!”

“Brail up the spanker!”

He shouted out these several orders as quickly as he could bawl them, the creaking of the cordage and rattling of the clew-garnet blocks forming a fitting accompaniment to his twangy voice; while the plaintive ‘Yo—ho—hoy—e! Yo—ho—hai—e!’ of the men, as they hauled upon the clewlines and leech and buntlines of the heavy main course, chimed in musically with the wash of the waves as they broke over the bows, dashing high over the yard-arms in a cataract of spray, and wetting to the skin those out on the fo’c’s’le furling the jib—these having the benefit also of a second

bath below the surface as well, when the ship dived under as they got on to the footrope of the jib-boom, plunging them into the water up to their middles and more.

"I guess, we're going to hev it rougher yet," said the captain presently, when the second-mate came aft, after seeing all snug forward, to ask whether he might now dismiss the port watch to their long delayed dinner. "Thet thaar squall wer a buster, but thaar's worse comin', to my reck'nin'. We'd best take another reef in them topsails an' hev one in the foresail, too."

"Verra goot, sir!" replied Jan Steenbock, the mate, respectfully, as he made his way forward again to where the men were waiting, anxious to go below to their lobsouse—cold, alas! by now. "Verra goot!"

Captain Snaggs smiled contemptuously after him, and then broke into a laugh, which was shared in by the first-mate, an American like himself, but one of a stouter and coarser stamp and build, albeit he boasted of a more romantic sort of name—Jefferson Flinders, to wit. This worthy now sniggering in sympathy, as he came up the after companion and took his place by the captain's side, having been roused out before his time by the commotion on deck.

"A rum coon thet, sir," said he to the captain, in response to his laugh. "He'll be the death of me some day, I reckon, with thet durned 'verra goot!' of his'n, you bet, sir!"

"We've a rum lot o' hands altogether aboard, Flinders—chaps ez thinks they hev only come to sea to eat an' enj'y themselves, an' don't want to work fur thaar grub; but, I guess I'll haze' 'em, Flinders, I'll haze' 'em!" snapped out

Captain Snaggs, in reply, his wiry billy-goat beard bristling again as he yelled out in a louder tone,—“Forrud thaar! Mister Steenbock; what air ye about, man—didn’t I tell ye I want another reef taken in them topsails? Away aloft with ye agen; lay out thaar, an’ look spry about it!”

The halliards were therefore again let go, and the same performance gone through as before, with the addition of the men having to go up on the fore yard after they had finished with the topsails, and take a reef as well in the foresail—another piece of touch work.

As the ship was then found not to steer so well close-hauled, without any headsail, on account of the jib being lowered down, the foretopmost staysail was hoisted in its place and the bunt of the spanker loosened, to show a sort of ‘goose-wing’ aft,—this little additional fore and aft sail now giving her just the steadying power she wanted for her helm, and enabling her to lie a bit closer to the wind.

“Thet will do, the port watch!” cried Captain Snaggs at length, and the men were scampering back to the fo’c’s’le in high glee, glad of being released at last, when, as if he’d only been playing with them—as a cat plays with a mouse—he arrested their rush below with another shout,—

“Belay thaar! All hands ’bout ship!”

“Ha! ha!” sniggered Jefferson Flinders, the first-mate, behind him, enjoying the joke amazingly; “guess ye had ’em thaar, cap. Them coons ’ll catch a weasel asleep, I reckon, when they try working a traverse on a man of the grit of yourn!”

“Bully for ye,” echoed the captain, grinning and showing his yellow teeth, while his pointed beard wagged out. “Say,

Flinders, I'll fix 'em!"

The men, though, did not relish the joke; nor did they think it such an amusing one! It might, certainly, have been necessary to put the ship about, for the leeway she was making, coupled with the set of the cross tides, was causing her to hug the Irish coast too much, so that she was now bearing right on to the Saltee rocks, the vessel having covered the intervening twenty odd miles of water that lay between the Tuskar and this point since the hands had been first called up; but Captain Snaggs could have done this just as well off-hand after the topsails were reefed, without waiting until the men were ready to go below again before giving the fresh order.

It was only part and parcel of his tyrannical nature, that never seemed satisfied unless when giving pain and annoyance to those forced to serve under him.

And so, the men grumbled audibly as they came back once more from the fore hatch, manning the sheets and braces, when the skipper's warning shout was heard,—

"Helm's a-lee!"

"Tacks and sheets!" the next order followed; when the head sails were flattened and the ship brought up to the wind.

