JACK HARDY

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"Surrender, in the king's name!" shouted Jack. Page 121

JACK HARDY

A Story of English Smugglers in the Days of Napoleon

By

HERBERT STRANG

Author of
Fighting on the Congo
In Clive's Command
On the Trail of the Arabs, etc.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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"If you make a movement, I shall fire"

JACK HARDY

CHAPTER I
THE ROAD TO LUSCOMBE

The first time Jack Hardy met Mr. Nathaniel Gudgeon was also the occasion of his first visit to Luscombe.

It happened in this way.

"Good-by, my boy," said his father, as Jack clambered on to the roof of the coach at the *White Hart*, Southwark, "and be sure you don't forget your Cousin Bastable, or your mother will never forgive you."

"All right, father. I'll take a look at him if I get a chance. I say, coachman, you'll let me have a drive?"

The coachman could not turn his head, because the collar of his coat was stiff and his neck brawny; but he screwed his left eye into the corner, winked, and gave a hoarse chuckle.

"I've seed Jack Tars on donkeys, and orficers on hosses," said he. "Lor' bless you, I knows 'em."

Which was the beginning of an argument that lasted all the way to Guildford.

Jack was on his way to Wynport to join H.M.S. *Fury*. Ten miles beyond Wynport lay the little village of Luscombe, and two miles beyond Luscombe was Bastable Grange, where his mother's cousin, Humfrey Bastable, lived. Jack had never seen Mr. Bastable; a hundred years ago relatives separated by a hundred miles of turnpike road saw very little of one another. But Mrs. Hardy had been very fond of her Cousin Humfrey when they were boy and girl together, and now that her son was going within easy walking distance of Bastable Grange, she insisted that Jack should go over and pay his respects.

Jack had just been transferred to the *Fury* from the frigate *Ariadne*, much to his disgust. In the *Ariadne* he had hoped to have an opportunity of joining Admi-

ral Nelson's fleet and fighting the French; the *Fury* was engaged in the humdrum and much less heroic work, as Jack regarded it, of hunting smugglers. But Jack was of a cheerful disposition, and by the time he arrived at Wynport he had forgotten his disappointment, for the coachman had let him take the ribbons for five good miles of the road, and he had nearly upset the coach in a ditch, nearly massacred a flock of geese, and nearly taken off the wheel of a carrier's cart, which was excitement enough for one day.

When he arrived at Wynport he found that it would be three or four days before the *Fury* was ready for sea. To Jack's eyes she appeared anything but furious, shored up high and dry in the yard, with huge balks of timber supporting her hull. "Wretched cockle-shell!" he said to himself, as he looked at her. But, having several days to spare, he thought he might as well spend the time in looking up his Cousin Bastable. Lieutenant Blake, commanding the *Fury*, good-naturedly gave Mr. Midshipman Hardy leave to visit his mother's relatives, so Jack slung his valise on to a carrier's cart that would jog to Bastable in the course of the day, and started to trudge over the cliffs. He had been told that he might save a matter of an hour by taking the shorter road by Wickham Ferrers; but it was a bright September day, exceptionally hot for the time of year, and there was more chance of a breeze by the cliffs. Besides, Jack preferred when he could to keep within sight of the sea.

He had no company for the first part of the journey, and that was a trial to a lad of Jack's sociable disposition. As became a midshipman of his Majesty's navy, he was ready to talk freely with peer or peasant. The few people he saw were going in the opposite direction, and though in pleasant country fashion they "passed the time of day," there was no occasion for stopping to chat. But, about five miles out of Wynport, he saw just ahead of him, on the winding white road, a man with a wooden leg, stumping along beside a donkey-cart. The man had a broad back and looked a sturdy fellow. The day being hot he had stripped off his coat, which dangled from a nail in the tail-board of the cart; and he carried in his left hand a glazed hat.

Jack was almost abreast of the cart when the man heard his footsteps, turned, and seeming to recognize him, pulled his forelock and said:

"Morning, sir, morning."

"Good morning. Uncommon hot, isn't it? You seem to know me?"

"Not to say know, sir. I've seed ye, that's all. I've been to Wynport; I goes there twice a week with my old moke here, and a cargo of fruit or vegetables, times and seasons according. And when I goes to Wynport, in course I looks up old messmates."

"You've been a sailor, then?"

"Nigh thirty year, sir! Joe Gumley my name: ranked A.B. when I got my

leg shot off in a' action with a French privateer six year ago. In course I were discharged then. I were a fisherman till they pressed me for the navy, so when I were no more use to his Majesty, sir, I come back to my native place, which be Luscombe, sir, and what with fishing and gardening and such like I manage to make both ends meet, as they say. I've got a tidy bit of cottage at a low rent from Squire Bastable—"

"Oh! he's my cousin."

"Now, if you'd said uncle, sir—"

"Well, he's my mother's cousin; my second cousin, I suppose."

"Not having any myself, I don't know second from first. Howsomever, as I were saying, I've give up the fishing now; but I keep to the gardening—not an easy job with this stump of mine, 'cos when I'm digging the misbehaving thing will sink in, and it takes a terrible time to be always heaving it out. Like as if you was to have to drop anchor and heave it again every knot you made. But I've got over that there little contrariness by taking a square bit of board with me now. When I'm going to dig, down goes the board, I sticks my stump on that, and so we gets on as merry as you please, 'cos when I want to shift, all I've got to do is to kick the board along a few inches, and there we are."

"Well, but how came you to know me?"

"Only seed you, sir. I was over at Wynport, as I were saying, and only this morning I comed across my old messmate, Ben Babbage, what was pressed along o' me. He's now bo'sun of the *Fury*, and we was having a smoke and a chat about old times when you come down the yard along o' the lieutenant, and Ben says to me: 'Joe,' says he, 'that's Mr. Hardy, the new midshipman.' That's how I knowed your name, but I didn't know as how you was cousin to squire, though to be sure, now I look at you, sir, you do seem to have something of his figurehead about you."

"Talking of figureheads, that's a queer-looking thing yonder."

He pointed to a tower that just showed above the trees in the distance. In shape it was not unlike a mushroom, the top and part of the stalk being visible.

"That?" said Gumley. "Queer, indeed. That be Congleton's Folly."

"And who was Congleton?"

"A man, sir, leastways a madman. Where he hailed from no one knowed, but years and years ago, when I was a' infant in arms, Congleton suddenlike come to Luscombe. He was a man about fifty then, and 'twas said that having waited to that age to fall in love, he got it very bad with a widder, who wouldn't have him. Love seems to be like measles, better had young. Well, Congleton took it so to heart that he made up his mind to live forlorn and lonely ever more. So he built a kind o' summer-house in the Hollow yonder; and when he tired o' that he set a small army o' laborers building the Folly, for so it got to be called; and there

he lived for a dozen years in one room at the top all by himself, seeing nobody, having his food sent up twice a week by a pulley. And then he died. Congleton's Folly 'twas called then, and so it be called to this day: a sort of wilderness all round it, and a fearsome place on a dark night."

The old tar talked on, Jack doing the listening, until they came to a spot where, just after the road crossed a deep chine cutting through the cliff to the sea, there stood a large farm-building by the roadside.

"Is that one of my cousin's farms?" asked Jack.

"No, sir, that be Mr. Gudgeon's freehold."

Jack glanced at it idly. It was an old roving building of stone, with gables and mullioned windows, many barns and outhouses hemming it in. Across the road was the farmyard, with a large pond skirting the roadway; and beyond it a level triangular stretch of pasture and cornland extending to the edge of the cliff, which here jutted out prominently into the sea.

Just before they reached the farm-house, Jack noticed a dense cloud of smoke pouring from one of the chimneys.

"The kitchen chimney's afire, I suppose," he said.

"Ay, ay, sir. Mr. Gudgeon do have a bad lot o' chimbleys. And there's a many in Luscombe, too. Plenty of jobs hereabouts for a good sweep! And there's Mr. Gudgeon himself—Nathaniel's his chrisom name."

A very big burly man, curiously short in the legs, made his appearance in the doorway, and walking backwards across the road, watched the black column of smoke drifting slowly eastward on the light breeze.

So closely was his attention fixed that he did not at once notice the pedestrians or the donkey-cart, and not until he had backed almost across the road did he suddenly catch sight of Joe Gumley. Then he started slightly, and his attention being now divided between the old sailor and the chimney on fire, he failed to observe a deep rut left by a passing wagon, that had evidently been driven into the pond to allow the horses to drink.

The result of the oversight was unfortunate. One of the short legs disappeared into the rut; there was a wild flourish of arms; and then the big unwieldy body toppled backward into the pond.

Jack could not forbear smiling. Gumley gave a quiet chuckle, and to Jack's surprise stumped on, not offering to help the farmer out. But the lad sprang forward impulsively, splashed into the water, and held out his hands to the miserable dripping object still floundering there, unable to gain a foothold on the clayey mud of the bottom.

"Steady, Mr. Gudgeon, steady!" cried Jack encouragingly. "Haul on, sir. Yo heave ho! and up we come!"

"Thank'ee, sir," said Mr. Gudgeon, spluttering. He had evidently swallowed

[image]

"Steady, Mr. Gudgeon, steady!" cried Jack

more of the muddied water than he cared for. "But how—ugh!—how do you—ugh!—know my name, sir?"

"Why, that old sailor man told me—Gumley, you know: we hitched on some miles up the road there."

"Yes, yes, of course: yes, yes. I'm all of a flutter, sir; my heart goes pit-a-pat. Ugh! That water is rank, and—and I—I feel quite upset. It was Gumley; of course it was: and he told you my name. Yes, to be sure. And you, sir, I might guess, are a king's officer, sir?"

"Oh, yes! My ship's the *Fury*"

"Why, to be sure! Come in, sir. You must dry your boots. Take them off, sir. I will take off my wet things and be with you in a few moments. Sit you down, sir."