Then came,—

"Mainsail haul!" and the ponderous yards were swung round as the *Denver City* payed off handsomely, close-reefed as she was, on the starboard tack, shaping a course at a good right angle to her former one, so as now to weather the Smalls light, off the Pembroke shore, at the entrance to the Bristol Channel—a course that required a

stiff lee helm, and plenty of it, as the wind had now fetched round almost due south, well before the beam.

"Thet will do, the watch!" then called out Captain Snaggs once more; but the men were not to be taken in a second time, and waited, grouped about the hatchway, to see whether he would call them back again.

He did not, however.

So, their stopping there made him angry.

"Thet'll do, the watch! D'ye haar?" he shouted a second time. "If ye want to go below fur y'r grub, ye'd better go now, fur, I guess I won't give ye another chance, an' yer spell in the fo'c's'le 'll soon be up. Be off with ye sharp, ye durned skallawags, or I'll send ye up agen to reef tops'ls!"

This started them, and they disappeared down the hatchway in 'a brace of shakes,' the skipper turning round to the first-mate then, as if waiting for him to suggest some further little amusement for the afternoon.

Mr Jefferson Flinders was quite equal to the occasion.

"Didn't you call all hands, cap, jist now?" asked he, with suspicious innocence; "I thought I kinder heerd you."

"Guess so," replied Captain Snaggs. "Why?"

"'Cause I didn't see thet precious nigger rascal, Sam Jedfoot. The stooard an' thet swab of a Britisher boy ye fetched aboard at Liverpool wer thaar, sir, an' every blessed soul on deck but thet lazy nigger."

"'Deed, an' so it wer, I guess," said the captain musingly, as if to himself; and then he slipped back from the binnacle, where he had been talking to the first-mate, to his original position on the break of the poop, when, catching hold of the brass rail as before, he leant over and shouted forward

at the pitch of his twangy voice; “Sam Jedfoot, ye durned nigger, ahoy thaar! Show a leg, or ye’ll lump it!”

Chapter Two.

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“A Gen’leman ob Colour.”

“Thet swab of a Britisher boy,” so opprobriously designated by the first-mate as having been “fetched aboard at Liverpool” by the captain, as if he were the sweepings of the gutter, was really no less a personage, if I may be allowed to use that term, than myself, the narrator of the following strange story.

I happened, as luck would have it, to be standing just at his elbow when he made the remark, having come up the companion way from the cabin below the poop by the steward’s directions to tell Captain Snaggs that his dinner was ready; and, as may be imagined, I was mightily pleased with his complimentary language, although wondering that he gave me the credit of pulling and hauling with the others in taking in sail on ‘all hands’ being summoned, when every idler on board ship, as I had learnt in a previous voyage to New York and back, is supposed to help the rest of the crew; and so, of course, I lent my little aid too, doing as much as a boy could, as Mr Jefferson Flinders, the captain’s toady and fellow bully, although he only played second fiddle in that line when the skipper was on deck, could have seen for himself with half an eye.

Oh, yes, I heard what he said; and I believe he not only called me a 'swab,' but an 'ugly' one as well!

Indeed, I heard everything, pretty nearly everything, that is, and was able to see most of what occurred from the time when we were off the Tuskar Light until Captain Snaggs hailed the cook to come aft; for I was in and out of the cuddy and under the break of the poop all the while, except now that I went up the companion, and stood by the booby hatch over it, waiting for the captain to turn round, so that I could give him the steward's message.

But the skipper wasn't in any hurry to turn round at first, sticking there grasping the rail tightly, and working himself up into a regular fury because poor Sam didn't jump out of his galley at the sound of his voice and answer his summons; when, if he'd reflected, he would have known that the wind carried away his threatening words to leeward, preventing them from reaching the negro cook's ears, albeit these were as big and broad as the bell-mouth of a speaking trumpet.

The captain, though, did not think of this.

Not he; and, naturally, not recognising the reason for the negro's non-appearance immediately on his calling him, he became all the more angry and excited.

"Sam—Sambo—Sam Jedfoot!" he roared, raising his shrill voice a pitch higher in each case, as he thus successively rang the changes on the cook's name in his queer way, making the first-mate snigger behind him, and even I could not help laughing, the captain spoke so funnily through his nose; while Jan Steenbock, the second-mate, who was standing by the mainmast bitts, I could see, had a grim

smile on his face. "Sam, ye scoundrel! Come aft hyar at once when I hail, or by thunder I'll keelhaul ye, ez safe ez my name's Ephraim O Snaggs!"

The bathos of this peroration was too much for Jan Steenbock, and he burst into a loud "ho! ho!"

It was the last straw that broke the camel's—I mean the captain's—back, and he got as mad as a hatter.