Mr. Gudgeon had led Jack into a large stone-flagged room, with a low ceiling of whitewashed rafters. He disappeared, and Jack, left to himself, took off his boots and stockings and sat on the broad, high ledge of the window. In one corner he noticed a long leather-bound telescope, and taking it up he looked out to sea. A few fishing boats dotted the shining surface, their brown sails just appearing above the edge of the cliff. In the offing a large lugger lay, apparently hove to. He was still peering through the glass when the farmer returned, carrying a tray with bottles and glasses. A servant came after him, and took away the wet boots and stockings.

"Now, sir," he said. "You have your choice. Here is brandy, and sloe gin, and cider—"

"Thanks, Mr. Gudgeon, a glass of cider for me; 'tis a cool drink for a hot day."

"To be sure," rejoined Mr. Gudgeon; "though for myself I find brandy the best cure for the flutters. You were taking a peep through my spy-glass, sir?"

"Yes: a good glass."

"Not bad, sir, not bad. And a clear day. But not much to see, sir, to-day."

"No. There's a lugger in the offing; and French by the cut of her."

"Surely not, sir," cried Mr. Gudgeon, taking up the glass. "Dear, dear! I'm all in a flutter again, sir. A French lugger, sir! 'Tis surely too near our coast to be safe."

"Yes, and I hope the *Pandora* will catch her; she's sailing this afternoon."

"To be sure, sir. The impudence of these Frenchmen! But I don't think she's French, after all; there's a lugger much like her down in Luscombe yonder. And you're an officer of the *Fury*? I've seen the *Fury* more than once, sir. She cruised about a good deal last winter on the lookout for smugglers. But she's laid up at Wynport now, I'm told."

"Yes, or I shouldn't be here."

"Ah! I wondered, now, what brought you to this quiet little place. Maybe you have friends in the neighborhood, sir?"

"I'm going to see my cousin, Mr. Bastable. I dare say you know him?"

"Know the squire! To be sure: a customer of mine. Ah! as I was saying, there's a good deal of smuggling on this part of the coast: so the common talk is, sir. Luscombe yonder is suspected, so 'tis said. Mr. Goodman, the new riding-officer, has his eye on the village. But up here on the cliff I don't hear much of what goes on. I keep myself to myself, sir—lead a quiet life; anything out of the way puts me in a flutter at once. And when will the *Fury* be ready for sea?"

"In four or five days."

"To be sure! And you are Mr. Bastable's cousin! Well, now, to be sure! 'Tis early days for the smugglers, sir: they don't begin, so I've heard, much before October; their work needs dark nights; but I hope you'll put 'em down, sir, I do. They're getting the neighborhood a bad name."

"Well, Mr. Gudgeon, we'll do our best to polish it up for you. Now, d'you think those things of mine are dry? I am getting hungry, and my cousin, I hope, keeps a good table."

"To be sure, sir; a fine man, Mr. Bastable. Though I'm only a poor working farmer, and keep myself to myself, I hope I may count Mr. Bastable a friend. You will give him my respects, Mr.—?"

"Jack Hardy: that's my name. Thanks for the cider, Mr. Gudgeon: mighty good stuff. Good-by. I hope you'll be none the worse for your sousing."

"Thank you, sir. I hope not. I shall take no harm unless I get a return of the flutters."

He went with Jack to the door.

"That is your way, sir," he said, pointing to a path that ran irregularly across the fields to the right. "The coast winds a good deal here; you would not think it, but the path will bring you near to the sea. Bastable Grange is on the cliff, sir, the other side of Luscombe, a fine airy position, though too near the coast if the French should land, *I* say."

Jack set off at a good pace, vaulted the many stiles that crossed the field path, and in less than half an hour found himself approaching a fine old red-brick house nestling among trees at the edge of the cliff. He paused for a few moments before lifting the latch of the gate to take a look round. There, in a hollow between

the two cliffs, lay the village of Luscombe, its few cottages straggling from the beach up the slope. Two or three fishing smacks lay alongside the short stone jetty: others rocked gently in the little bay. A turn of the path hid them from sight for a minute or two; when next they came into view Jack was surprised to see one of the smacks making under full sail out to sea.

"Smart work that!" he thought. "There was no sign of her putting off a few minutes ago. The Luscombe fishers would make good king's men, by the look of it; they'll have a visit from the press-gang one of these days."

He watched until the smack rounded the point; then he turned, opened the gate, walked up the gravel path, and pulled the bell at the door of Bastable Grange.

CHAPTER II
MONSIEUR DE FRONSAC

Jack was shown into a little snuggery, where he found a red-faced, blue-eyed gentleman sitting deep in a comfortable arm-chair, his legs perched on a smaller chair. His black hair was tied in a short queue; he had curly side whiskers: and he wore the full uniform of the Dorsetshire yeomanry—a tight red coat with a high stock, white buckskin breeches, and big Hessian boots that came to the knee.

"A young gentleman to see you, sir," said the servant.

"How d'ye do, Cousin Humfrey?" said Jack, advancing with a smile and outstretched hand.

"Who in the world are you?" said Mr. Bastable, clutching the arms of his chair, his eyelids squeezed together oddly.

"Oh! I'm Jack Hardy. Mother said I was to be sure and call. My traps are coming after."

"They are, are they? You're a pretty cool young spark, aren't you? I must take it, I suppose, that you're my Cousin Millicent's boy, eh?"

"Of course, Cousin Humfrey. She said you'd be glad to put me up for a day or two, if I reminded you what friends you and she were, I don't know how many years ago."

"She did, eh? Well, you'd better give an account of yourself. How old are you, and what are you doing in these parts? I don't suppose you came all the way from London to remind me of your mother."

"I'm sixteen, sir, and just appointed to the *Fury*—you know, the revenue cutter now repairing at Wynport. I've got a few days' leave, so I've just walked over."

"So I should suppose. Your boots look as if you'd walked through half a dozen horseponds on the way."

"Only one, cousin," replied Jack, laughing. "That was in helping a friend of yours, who tumbled over through walking backwards looking at a chimney on fire: Mr. Gudgeon, the farmer."

"A friend of mine, eh? Well, not exactly," said Mr. Bastable dryly. "So his chimney was afire."

"Yes, though I must say he took it pretty coolly; didn't seem to remember it when he got back into the house."

"Oh! You went into the house, then?"

"Yes, he gave me some cider, and drank some brandy himself for the flutters. He's not quite the shape for the flutters, cousin, is he? Looks pretty solid."

"And he made himself agreeable, eh? You told him who you were, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes! And he as good as said he was glad the *Fury* was getting ready for sea. Luscombe's getting a bad name for smuggling, it appears, and 'tis time some of us came along. Don't you think so, cousin?"

"Quite time, quite time!" replied Mr. Bastable. Jack fancied he caught a twinkle in his half-closed eyes. "Father and mother quite well, eh? And how long have you been a king's officer?"

"A couple of years, cousin. Of course I had to serve two years as a volunteer first; then two years ago I was put on the books of the *Ariadne*, second-rate frigate, Captain Bagot. Why on earth they transferred me to the *Fury* I can't tell—just as the *Ariadne* was going out to join Admiral Nelson's fleet, too. I call it disgusting."

"No doubt they thought you'd be more useful to the revenue. Well, your traps are coming after you, you said? Get off those boots and I'll introduce you to your cousins. I suppose they're your cousins, if I'm one. Ah! here's the first!"—as the door burst open, and a girl ran in. She wore a white muslin dress with a pink sash, and a chip hat was swinging on her arm. Seeing a stranger she stopped, and her cheeks flushed.

"Come, Kate," said her father, "this is your cousin, Mr. Midshipman Hardy, come to pay us a visit."

Kate Bastable made the formal little courtesy of those days, to which Jack returned his best bow.

"I came to tell you dinner is nearly ready, father," said the girl.

"Goodness alive, and I haven't got out of my regimentals yet! Run and send your mother here, Kate; she must say which room your cousin is to have.

We dine earlier than you fine London folks, my lad. You're a good trencherman, I'll be bound."

"I'm pretty sharp set after my walk, cousin, and we fellows can usually do our duty with knife and fork."

"As well as in other matters, eh?—catching smugglers, for instance. Well, come along; we'll find my wife and see what she can do for you in the way of slippers."

Jack was perfectly satisfied with his dinner, and with his new-found relatives. Mrs. Bastable and he became good friends at first sight. She was a pleasant, fresh-colored woman of forty, quiet in manner and speech, but with a shrewdly humorous eye. Kate was fifteen. She said little, but took stock of her new cousin as he chattered at the dinner-table. The last member of the family was Arthur, a boy of twelve, who, Jack found afterward, was not nearly so shy as he looked. An only son, he had not been sent to school, but was tutored at home. The tutor formed the sixth at table, a slight man of about thirty, with a very swarthy skin and intensely black eyes, good features, and a glittering smile. He was introduced to Jack as Monsieur de Fronsac, a Frenchman of a noble house. He had emigrated a few years before, and settled in England as a teacher of languages and mathematics. Monsieur de Fronsac bowed and smiled when the introduction was made, and said that he was charmed and delighted to meet an officer of the king's so excellent navy.

Jack found that he was expected to do most of the talking. His cousins plied him with questions about the latest news in London. What was happening in India? Had Spain declared war? What did the people in London think of the chances of a French invasion? Jack was equal to the demands made upon him.

"Oh, as to India," he said, "a day or two before I left we got advice that that Mahratta fellow, Holkar, had invaded our territories and General Wellesley was after him. He'll soon settle his hash. And Admiral Keith is going to have a shot at those flat-bottomed boats that Boney has got at Boulogne. They'll never cross the Channel, not they. Praams they call 'em: miserable tools; a storm would knock 'em to pieces; they can't hug the wind; and the eight-pounder they've got mounted aft is a fixture, so that if we laid a small boat alongside, the gun would be useless, and they'd only have musketry to resist with. And the poor wretches on board get so seasick if there's the least swell that they lie about groaning in the hold, too weak to lift a musket. One of 'em was captured last year by a gun-brig of ours; she'd got a little leeward of Boulogne and couldn't get back, and our brig had her by the heels as she was steering large for Calais. Our fellows don't believe old Boney intends to send 'em across at all, but only wants to frighten us. By George! I wish he would, though. We'd make ducks and drakes of his praams, there's not a doubt about that."

"But they might row over in a calm," suggested Mr. Bastable; "then our cruisers would be helpless."

"Why, if they did, cousin, there'd be a chance for you. I'd like to see the yeomanry cavalry dashing at 'em as they landed, sabers out, cut and thrust, ding-dong, over you go. Oh, it won't be so easy as Master Boney imagines. Don't you think he's off his chump, cousin?—Beg pardon, Cousin Sylvia, I mean cracked; that is, mad—why, 'tis said he's had a medal struck to commemorate his invasion; his own precious head on one side and a figure of Hercules strangling the sea monster on the other. The sea monster's us, you know, Monsieur. And he's got the words 'Struck at London, 1804,' on the thing—isn't that cool cheek? Better have waited till he got to London—don't you think so, cousin?"

Thus he chattered on, amusing his relatives with his frank boyish confidence, and especially pleasing Monsieur de Fronsac, as it appeared, for the French tutor was constantly showing his teeth as he smiled.

"It is good to hear," he said once. "I like it. I do not lov dis Napoleon; truly he is a monstair."

"Makes a breakfast of babies, don't he?" said Jack.

"That's rubbish, of course," said Mr. Bastable. "But he's a monster all the same, as Monsieur says; and I warrant if he does manage to escape you blue-coated gentlemen of the navy he'll find us redcoats ready to meet him."

Monsieur de Fronsac retired immediately after dinner.

"Gone to scribble poetry," said Mr. Bastable with a smile, when the door was shut. "He's a decent fellow, and knows a heap of mathematics. I fancy he must have been crossed in love, for he's always writing poetry about the moon or the trees or the sea—so Arthur says, for he never shows his stuff to me. Now, we're early birds here, Jack. We'll play a rubber with the ladies, if you please, and then to bed."

At breakfast next morning Mr. Bastable was in particularly good humor. He had been out early, so he said; there was nothing like a ride before breakfast for freshening one up and improving one's appetite.

"By the way, Jack," he added, "when I was out I heard that the smugglers made a capital run last night—the first of the season."

"The villains!" cried Jack; "under my very nose!"

"Taking advantage of the *Fury's* being laid up for repairs, you see. But no doubt you'll put a stop to it when once you get to work—eh, Jack?"

Jack fancied there was something quizzical about his cousin's smile as he said this, and wondered whether the squire was "smoking" him. But he answered cheerfully:

"We'll see, cousin. I don't know what sort of man Lieutenant Blake is: only saw him for the first time yesterday; but if he's anything of a goer we'll give the

smugglers a warm time, I promise them."

"And how will you set about it, cousin?"

"Don't know, for my life!" said Jack with a laugh. "But there are forty ways of catching flies, and about the same number of tying knots; and we'll find out a way, you may be sure. By the by, cousin, can you tell me how to get to the cottage of an old tar named Joe Gumley? I had a chat with him yesterday as I came here, and I'd like to look him up."

"Yes, I can tell you. He's a tenant of mine. But he won't see you."

"What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. He won't see you. He lives by himself and never admits a visitor. He's most unpopular with the village folk, and has to tramp to Wynport to sell his garden stuff."

"Why don't they like him?"

"Ah, well! The truth is he's an oddity, a very queer fellow."

This explanation by no means satisfied Jack, and he made up his mind to visit Gumley as he had intended. The sailor's cottage stood some distance farther along the cliff. After breakfast he set off alone toward it. Within ten minutes he came to a stout wooden fence tipped with nails, and so high that he could only just see over it. Then the view of the cottage itself was hidden by a mass of bushes and trees, the foliage of which, though tinged with autumn brown, was still thick. There was a gate in the fence, but no latch and no bell.

"An 'I'm-the-king-of-the-Castle' look about this," thought Jack. He lifted his cane and dealt the gate several smart raps. Immediately he heard a dog rushing down the garden, barking angrily. Standing on tiptoe he peered over, and saw an immense bulldog, thick-set, broad-chested, with an enormous and most ugly head, showing his teeth viciously. The moment the dog caught sight of Jack he redoubled his barking and dashed forward against the fence, as if furious to get at him.

"Good dog, good dog!" said Jack soothingly. "What's the matter with you, you son of a ten-pounder? I say, Gumley—ahoy! ahoy! Gumley!"

He raised his voice to a singsong, and sent the call rolling toward the cottage, rather enjoying the din made by himself and the dog, with a hundred echoes from every dell and hollow in the cliff. In a minute or two he saw the sailor stumping round the bushes, his head bare, his shirt open at the neck, a spade in one hand, and in the other a little square board.

"Oh, 'tis you, Mr. Hardy, sir. I was digging turnips at the back. Lor', sir, all Luscombe will know you've bin here, with this terrible row and all."

"I don't care if they do, and it was your dog that made the row."

"A good dog, sir. Living alone by myself, you see, I need a watch-dog. Come in, sir, come in."

He had removed a padlock, drawn two bolts and loosed two bars on the inner side, and thrown the gate open. Jack stepped into the garden, keeping an eye on the bulldog, which had ceased to bark as soon as Gumley appeared, but walked slowly round and round the visitor, sniffing at his legs as if choosing the best place for a bite.

"There's no cause for alarm, sir—leastways not while I'm on deck. I'd best introduce you proper like, then you'll be safe any time, fair weather or foul. This here's Comely; and this is Mr. Hardy of the *Fury*: twiggy-voo, as the mounseers say? Now pat him, sir."

Jack felt a little uneasy, but knowing that it is best to put a bold face on it, whether with dogs or men, he stooped and patted the massive head. With an expression that seemed to him more sinister than ever, the dog stuck out a red tongue and licked his hand.

"Now all's snug and shipshape, sir. Comely's your friend for life."

"Queer name that."

"True, sir. It was like this. I had a notion of calling him Handsome, 'cos handsome is as handsome does, and he does most uncommon handsome. But thinking it over between watches, as you may say, it seemed like poking fun at the poor beast that couldn't hit back, and I cast about for a name that would mean the same but not quite so strong. I tacked about for a time without catching a fair breeze, sir. Then all at once I remembered a word in my Bible: 'black but comely.' Comely's a good name, thinks I, and his muzzle's black, and my name's Gumley, so Comely it shall be: and Comely it is, sir. We're a pair, I can tell you, Comely and Gumley."

"A capital match," said Jack laughing. "But I say, why do you barricade yourself in like that?" Gumley had replaced padlock, bolts and bars. "Any one would think you were making ready to stand a siege."

"Well, sir, I won't say 'tis to be ready for Boney's landing, and I won't say 'tisn't."

He was now stumping up the path toward the cottage, and said no more. Jack saw that he did not mean to enlighten him, and changed the subject.

"I say, Gumley, why didn't you help Mr. Gudgeon out yesterday? You went on and left me to do it."

"Ay, ay, sir. The truth is, Mr. Gudgeon and me bean't, so to say, on speaking terms."

Jack felt that there was something puzzling about all this. Gumley was not popular with the villagers, Mr. Bastable had said; the old sailor had confessed to a feud or at least a coolness between himself and his neighbor on the opposite cliff. There was an honest look about his weather-beaten face; he did not seem to Jack morose or ill-tempered. What was at the bottom of this strange attitude of

antagonism, shown by the man's somewhat elaborate defenses? Well, after all, it did not matter to Jack; his leave would be up in a few days, and then his duty would take him to sea.

He sat for some time in Gumley's trim little parlor, where everything bespoke the handy Jack Tar, chatting about sea life in general and the *Ariadne* in particular. Then the talk came round to Jack's new vessel, the *Fury*, and brought up the question of smuggling.

"Mr. Gudgeon said that a good deal goes on about here," said Jack, "and by George! my cousin, Mr. Bastable, told me that the villains ran a cargo ashore only last night. I suppose he met the riding-officer as he went for his morning canter. Did you hear anything of it?"

"Not a word, sir. I keep myself to myself."

"Yes, Mr. Gudgeon said much the same thing, I remember. But I suppose you hear talk in the village sometimes?"

"Never bin into the village since I gave up fishing, sir. I get all my victuals from Wynport, and often don't set eyes on the village folk from week-end to week-end, except at Church at Wickham Ferrers on Sunday."

"Why you're quite a hermit—almost as bad as Congleton."

"True, sir, but I've never bin crossed in love, 'cos I never seed a maid I fancied afore I lost my leg, and there's ne'er a maid would take a fancy to a poor chap with a stump like this. And I'm afeard of going like Congleton, sir."

"Yes, but, Gumley, never mind about that. Tell me straight out, man; are the people in Luscombe below there smugglers or not—the whole crew of 'em, I mean?"

"Well, since you put it plain, sir, I wouldn't be surprised if some of 'em think a sight more of French brandy than of Jamaica rum."

"That's no answer, you old rascal. Well, I'm going down to the village to have a look round. I saw some neat little smacks at the jetty yesterday, and one of 'em put out pretty smartly, too: was uncommonly well handled."

"Well, sir, you be a fine, mettlesome young gentleman; but if so be as I might advise you, I'd say keep your weather-eye open. If so be they are a smuggling lot below—well, they won't be exactly main pleased to see a king's officer."

"Bless you, they won't know me. I'm not in uniform, you see. Nobody knows who I am but my cousins and you and Mr. Gudgeon."

"True, sir; and me and Mr. Gudgeon keeps ourselves to ourselves, to be

sure."

CHAPTER III
A FIGHT IN LUSCOMBE MARKET

Jack was accompanied to the gate in quite a friendly way by Comely. He smiled as he heard the click of the lock and bolts behind him, and thought a good deal about Joe Gumley as he made his way down the steep cliff path to the fishing village below. It was quite a small village: a few cottages clustered about a cobbled square, with others climbing the cliff, each with its little bit of garden.