"Ye durned Dutch skunk!" he flamed out, the red veins cross-hatching his face in his passion. "What the blue blazes d'ye mean by makin' fun o' yer cap'n? Snakes an' alligators, I'll disrate ye—I'll send ye forrud; I'll—I'll—"

"I vas not means no harms, cap'n," apologised the other, on the skipper stopping in his outburst for want of breath, the words appearing to be choking in his mouth, coming out too quick for utterance, so that they all got jumbled together. "I vas hab no bad respect of yous, sare. I vas only lafs mit meinselves."

"Then I'd kinder hev ye ter know, Mister Steenbock, thet ye'd better not laugh with yerself nor nary a body else when I'm on the poop," retorted Captain Snaggs, not believing a word of this lucid explanation, although he did not seemingly like to tell him so, and quarrel right out. "I guess though, as ye're so precious merry, ye might hev a pull taken at thet lee mainbrace. If ye wer anything of a seaman ye'd hev done it without me telling ye!"

Having administered this 'flea in the ear' to the second-mate, the captain turned round abruptly on his heel, with a muttered objurgation, having some reference to Jan Steenbock's eyes; and, as he looked aft, he caught sight of me.

“Jee-rusalem, b’y!” he exclaimed; “what in thunder air ye doin’ hyar? The poop ain’t no place fur cabin b’ys, I reckon.”

“The steward sent me up, sir,” I replied, trembling; for he looked as fierce as if he could eat me without salt, his bristly beard sticking out and wagging in the air, as he spoke in that snarling voice of his. “He t-t-old me to tell you, sir, that dinner was ready in the cabin, sir.”

The ship at the moment giving a lurch to port, as a fresh blast of wind caught her weather side, sending a big sea over the waist, I rolled up against him as I answered his question.

“Then ye ken skoot right away an’ tell him that I guess I’m boss hyar,” cried he, after shoving me back with an oath against the cabin skylight, which I almost tumbled over. “I’m goin’ to hev my meals when I chooses, I say, younker, an’ not when anybody else likes, stooard or no stooard!”

With this return message, I retreated nimbly down the companion, glad to get out of his reach, he looked so savage when he shoved me; but I had hardly descended two steps, when he called after me with a loud shout, that echoed down the passage way and made my flesh creep.

“B’y!” he yelled, making a jump, as if to grab hold of me. “B’y!”

“Ye-e-e-yes, sir,” I stammered, in mortal terror, looking back up the hatchway, though too frightened to return to nearer quarters with him again. “Ye-e-yes, sir.”

My alarm amused him. It was a sort of implied compliment to his bullying powers; and he laughed harshly, nodding his head.

“What in thunder air ye afeard on?” he said. “I ain’t goin’ to kill ye this time, b’y; it’s another cuss I’m after, a kinder sort o’ skunk of a different colour, I guess. Look hyar, b’y, jest ye make tracks forrud when ye’ve told the stooard what I’ve said, an’ see whether thet tarnation black nigger’s asleep in his galley, or what. Won’t I give him fits when I catch him, thet’s all—thaar, be off with ye, smart!”

I did not need any second intimation to go, but plunged down the companion stairway as if a wild bull was after me; and, telling the Welshman, Morris Jones, who acted as steward, a poor, cowardly sort of creature, that the captain did not want his dinner yet, hastened through the cuddy, and on to the maindeck beyond, coming out by the sliding door under the break of the poop, which was the ‘back entrance,’ as it were, to the cabin.

The ship being close-hauled, heeled over so much to leeward that her port side was almost under water, the waves that broke over the fo’c’s’le running down in a cataract into the waist and forming a regular river inside the bulwarks, right flush up with the top of the gunwale, which slushed backwards and forwards as the vessel pitched and rose again, one moment with her bows in the air, and the next diving her nose deep down into the rocking seas; so, I had to scramble along towards the galley on the weather side, holding on to every rope I could clutch to secure my footing, the deck slanting so much from the *Denver City* laying over to the wind, even under the reduced canvas she had spread. To add to my difficulties, also, in getting forwards, the sheets of foam and spindrift were carried along by the fierce gusts—which came now and again

between the lulls, when it blew more steadily, cutting off the tops of the billows and hurling the spray over the mainyard—drenched me almost to the skin before I arrived within hail of the fo’c’s’le.

However, I reached the galley all right at last, if dripping; when, as I looked in over the half-door that barred all admittance to the cook’s domain except to a privileged few, what did I see but Sam Jedfoot sitting down quite cosily in front of a blazing fire he had made up under the coppers containing the men’s tea, which would be served out bye and bye at ‘four bells’, enjoying himself as comfortably as you please, and actually playing the banjo—just as if he had nothing else to do, and there was no such person as Captain Snaggs in existence!