The harbor was protected by a natural breakwater of rock running out to sea, and forming an excellent defense against the southwest gales. A few brawny fishermen were lounging about in jerseys and sou'westers, hands in pockets, pipe in mouth. Jack tried to enter into conversation with them, but found them strangely taciturn. They looked hard at him before answering his questions, used few words, and gave him very little information. Mr. Bastable laughed when, meeting Jack at luncheon, he learned how he had spent the morning.

"They're not a talkative set," he said, "and were probably somewhat overcome by the presence of a king's officer."

"But how did they know I'm a king's officer, cousin? We fellows don't go blabbing about: I didn't tell 'em, and only Gumley and old Gudgeon know, besides you and my cousins."

"Perhaps it was Kate that told them. Ladies are great gossips, they say."

"I'm sure Kate doesn't go gossiping with fishermen; do you, Kate?"

"Indeed, no," said Kate, "'tis a shame to say so, father."

"I didn't say so, now did I, Jack? I said 'perhaps.' You don't suppose I went and boasted of having a king's officer as my guest, Mr. Midshipman Hardy; and Mr. Gudgeon and Gumley keep themselves to themselves, as they told you, my boy."

"Well, I can't make it out, and it doesn't matter."

"Probably they won't know you again in your uniform, Jack."

"Do you wear a dirk, cousin, and a belt with pistols in it?" asked Arthur eagerly.

"You may be sure he does," said Mr. Bastable; "looks a regular bucaneer, I've no doubt. You'll give old Gudgeon the flutters if he sees you in all your war-paint,

Jack."

"Oh, come now, cousin!" protested Jack. "Our fellows don't look half so fierce as you yeomen. Boney will be terrified if he catches sight of your big hats and red coats."

"De uniform of de yeomen is ver' fine," said Monsieur de Fronsac, smiling. "It is quite beautiful. Dat is vat I say to Monsieur Arthur; dat de Monstair Bonaparte vill tr-r-emble ven he see de brave English yeomen."

Jack was interested in Monsieur de Fronsac. He had never met a Frenchman before, and he studied him as he might have studied a strange animal. After lunch he spent some time with the tutor, and learned something of his history. It appeared that on leaving France, a few years before, he had gone to live on his estates in Martinique, hoping there to escape the dangers to which, as a royalist, he would be exposed at home. But on the advent of Napoleon Bonaparte to power his property had been confiscated by the Bonapartist governor. He himself had been proscribed; he fled to Jamaica, thence to London. It was hard for poor *émigrés* to pick up a living. Happening to hear that a school in Wynport required a teacher of mathematics he had come down from London, only to find that the place had been filled. But luckily Mr. Bastable was at the time in search of a tutor for his son. De Fronsac heard of it from the master of Wynport school: he applied and was accepted.

"But I hope vun day to get back my estates, ven dat Monstair, dat impertinent from Corsica, lose his life, or ven he shall be reject from de throne he goes so impudent to seize."

Jack became a little tired of Monsieur de Fronsac's references to the Monstair. He never spoke of Bonaparte without tacking on the epithet. Of course, he had good reason for hating the First Consul if he had lost all his property and been compelled to teach for a living; but it was not the English way to call names—and always the same name. Jack set it down as one of the peculiarities of Frenchmen.

That evening, after dinner, the conversation once more came back to the subject which was then discussed more often than any other among the good people of the south coast—the expected landing of the French. Mr. Bastable was inclined to think that with so long a coast-line open to him, and so many possible landing-places, Bonaparte would only have to choose his time carefully to be able, with any kind of luck, to make his descent. But Jack scoffed at the idea.

"What about Nelson, and Collingwood, and Keith, cousin? They'd smash him before he got half-way across."

"But Nelson is away in the Mediterranean, isn't he? He can't be everywhere at once, Jack."

"And every one can't be a Nelson, but we can do our best."

"I wonder where Boney would think of landing. Somewhere west, not Pevensey like the Conqueror: too near London. The Conqueror sailed from Boulogne, didn't he?"

"Don't think so, cousin: Boulogne isn't in Normandy."

"Still, I'm pretty sure it was Boulogne. Monsieur will know. We'll ask him."

"I'll go and find him; hope I shan't interrupt his flow of poetry."

Jack hurried off, and learned that the tutor had gone out some little time before.

"He said he were gwine fur a promenade," said the servant whom Jack asked.

"Which way did he go?"

"Down along by Congleton's Hollow, sir."

"Well, I'll go after him. Tell your master I'll be back soon."

A footpath over the fields led to Congleton's Hollow, about a mile and a half from the Grange. Jack had visited the spot in the afternoon with his cousin Arthur. They had climbed over the half-ruined wall, and wandered about in the dense plantation. Under the trees it was quite dim, even in daylight; and where there were no large trees the ground was thickly covered with a tangle of bushes and ferns. Blackberries and nuts grew in abundance, and the boys had gathered them by handfuls, regardless of scratches, or rents in their clothes. Rabbits scurried across the path from patches of tall brake; squirrels blinked out of the foliage. The place had a wild beauty of its own—the romantic charm of a spot seldom visited by men.

Delightful as it had been in the afternoon sunlight, it seemed to Jack more delightful still in the dusk of this beautiful September evening. The moon was just rising, throwing pale shafts of light through the trees, deepening the shadows. An owl hooted from the top of the Folly; as Jack picked his way through the brake he heard the whisk of scared rabbits. By the time he reached a part of the ruined wall whence he could look over a stretch of open country he had almost forgotten his errand. He sat on the wall, dangling his legs. There, across the fields to his right, the moonbeams shone on the weathercock on Gudgeon's roof. Luscombe was out of sight in the dip of the cliffs, but he fancied he could hear the grinding of the surf on the shingle.

Suddenly he started. The light southeast breeze blowing toward him brought the sound of low voices a little way ahead. Was it Monsieur de Fronsac speaking? Jack thought he recognized the low smooth tones. Should he go on? That would be to risk overhearing the speakers. He hesitated; he heard another voice, deeper, rougher; then both voices together, as if in altercation.

"This won't do!" thought Jack. "I'd better clear out." So he sprang lightly down from his perch and began to retrace his steps, walking slowly as he had

come, and looking back every now and again to see whether the tutor was following. At last, just as he reached the first of half a dozen stiles between himself and the Grange, he saw Monsieur de Fronsac's figure come into the moonlight from the shade of the trees half a mile behind. He was alone. Jack sat on the stile and waited.

The Frenchman walked with downcast eyes and for a few moments did not perceive him. Catching sight of him at length, he seemed to be startled, for he halted and made a strange upward movement of the right hand. But his pause was only momentary. He came on again, and as soon as he was near enough to see clearly who was sitting on the stile, he showed his teeth in a brilliant smile, and called softly:

"Hi! Monsieur Jack, I see you."

"Well, I'm pretty solid, Monsieur," returned Jack with a smile. "The place looks lonely enough for a ghost, don't it? I'd come to meet you; got a question to ask."

"Ah! truly de place is romanesque. It demand poesy. Often do I come here, in evenings ven de moon is bright, to compose poesy. It please me, it console me in my miseries. I come dis minute from composing a poem about de moon. Vill I declaim it? Is Monsieur interested?"

"Oh, fire away!" said Jack. He thought he might as well humor this singular Frenchman. "Stop a bit, is it in French or English? If it's in French it'll be clean over my head."

"No, it is in English. I compose alvays in English since dat Monstair have maltreat me. I recite it: listen:

"'*De moon, she shine in de sky*
O lovely! O sharming!
Ven I look, vat can I? I sigh.
Vat fine zing for farming!'

"I explain dat: Your so difficult language have not good rhymes: and dere needs one for 'sharming.' I recollect myself to have seen de farmers making hay by de moonlight. Dat also vas sharming sight, so I put him in my verse."

"First-rate," said Jack. "Go on; I like that bit."

"I have no more complete at present. It take so much to seek your English rhymes. Now in my language—"

And Monsieur de Fronsac began a long course on French poetry, keeping up a steady flow of talk which lasted till they reached the Grange. Not till they were entering the drawing-room together did Jack remember the question he had gone to ask.

"Well, Jack, I'm right, eh?" called Mr. Bastable.

"'Pon my life, cousin, I forgot to ask. Monsieur has been entertaining me with poetry and things, and drove the question clean out of my head. Where did William the Conqueror sail from, Monsieur?"

"I do not know, I regret to say."

Mr. Bastable laughed.

"Well, we're none the wiser. Come, Jack, take a hand at cards. We've been waiting this half-hour."

When Jack was alone in his bedroom, and thought of his meeting with De Fronsac, he felt vaguely uneasy. Why had the tutor been so anxious to explain his walk? Why had he talked on and on so glibly about such a dull subject as French poetry, with the evident desire to prevent Jack from talking? Why had he made no reference to his companion in the Hollow? His friends, his private business, were, of course, no concern of Jack's; but the position of De Fronsac in the Bastable household scarcely seemed consistent with stealthy meetings in retired spots, and Jack, without knowing why, did not like it. But he slept none the less soundly, and had almost forgotten it by the morning.

The third day of his visit Jack had pretty much to himself. The ladies drove early into Wynport to see a dressmaker, and would not return till late; Arthur was engaged with his tutor; and Mr. Bastable had to go to the county town on yeomanry business. Jack spent part of the day in roaming about the cliffs, and in the afternoon went down to the shore, to bathe and watch the fishing-boats go out. Dinner had been put back an hour, so that he delayed his return to the Grange somewhat later than usual.

As he made his way up the hill, turning off through a narrow lane to the left, he tripped over a cord that had suddenly been drawn tight in front of him. There had been rain during the morning, and the place had been carefully chosen by the practical jokers, who betrayed their presence by a subdued chuckle from an alley-way on Jack's right as he fell head forward into a pool of mud.

Jack had served an apprenticeship in the art of practical joking in the *Ariadne*. Not for nothing had he been for two years a "youngster" in a midshipman's mess. He knew that the best way to discourage the gentle sport in others was to take summary vengeance on the joker—if he could get at him. He picked himself up in a trice, dashed into the alley-way—so narrow that there was scarcely room for more than one to pass at a time—and saw before him the back of a hulking form disappearing into the dusk, and hiding, as Jack judged from the clumping of heavy boots, a number of his fellow conspirators in front.

The fugitive was tall, but his clumsy body seemed too heavy for his short legs, and he moved slowly. Jack was upon him just as he emerged from the narrow alley into the open square of the village. Catching sight, with the readiness of

one accustomed to use his eyes, of a convenient muck-heap—there were always convenient muck-heaps in town or country a hundred years ago, when sanitary inspection was still undreamed of—Jack neatly tripped the burly figure into its soft and odorous embrace. There was a great yell from the other fugitives, who stopped their flight when they found that they were not in immediate danger; and as they closed in toward the spluttering victim, now slowly raising himself, Jack saw that they were some of the boys and youths of the village, whose eyes he had often noticed upon him as he passed through. And there was something strangely familiar in the attitude of the hobbledehoy struggling clumsily to his feet. He was not a fisher lad; where had Jack seen him before? The cries of the crowd enlightened him.

"Fight un, Bill Gudgeon!"

"Heave un into midden, Billy."

"Black his eyes!"

"Give un a nobbier!"

But Bill Gudgeon, like his father, was inclined to keep himself to himself.

"Not if I knows it," he said slowly, as he sheered off. "Maister and me be quits now."

"Chok' it all!" cried one of his companions, a sturdily built, black-browed, bullet-headed fisher youth of some eighteen years. "If so be you woan't fight, Billy Gudgeon, I will, so there then. Be you afeard, maister?"

"No, I don't think I'm afraid of you," said Jack, "but I don't see what we've got to fight about. As your friend yonder said, we're quits. And I'm in a hurry. Good night."

"Boo! boo!" yelled the rest, encouraged by this seeming display of the white feather. "Rare plucked un to fight Boney! Afeard of Jan Lamiger! Boo! boo!"

Jan Lamiger slouched forward as Jack was turning away, and as an earnest of battle cleverly flicked off his hat. Jack was round in an instant.

"Very well, Jan, or whatever your name is, if you're set on fighting, I suppose I must oblige you."

He took off his coat, folded it, and placed it carefully on a stone pillar hard by: then he picked up his hat, set it on top, and rolled up his shirt-sleeves. The young fisherman meanwhile divested himself of his jersey, and listened with a smug smile to the encouraging hints and practical instructions of his mates.

Jack felt a trifle bored. It was much beneath his dignity as a midshipman of his Majesty King George to be fighting fisher lads in the open fish-market of Luscombe, but it would have been still more beneath his dignity to refuse the challenge and have the pack of fisher lads at his heels. He was relieved to find that the Square was quite deserted save for the group about him. A few seconds earlier he had had an impression that there were a number of fisher folk

about. The people had, in fact, hastily retired into their cottages when they saw what was afoot. They had no objection to the lad's trouncing a king's officer, but when that officer happened to be a relative of Squire Bastable at the Grange it was perhaps just as well not to countenance the fight openly. For they had no doubt that Jan Lamiger would win. He stood half a head higher than the midshipman, and was probably three stone heavier. And, moreover, he had some little reputation in the neighborhood as a boxer and wrestler. Had he not thrown all comers at Wickham Fair? And knocked Tom Buggins, the light-weight, clean out of time at Casterbridge only last month?

It was a somewhat rough battle-ground; the cobbles of the Square would make a hard fall; but neither of the combatants had chosen the spot, nor did it occur to them to seek a more convenient place for their encounter.

Those were the days in which skill in the use of the fists was a real title to consideration among all classes, high and low. And fortunately for Jack, it was an art cultivated with great perseverance by the young gentlemen of H.M.S. *Ariadne*. A new midshipman had to fight his way into the right to call anything his own. So frequent were the battles on board, that the art had reached a very high degree of perfection. Even the muscular heroes of the prize-ring might have envied the quickness of eye, the wariness, the nimbleness of movement, the skill in feint, of these young warriors.

The group had become by this time enlarged by the addition of several other boys, big and small, eager to see the fight and the imminent discomfiture of the king's officer. They drew away to give the principals fighting room. The two at once got to work. In the first half-minute Jack found that he had no novice to deal with, and that in sheer physical strength he was hopelessly outmatched. But the big lumbering fisher had nothing like the quickness of wit or the science of the slighter midshipman. Hitherto he had won his bouts by staying power added to a certain rudimentary knowledge of fisticuffs that might pass for skill among the yokels at a country fair. But in all his previous battles he had never met an opponent who forced the pace like this one. Where was he? He seemed to be on all sides at once. Jan dealt what he firmly believed was a staggering right-hander, only to hit air and to feel a smart tap on the left side of his chin. He flung out his left hand, and before he knew what was happening, he felt a similar tap on the right side. This kept things even, but it spoilt Jan's temper. He forgot his science in his irritation, and lurched forward to give full effect to his weight and height. The result was disastrous. Where did that whack in the left eye come from? He had hardly realized that he could not see quite so well as usual, when something very hard and knobby came into his right eye, and while the stars were still dancing before him a neat left-hander from Jack sent him reeling back on to the cobblestones, where he sat up and peered about him dazedly.

It was clear that the battle was over in a single round. There was no fight left in Jan. The crowd was silent now. Several were assisting Jan to rise, and Jack quickly rolled down his sleeves, put on his hat and coat, and walked away, leaving the Square by the alley through which he had entered it. Perfect stillness reigned in the village; but Jack was conscious that the windows and doorways were now filled with faces watching the scene. He smiled as he left the village behind him.

CHAPTER IV
CONGLETON'S HOLLOW

Jack was beginning to enjoy himself. There is something bracing in antagonism: the knowledge that he was regarded as an enemy by the people of Luscombe, so far from daunting him, whetted his appetite for duty. He made up his mind to say nothing to Mr. Bastable of what had occurred.

When he got back to the Grange he found the household bubbling with an excitement of its own. Mr. Bastable had brought back with him two new suits of yeomanry uniform, and Tony, the coachman, and Andrew, the groom, had just fitted them on and were displaying their finery to the admiring eyes of Molly, the cook, and Betty, the housemaid. The men grinned sheepishly as Jack passed them.

"Bean't they fine, Measter Jack?" said Molly, giggling.

"Splendid! You won't be afraid of Boney now."

"Sakes alive, no, sir! But I be mortal afeard o' William's blunderbuss. It do look a terrible deathly instrument, to be sure; and what would happen to us if it went off by accident goodness only knows."

William was the gardener, who, though too old and bent to make an efficient yeoman, had been armed, like Overcombe, the butler, with a blunderbuss, Mr. Bastable having thought it worth while to give the men of his household weapons of defense.

"You never know," he said to Jack; "Boney may land or he may not; if he lands, the more men we have to fight him, the better; and a blunderbuss behind a wall may do some damage. I'm going to exercise 'em every day."

"And what about Monsieur de Fronsac, cousin? Will you arm him, too?"

"Well, I didn't intend to. I thought I could hardly expect him to fight against

his own countrymen. But he is so bitter against the Monster that he declares he won't remain neutral. While his countrymen lick the feet of the Monster, he says, he disowns 'em. He's got a pistol, and uncommon handy he is with it, too. There he is," he added, as a loud report was heard; "he's practising behind the coach-house. Let us go and see what he can do."

De Fronsac smiled when he saw them.

"You see, Messieurs, I exercise myself," he said. As he spoke he stooped and lifted a horn button from the ground. Walking up to the wall he placed the button edgewise against a brick; turned, stepped a dozen paces, swung round, and almost without seeming to take aim, fired. The button was shattered into small fragments.

Jack could not but envy the Frenchman's skill.

"You must have had plenty of practice, Monsieur," he said.

"Yes, truly. Ve of the noblesse know to use de pistol, assuredly."

Next day there was to be a yeomanry parade at Wickham Ferrers. Arthur begged off his lessons for the day, wishing to go with Jack to see the training. There were no horses for them to ride or drive, Mr. Bastable's three being required to mount himself and his men, so they had to walk. It was only six miles; they started early, and were on the field before the troops arrived. They got a good deal of amusement out of the scene. Many of the yeomen were raw recruits who found the management of horses and arms at the same time somewhat beyond them. Falls were frequent, and the officers got very red in the face with the exertion of commanding and countermanding. When the parade was over, the two boys had early dinner with Mr. Bastable and the other officers at the *Wickham Arms*, and started to walk back in the cool of the evening.

They came by a path that led past the tower once inhabited by the melancholy Congleton. Jack looked up at it, wondering what sort of place that lonely room at the top was. But Arthur said that the only doorway was strongly barricaded, and Jack was not inclined to waste time in breaking in. Another half-mile brought them to the middle of the Hollow. Jack had not mentioned the incident of two nights before; it would seem too much like prying into De Fronsac's affairs; but he was thinking of it when a shot rang out from the depths of the copse, followed by a cry. Arthur paused in the act of capturing a belated butterfly.

"What's that, Jack?"

"A cry for help! Come on!"

He vaulted the wall; after a moment's hesitation Arthur scrambled over; and they dashed toward the thickest part of the wood, Jack a few yards ahead. Heedless of scratches and tears they pushed through the tangle in the direction of the sounds, and, Jack suddenly finding himself blocked by a thick clump of brambles, Arthur came panting up to him.

"Over there, Jack, I think!" he said. "I heard some one moving."

He pointed to the left. They listened; there was no sound but the ripple of a tiny stream.

"Let's go on!" said Jack in a whisper, pointing ahead. "'Twas there the sound first came from."

He disentangled himself from the bush, not without damage to hands and clothes, and skirting the obstacle, the two pushed still deeper into the wood, dim in spite of the glow of the westering sun. In a few moments they saw through the trees a more brightly-lit patch of ground, and came to an open glade, covered with fern and tall grass run to seed. At the far side stood the ruins of a large timber summer-house, built of logs something like those of the pioneers in America of which Jack had read. It was somewhat dilapidated. But what took his attention immediately was the figure of a man sitting on one of the fallen logs, apparently stanching with a red handkerchief a wound in the head.