He had his back turned to me, and so could not notice that I was there, listening to him as he twanged the strings of the instrument and struck up that ‘tink-a-tink a tong-tong’ accompaniment familiar to all acquainted with the Christy Minstrels, the cook also humming away serenely to himself an old ditty dear to the darkey’s heart, and which I had heard the negroes often sing when I was over in New York, on the previous voyage I had taken a few months before, to which I have already alluded—when I ran away to sea, and shipped as a cabin boy on board one of the Liverpool liners, occupying a similar position to that I now held in the *Denver City*.

This was the song the cook chaunted, with that sad intonation of voice for which, somehow or other, the light-hearted African race always seem to have such a strange predilection. Sam touching the strings of the banjo in

harmonious chords to a sort of running arpeggio movement:

—

“Oh, down in Alabama, 'fore I wer sot free,
I lubbed a p'ooty yaller girl, an' fought dat she
lubbed me;
But she am probb unconstant, an' leff me hyar to
tell
How my pore hart am' breakin' fo' croo-el Nancy
Bell!”

He wound up with a resounding “twang” at the end of the bar, before giving the chorus—

“Den cheer up, Sam! Don' let yer sperrits go
down;
Dere's many a gal dat I'se know wal am waitin' fur
you in
de town!”

“I fancy you do want cheering up, Sam,” said I, waiting till he had finished the verse. “The skipper's in a regular tantrum about you, and says you're to come aft at once.”

“My golly, sonny!” cried he, turning round, with a grin on his ebony face, that showed all his ivories, and looking in no whit alarmed, as I expected, at the captain's summons, proceeding to reach up one of his long arms, which were like those of a monkey, and hang the banjo on to a cleat close to the roof of the galley, out of harm's way. “What am de muss about?”

“Because you didn't turn out on deck when all hands were called just now to reef topsails,” I explained. “The 'old

man' is in a fine passion, I can tell you, though he didn't notice your not being there at first. It was that mean sneak, the first-mate, that told him, on purpose to get you into a row."

"Ah-ha! Jess so, I sabby," said Sam, getting up from his seat; although he did not look any the taller for standing, being a little man and having short legs, which, however, were compensated for by his long arms and broad shoulders, denoting great strength. "I'se know what dat mean cuss do it fo'—'cause I wouldn't bring no hot coffee to um cabin fo' him dis mornin'. Me tell him dat lazy stoo'ad's place do dat; me ship's cook, not one black niggah slabe!"

"He's always at me, too," I chorussed, in sympathy with this complaint. "Mr Flinders is harder on me than even Captain Snaggs, and he's bad enough, in all conscience."

"Dat am true," replied the cook, who had been my only friend since I had been on board, none of the others, officers or men, having a kind word for me, save the carpenter, a sturdy Englishman, named Tom Bullover, and one of the Yankee sailors, Hiram Bangs, who seemed rather good-natured, and told me he came from some place 'down Chicopee way'—wherever that might be. "But, never yer mind, sonny; needer de cap'n nor dat brute ob a mate ken kill us no nohow."

—' "Cheer up, Sam! Don' let your 'perrits go down

"Guess, dough, I'se better go aft at once, or Cap'n Snaggs 'll bust his biler!"

And so, humming away still at the refrain of his favourite ditty, he clambered along the bulwarks, making his way to the poop, where the captain, I could see, as I peered round the corner of the galley, was still waiting for him at the top of the ladder on the weather side, holding on to the brass rail with one hand, and clutching hold of a stay with the other.

I pitied the negro; but, of course, I couldn't help him. All I could do was to look on, by no means an uninterested spectator, though keeping cautiously out of sight of Captain Snaggs' watchful eye.

The wind was not making such a noise through the shrouds now, for one could distinguish above its moaning whistle the wash of the waves as they broke with a rippling roar and splashed against the side like the measured strokes of a sledge-hammer on the ship breasting them with her bluff bows, and contemptuously sailing on, spurning them beneath her fore foot; so, I was able to hear and see nearly all that passed, albeit I had to strain my ears occasionally to catch a word here and there.

He had waited so long that perhaps his anger had cooled down a bit by this time, for Captain Snaggs began on Sammy much more quietly than I expected from his outburst against him when I was up on the poop.

He was quite mild, indeed, for him, as I had learnt already, to my cost, during the short acquaintance I had of his temper since we had left the Mersey—as mild as a sucking dove, with a vengeance!

“Ye durned nigger!” he commenced; “what d’ye mean by not answerin’ when I hailed ye?”