As the two boys made their appearance at the edge of the glade the man started and tried to rise; but he staggered back with a groan, and continuing clumsily to stanch his wound, eyed them sullenly with uneasy suspicion as they approached.

Jack went up to him impulsively.

"We heard a shot and a cry. Did you call out?" he asked. "You are hurt. Can we do anything?"

The man was an undersized, mean-featured, ill-conditioned looking fellow. He had a low beetling brow, and his cheeks were black with the unshorn growth of several weeks. He was evidently badly hurt, and, villainous though he looked, Jack was eager to aid him.

"It is nothing," said the man, in a low and surly tone, with a slight foreign accent. "I am getting better, if only the bleeding would stop!"

Jack could see the handkerchief was drenched with blood.

"You were shot! Who fired?" he asked.

"Ah, who? I want to know. It was all at once. I did not see."

"And how did it happen, then?"

"Why, I walk along, looking straight in front, when behind me a shot is fired. I feel the pain. I call out; the pain indeed is no little; see, the bullet cut my scalp three inches long, at least. A little lower, and without doubt I am a dead man."

"And you did not see who fired?"

"No, how can I? I turn round; but the villain hears you as you come, and he escapes. That way I hear him go."

He pointed in the direction suggested by Arthur.

"It was some robber, without doubt," he added.

Jack looked uneasily around. Where was the man? Perhaps still in the copse ready to repeat his shot. But with another glance at the victim Jack felt that there was something strange in his story. Who would rob an ill-clad, dirty-looking fellow like this? He did not appear worth the pains. And what had brought him to the Hollow? He was certainly a foreigner; the copse was off the highway; what was he doing there?

From beneath his black shaggy brows the man was keenly watching. Apparently he saw by Jack's expression that doubts were crossing his mind. Still dabbing his head he began to speak again.

"I am unlucky. I am of Spitalfields, a silk weaver. At Wickham Ferrers I have at the inn fine silks. I visit the nobility and gentry; they give me orders. I am on my way to the house of Mr. Bastable—the squire, people call him. He is rich; his lady will buy my silks."

"But this is not the way to Mr. Bastable's."

"Is it not? They told me there was a short cut through the wood. Ah! the villains! It is a trap. They had me here to shoot me. Yes, that is it."

"And your samples?"

The man started.

"Yes, my samples," he said hurriedly, looking round. "They steal them. But I have others at Wickham Ferrers, at the inn. I go for them at once."

He rose as he spoke. Erect, he stood a head shorter than Jack.

"I beg you keep close to me till we are out of the wood. Ah! I feel sick, I am not able to walk so far. I am shaken; I can not wait on a lady this evening. Can you tell me a lodging in the village?"

"Do you know of one, Arthur?"

"There's old Mother Philpot; she could put him up."

"I thank you. Philpot: I will remember the name."

The boys walked with him until they reached the edge of the plantation. Then Arthur pointed out the path that led down to the village; the man refused their offer of further assistance, and when he had gone from sight they struck off at an angle toward the Grange.

Arthur was greatly excited at the incident, and talked about it all the way home. Jack was puzzled. It seemed so unlikely that a peddler carrying silks should go so far out of his way, and that he should be set upon and robbed of a bundle of samples when the more valuable bulk of his wares lay at Wickham Ferrers.

At dinner he mentioned the occurrence. Mr. Bastable was as much annoyed as concerned.

"This won't do," he said. "We're a peaceable and law-abiding folk here."

"The smugglers, cousin?"

"Oh! the smugglers!" Mr. Bastable's face again wore that strange quizzical smile that Jack had noticed whenever smuggling was mentioned. "That's another matter. I say we're a law-abiding folk. There hasn't been a robbery, an assault, or anything of that kind, for years. So near the Grange, too. As a justice of the peace, I must see that fellow and get a description of the assailant; we'll raise the hue and cry and have him fast by the heels, I warrant him. I'll send Tony to Mother Philpot at once."

"He said he didn't see the man who fired the shot."

"Nonsense. How could any one take his samples without being seen?"

"Permit me," said De Fronsac, smiling. "From vat Monsieur Jack says, de poor man is a compatriot. He is a weaver of Spitalfields, but he talk viz a foreign accent. De French families in Spitalfields have been dere so many generations dat dey are now English; dey vould have no accent, and dis poor man must be, as I myself, a victim of de troubles in France of dis day—perhaps he is a victim of dat Monstair. Vill it not be convenient dat I go to see him at his lodgment, and speak to him in his own language, and learn all dat he has to tell?"

"'Tis very good of you, Monsieur; but I don't want to spoil your dinner, and this must be done at once, or the villain will get away."

"De dinner, it is noding!" said De Fronsac with a smile, not perceiving the little grimace that for an instant showed itself on Kate's lips, or the glance exchanged between her and her mother. "I vill go at once. I do anyzing to serve a friend like you, Monsieur," he said, with a low bow as he rose.

After De Fronsac's departure the family discussed the incident at length, Mr. Bastable becoming more and more indignant as he thought of the outrage committed in that quiet spot and so near his own doors. But Jack felt very uneasy. He could not help connecting the event with the voices he had heard in the copse two nights before. The speakers had seemed to be in altercation; one of them had been De Fronsac. And De Fronsac had offered to go and question the injured man. Jack wondered whether he had better tell his cousin what was passing through his mind, but he did not like to make him uneasy or suspicious if, after all, there was no cause for it. So he decided to say nothing—at least, until De Fronsac had reported the result of his interview.

The family were in the drawing-room when the tutor returned.

"I have accomplish' my mission," he said. "I am hot; I valk fast. De man is indeed, I regret to say, a compatriot. He is in England from a young man; vid his parents he arrive fourteen years ago, ven de troubles began. I dink he is honest man. He see only very little bit of de man vat shoot him, but it seem he vas short, and zick, and vid red hair. Dat is vun zing he know: de man had de hair red."

"Red-haired men are as common as blackberries in these parts," said Mr. Bastable. "That won't help us much. Why didn't the fellow use his eyes to better

purpose? I warrant, if a man shot me I'd know a little more about him. However, I'll send Tony to Wickham Ferrers, and we'll have some men out scouring the country. Unluckily 'tis getting dark."

Mr. Bastable went to bed later than usual that night, in case the man should be caught and brought before him as a justice of the peace for committal. But the searchers had made no discovery, and the squire at last retired, going round the house with more than usual care to see that doors and windows were carefully bolted.

Next morning they were seated at breakfast when Tony knocked at the door and came in with a face full of news.

"Please, sir, there's bin housebreaking now. Mother Philpot's house were broke into last night, and the Mounseer carried off."

"What! what!" shouted Mr. Bastable with a very red face, holding upright the knife and fork with which he was carving a fine piece of pickled pork.

"'Tis true, sir. Mother Philpot were just gwine up along to roost, when there come a knock at the door. She opened, poor soul, and three men with faces black as sut pushed past. One caught her by the arm and told her to be mum and no harm would come o't; t'others went into Mounseer's chimmer and pulled un out as soon as they'd got his coat and things on, and took un away. He was all a-shaking, sir. Mother Philpot says, says she: 'A were a-trembling like an apsen, and so were I!'"

"This is monstrous!" cried Mr. Bastable, pushing back his chair.

"Alas! my compatriot is in danger yet still," said De Fronsac, carefully folding his napkin.

"And the silks! I had set my heart on a plum-colored dress, Humfrey," said Mrs. Bastable.

"Silks! Fiddlesticks! 'tis an outrage; 'tis contempt of court! 'tis—'tis—hang it! I don't know what it isn't. Tony, get my horse saddled. I'll ride over to Wickham myself, and get the colonel to scour the country with dragoons, or we'll send to Budmouth for those fellows of the German Legion, and see what they're good for. We can't allow this sort of thing in Luscombe, and by George! we won't."

The angry squire strode away, leaving his breakfast unfinished.

"Your poor father will be so hungry, and so bad-tempered all day," said Mrs. Bastable, whom nothing seemed to ruffle. "Jack, will you carve the pork? You have not finished, Monsieur de Fronsac?"

"Absolutely, Madame," said the Frenchman with a bow and a smile. "Dere is yet an hour before ve study; I vill valk to de village and back. De fresh air it is salubrious; and de fishermen interess me. My estates vere in Brittany; and in my days of youth I pass much time among fishermen. Ven I come back, ve vill study

de properties of angles, Monsieur Arthur."

And with a smile Monsieur de Fronsac left the room.

CHAPTER V
A MIDNIGHT EXCURSION

"I know!" said Arthur that evening, coming up to Jack, who was practising skittles in an alley behind the house. He looked up slyly in Jack's face.

"You do, do you? And what do you know?"

"About you."

"Well, I suppose you do. I'm Jack Hardy, son of Major James Hardy, late of the East India Company's service, and—"

"Didn't he touch you at all?"

"Who? Father? Yes, he used to lay it on pretty thick when I was a young un like you."

"Jan Lamiger, I mean."

"Oh, that's it, is it? And what do you know about Jan Lamiger, may I ask?"

"Tony told me. He says Jan Lamiger has got two black eyes and a green nose. Oh! don't I wish I'd seen it! Just don't I!"

"Well, my young cockchafer, you hold your tongue about it. I don't want it all over the country that a king's officer has been sparring with a lout like Jan Lamiger."

"All right. You needn't be stuck up about it. Did he go squash?"

"Your language is not very choice, Master Bastable. Hullo! There's Gudgeon's chimney on fire again."

"It's always on fire."

"What do you mean?"

"So it is—in the winter."

"Well, I s'pose he doesn't have fires in the summer, but it isn't winter yet."

"I don't care. I've seen the chimney smoking away like that often enough; sometimes twice a week."

"That's rather curious, isn't it? Doesn't he ever have 'em swept?"

"I don't know. I asked Bill Gudgeon about it once, and he said they can't afford sea-coal, and burn up all their muck like that."

"Just the sort of answer I should expect from him. Well, there's your tutor

coming to teach you a, b, ab, b, a, b, bab. Cut away!"

"I say!"

"Well, what is it now?"

"I hate Frenchmen."

"A very wise and proper thing for an English boy."

"And I hate lessons."

"Very wrong. You'll grow up a dunce and disgrace to the name of Bastable. Cut!"

"Bother!"

He made a wry mouth and went slowly away. Jack smiled.

"He'll do!" he said to himself. "But I wonder why Gudgeon's chimneys seem so uncommonly foul. I think I must pay Bill's father a visit some day."

He mentioned the matter of the chimney to Mr. Bastable when that gentleman returned later in the day, after starting the chase for the rogues who had dared to disturb the peace of law-abiding Luscombe. Mr. Bastable laughed.

"Yes, Gudgeon has an uncommon quantity of muck on his farm," he said, "but some good stuff, too—some uncommonly good stuff."

Jack did not regard this as a very satisfactory explanation.

That night he was roused from a very heavy sleep by a touch on his arm.

"Who's that?" he cried, springing up at once.

"Only me," said Arthur in a whisper. "I say, Jack, I heard some one moving about below. It seemed to be in De Fronsac's room."

"Well, he's stumping about doing some more poetry perhaps. Go to bed."

"But I believe he's gone out."

"'Tis rather a close night. Perhaps he wanted air."

"I believe he knows something about that fellow who was shot. I watched his face."

"Oho!"

Jack was surprised to find that the boy's suspicions jumped so nearly with his own.

"Look here, who've you told that to?"

"Only you."

"That's all right. I'm going out."

"So am I," was the quiet rejoinder.

"I don't think so. I'm not going to make a row opening doors. I'm going out at the window."

"If you do, I will, too."

"All right. Go and pull on some things and be back here in fifty-nine seconds. Sharp!"

The boy hurried away.

De Fronsac's room was just below, on the ground floor. It had once been a parlor, but little used, and when the tutor begged to have it for his bedroom, Mrs. Bastable made no objection. It had French windows opening on to the lawn, and De Fronsac said it would be so convenient for him, for he could go out before the household was astir, and compose poems on the Dawn, or satiric odes to the Monstair.

Arthur was back as soon as Jack had pulled on his coat, breeches, and boots.

"Ever climb down a rain-pipe?"

"No."

"Well, you've got to now. I'll go first, to be ready to pick up the pieces. Hist! What's that?"

Jack had spoken in a whisper. Now through the open window he heard a sound as of a latch falling. Going to the window he peered cautiously out from behind the curtain. For a few moments he saw nothing. It was a dark night, but the moon was rising, and he thought he detected a dark figure moving along in the shadow of the wall. The figure went furtively on until the wall ended and a fence began; then Jack lost sight of it.

"You were right, Arthur," whispered Jack. "Don't look like making up poetry, either. Come along."

Looking out to make sure that the figure was no longer in sight, he slipped over the window-sill, slid down the rain-pipe with a sailor's ease, and in a few seconds stood on the lawn. Arthur hesitated for a moment at the sill, then, plucking up his courage, he let himself over and grasped the pipe. For a few feet he managed well enough; then he lost his head and his grip together, and came down with a rush, to be caught by Jack, who staggered under his weight.

"Well tried, youngster. No damage done?"

"No," replied Arthur, not thinking it necessary to tell that he had two or three grazes on his wrists and legs, and that he had knocked his nose against one of the joints of the pipe.

The two boys hurried down the garden, passed through a gap in the fence made by removing two of the palings, and set off in the reverse direction, toward the front of the house. Jack chose this course almost by instinct; somehow he felt sure that De Fronsac was making toward the cliff. Between this and the house ran the highroad. On reaching the road, Jack looked up and down: it ran straight for at least a third of a mile in each direction. No figure was in sight; yet Jack was sure that unless De Fronsac had actually run he could not have already got so far as a third of a mile ahead; and the road lay so white in the moonlight that no person could move along it without being plainly seen.

"No good going on unless we can see him," said Jack.

"Perhaps he has gone by the beach," suggested Arthur.

"Right. The tide's full, but there's always room to walk at the foot of the cliffs. We'll chance it."

They ran across the road, vaulted the low wall on the other side, and doubled over the two fields separating them from the edge of the cliffs. As they approached the steep zigzag leading down to the shore they went more carefully. They did not immediately begin the descent, but made their way to a jutting portion of the cliff whence they could get a good view of the shore on either hand.

"We can't see him if he's down there," said Arthur, still in a whisper.

"No, the shadow's too black," replied Jack. "And we can't hear him, either. Wish it was sand! The rollers make such a noise on that shingle, and the tide's too high for any one to walk on the sands."

But he had hardly finished speaking when, looking to the left, he saw a black shade on the shingle, at a point where a mass of rocks at the foot of the cliff interrupted the direct path. It moved a few yards, and again disappeared. That was enough for Jack.

"There he is!" he whispered. "Take care, youngster; we don't want any broken necks."

Quickly lowering himself over the steep side of the cliff until his feet touched the zigzag path, he began to race down as quickly as the need for quietness permitted, Arthur following somewhat less rapidly. At the foot he waited for his cousin, then both set off toward the village, the direction in which they had seen the shadow move.

He almost wished now that he had refused to let Arthur come with him, for while the sound of one person running on the loose shingle might pass unheard, it was not so likely that two could run with the same security. But he did not care to send the boy back now, so they went on together, more slowly than he would have done alone.

De Fronsac must have walked rapidly, for it was not until they had nearly reached the village that they caught another glimpse of him. Then, however, the gap in the cliff brought him well into view, and the boys had no difficulty in following. He kept straight on across the deserted harbor and on to the footpath at the other side running up the cliff,—a short cut for pedestrians leading to the highroad a little short of Gudgeon's farm. Not far up, however, the path forked, a narrow track leading down again to the beach, which it reached about two hundred yards farther east.

Jack had to wait until De Fronsac had disappeared before he followed him across the open space around the harbor, for if he had chanced to turn he must have caught sight of any one behind. Thus, when the boys reached the fork of the path, they were uncertain whether to continue up the cliff, or to turn down to the right.

"Listen!" said Jack.

Holding their breath they waited. Was that a faint sound from above?

"Let us chance it," said Jack, and up they went, following the steep winding path until it brought them once more to the highroad. They glanced up and down; there was nothing to be seen, only Gudgeon's farm about a stone's throw to the right, and the bare white road winding down-hill past it and up-hill to the left. They were again at fault; presumably De Fronsac, to avoid the very loose shingle near the village, had chosen the cliff path, only to turn to the right and continue his road by the beach.

"If that's it," said Jack, "we can easily make sure. Remain here by the wall so that you can't be seen. I'll go on."

He ran on tiptoe along the road past Gudgeon's house standing black and silent, crossed the little bridge over the chine, and, vaulting the wall, hastened to the edge of the cliff. He should now at least be level with the Frenchman if he was still walking along the beach eastward, for on the road Jack had run much faster than was possible on the shingle.

Here again, however, the cliff cast a black shadow. He could see nothing; nor, listening intently, could he detect any sound from below, save the slow wash of the high tide. But in a few moments his practised ear caught another sound. Surely that was the faint thud of oars working in row-locks out at sea. Yes: a quarter of a mile eastward he saw a boat cross the white path of the moonbeam across the water and creep shoreward. And beyond, straining his eyes, he thought he saw in the shimmering moonlight the shape of a larger vessel, motionless.

"Whew!" he whistled softly, "that's the Frenchman's little game!"

He was convinced that there must be some connection between the approach of the boat and De Fronsac's suspicious movements. What was it? He thought of Arthur, remaining by himself in Gudgeon's field.

"Better fetch the youngster," he said to himself.

He raced back to the spot and told Arthur what he had seen.

"You had better come with me. Who knows what this will lead to?"

They returned together and hurried along the cliffs, keeping well away from the edge to avoid being seen.

"She's making for Laxted Cove," said Arthur when he saw the boat.

"How far away?"

"About half a mile. We'll have to fetch round it and approach from the other side if we're to see what's going on."

"Come on, youngster; hold your wind."

They pounded along at a steady pace over the rough bent. The surface was very irregular, and more than once the boys tripped and almost fell headlong as some sudden irregularity of the ground betrayed their steps. In spite of all their

haste, by the time they had reached a point beyond the cove whence they could look down in security, the boat had already been beached, and men were landing.

The boys lay flat on their faces, peering over the edge of the cliff that fell here almost perpendicular to the beach. The men below were speaking in low tones; Jack caught a few words of French, he thought. They were apparently impatient to be off. He could not distinguish their faces, nor even their dress, for having come up the beach from the water-line they were now in the shadow of the cliffs.

Suddenly there was a low hail; immediately afterward the sound of footsteps. From the darkness of the undercliff there stepped three men carrying a heavy bundle. They staggered somewhat noisily across the shingle toward the waiting boat. Behind them two other figures came out of the blackness and stood just below the boys, as if watching the proceedings.

The three men met those who had landed from the boat. Jack saw the bundle transferred from the one party to the other, and with a start he recognized that it was the form of a man, well trussed up. It was carried to the boat and stowed with scant ceremony in the bows. Then the boat was pushed off, the men wading until she was fairly afloat. They sprang on board, gave a low farewell to the men on the beach, and seizing the oars pulled rapidly out to sea.

The men who had borne the prisoner watched the receding boat until it was lost to sight, then trudged off toward the village. The other two had already disappeared. Jack wished he could have seen who they were, but the man nearest him had been all the time in shadow, and the others had been too far away to be recognized.

"I say, Jack," said Arthur, "what shall you do?"

"That's just what I'm wondering. If I'd only got a few men here I'd go down to the village and demand an explanation of this strange business, in the king's name. But if I went alone I'd make a fool of myself."

"I'd go with you."

"Then there'd be two fools instead of one. They could knock us on the head and send us to join that bundle on the boat. I wonder who he is. Surely they haven't decoyed De Fronsac here and carried him off to the Monster!"

"He wouldn't like that, would he?"

"Well, we can't do anything at present. We'd better get back."

"Shall you tell father?"

"Don't know. I'll tell you that to-morrow morning."

They went back over the cliffs. They had just crossed the chine when a big figure suddenly loomed up to the left, appearing from the zigzag path leading down to the shore. There was no time to avoid a meeting; indeed, so suddenly had the man appeared from round a bend in the path that unless he and the boys had

started back simultaneously there must have been a collision. The moonlight shone full in the face of the big man, and Jack recognized him even as Arthur whispered:

"I say! old Gudgeon!"

Gudgeon recognized the boys at the same moment.

"Oh, Mr. Hardy, sir!" he said, "you put me in quite a flutter. And you, too, Master Bastable; well to be sure! As if I had not had enough flutters for one night! Did you hear a boat, sir?"

"Saw it, too."

"There now! I was kept up late attending to some lambs" ("Pretty old mutton!" thought Jack.), "and I thought I heard people moving, and I came out, and I was sure I saw a boat putting out to sea. It gave me quite a start. Perhaps it was some of those smugglers—a rough lot. But gracious me! 'tis very late for two young gentlemen to be out; your good mother would be in a terrible flutter, Master Bastable, if she knew."

"I say, are you going to tell her?"

"I have to consider my duty, Master Bastable. As to Mr. Hardy, of course he's a king's officer, and can keep any hours the king likes to let him. But a boy like you, Master Bastable! Really, Mr. Hardy, sir, I'm surprised at you. But I keep myself to myself, I do, and don't meddle with no man's business as don't concern me. So this time, Master Bastable, I won't think it my duty to tell your lady mother what I seed this night."

"I'm going to tell her myself, and what—"

"Avast there!" interrupted Jack, "you ought to be very much obliged to Mr. Gudgeon, you young donkey, for not rounding on you. Good night, Mr. Gudgeon."

And he hauled Arthur away.

"You young idiot!" said Jack, when they were out of earshot. "You were going to say you would tell your mother all you had seen. We mustn't on any account let them know what we have found out. That would put them on their guard at once. Better say nothing at all just yet."

"All right. But why?"

"Because there's something going on which I don't understand. De Fronsac may be in it; Gudgeon certainly is; and if they think we know too much it will spoil things. Not a word to any one, mind."

"I say, how am I going to get back into your room? I got down the rain-pipe, but I couldn't climb up it."

"Don't worry yourself, we'll find a way."

On reaching the house they saw that De Fronsac's windows were shut. Jack quickly swarmed up the pipe and entered his room. In about a minute down came

the end of a knotted sheet. Arthur caught it, and in a few minutes was standing beside Jack.

The family were seated at the breakfast-table next morning when De Fronsac came in.

"Pardon, Madame," he said, "I am late. Last night I see a fine moon; it drew me out towards de so beautiful sea over dere"—he pointed in a direction exactly contrary to that taken by the figure followed by the boys—"and I compose a little poem on de Minotaur—who is, of course, dat Monstair Bonaparte."

"That's strange, Monsieur," said Jack, at whom Arthur had been staring very hard while the Frenchman spoke. "I could not sleep last night, and went out for a stroll, and I could have sworn I saw you coming just the opposite way."

"Ah! I see you also. I see you drough my curtains—ven you climb up de pipe. To mariners dat is, of course, as easy as the staircase; but as for me, I shudder."

"Gave you the flutters, eh, Monsieur?"

"Myself I vould say de tr-r-rembling. De poem I compose, Madame, it begin—

"'Is dere a creature vizout shame?
Napoleon—so is he name.
Is dere a creature vizout heart?
Ah! yes!—de Monstair Bonaparte.'"

"Yes, but Monsieur," persisted Jack, "I saw some one uncommonly like you going the other way, towards Laxted Cove."

"Ah, Monsieur Jack, ve have a proverb, 'In the dark all cats are gray.' Dat you see some vun, it is certain; but me—no, Monsieur Jack, how can it? I vas composing my poem—over dere."

CHAPTER VI
SIGNALS

In the course of the morning Jack received from a carrier a note summoning him to rejoin his ship at once. His cousins were sorry to bid him good-by, and, though he was eager enough to return to his duty, he was so much interested in

the strange things that had happened since his arrival at Bastable Grange that he would have liked very well to remain a few days longer and try to unravel the mystery by which he seemed to be surrounded. Before leaving he took Arthur aside for a moment.

"Look here, youngster," he said, "keep your eye on De Fronsac. If he tries to pump out of you what we saw last night, tell him we saw a boat putting out to sea and wondered whether the smugglers were at work. Don't say a word about the man we saw put on board. Don't let him think we suspect him. And it will be as well to take a note of the days when he reels off poetry."

"All right.—I say!"

"Well?"

"His poetry is fearful rubbish, isn't it?"

"Never made any myself, but I fancy I could do as well as he. Good-by. Remember what I said."

Jack returned to Wynport in a carrier's cart. He went down at once to the harbor, and was rowed to the *Fury*, which lay at her moorings, just inside the bar. A stout old mariner was leaning over the side, smoking a big pipe. One of his eyes was considerably larger than the other; a big and very bulbous nose seemed to occupy the greater part of his face; and a long black curl hung in a graceful curve over his right brow. Guessing instinctively that this could be none other than Ben Babbage, Gumley's friend, and bo'sun of the cutter, Jack hailed him.

"*Fury* ahoy!"

"Ay, ay, sir. Morning, sir, morning, leastways good arternoon, seeing as how we've just took in our cargo of dinner. Glad to see you, sir. Mr. Blake he said we was to get under way the very minute you came aboard."

Jack swung himself up, flung a coin to the boatman, and turned to the old sailor.

"Where's Mr. Blake?"

"Below, sir, a-laying in his bunk, twisted up with rheumatics. You're in command, sir, *pro tem*, as brother Sol used to say."

"Very well; heave the anchor, and run up the mainsail. You're the bo'sun, eh?"

"Ay, ay, sir: name Babbage; not Sol, sir; that's my brother, and a much better chap nor me, though, so far. Ben Babbage my name, sir."

"Well, Babbage, clear the harbor. I'll go and see Mr. Blake and get her course. You can call me when you've fairly crossed the bar."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Jack went below and found the lieutenant groaning in his bunk. He was a weather-beaten sea-dog of forty-five, who had long since given up whatever dreams of promotion he might at one time have entertained.

"You're back, then, Mr. Hardy," he said. "You see me a martyr to rheumatism: my old enemy serves me like this every time I go to sea. Babbage gave you my message?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I'll tell you what our orders are. French privateers are careering up and down the Channel, dodging our cruisers and swooping down on our merchantmen. We've got to cruise at large, keeping one eye on the French, and t'other on the smugglers. They're expected to be pretty active just now, when every one's mad with excitement about these flat-bottomed boats that Boney is going to invade us with. The *Fury* has got to act as a sort of watch-dog."

"Not much fun about that, sir," said Jack.

"No, sir, no fun, and no glory. Both you and I, I take it, would sooner sling our hammocks on a frigate or a line-of-battle ship. But we've our duty to do, sir, and we can't do more than our duty, wherever we are. Did you find your relatives well?"

"Yes, sir. Do you know Luscombe?"

"No, I've never done this shore-crawling before."

"A good deal of smuggling goes on there, I am told. 'Tis a quiet little place, almost hidden away in a recess between the cliffs. It doesn't seem to have been troubled much by the preventive men."

"The last riding-officer was a slack-twisted fellow, it appears, no good for his job. The new man—I've seen him once or twice here—is energetic enough, but not too quick-witted, I should say, and a little inclined to be bumptious."

At this point a sailor put his head in at the little cabin.

"If you please, sir, Mr. Babbage says we're off Minton Point, and waits for orders."

"Very well, Turley. Go on deck, Mr. Hardy, and take a run down Channel. Let me know what you think of the *Fury's* sailing powers; we've nothing but our speed to trust to if we happen to fall in with the enemy in force."

All feelings of disappointment vanished from Jack's mind immediately as he stepped on deck. The *Fury* was in all respects a model cutter. Jack had admired the beauty of her lines as she lay in harbor, sitting the water like a sea-bird, with every promise of speed in the graceful hull, the long tapering mast and the huge boom extending considerably beyond the stern. Now heeling slightly to a stiff sou'-sou'-westerly breeze, with her great spread of canvas she seemed to Jack like a sea-bird in flight. A stately Indiaman that had left port some time before was working to windward a mile ahead. In order to test the capacity of the *Fury* Jack brought her a few points nearer the wind, and found that he steadily overhauled the huge vessel. Before nightfall the Indiaman was nearly hull down, and Jack was satisfied that the *Fury* had the heels of most craft he was likely to meet on

the coast.

Two small brass guns, one forward and one aft, comprised her whole armament. Jack could not help contrasting this with the forty huge guns of the *Ariadne*. The crew consisted of some five and twenty seamen and marines. Most of them had seen much service, and one and all wished they were with Nelson chasing the French instead of being engaged in what they considered the humdrum task of watching the coast. Jack privately thought it might turn out to be not so very humdrum after all. He soon made himself acquainted with the crew, and was rather attracted by a merry-eyed salt named Joe Turley, a handy man who seemed to live to poke fun at Babbage the bo'sun. Among the men that worthy was variously known as Cabbage, Artichoke, Brussels sprouts, Sparrow-grass, and Turnip-tops; he was rarely called by his own name, except to the officers, when he was always alluded to most respectfully as Mr. Babbage.

A fortnight passed away, and Jack, as well as every member of the crew, was growing very tired of the uneventful life. Every day was alike, save for the weather, and that varied little. The cutter cruised up and down the Channel between Weymouth and Portsmouth, putting in occasionally to communicate with the riding-officer and to take in provisions, but finding nothing of any importance to do. The smugglers seemed to be quiet; the only vessels sighted were British merchantmen passing up or down Channel under convoy, or fishing-smacks out from the English ports. The men grumbled at the lack of chances of obtaining prize money, and Jack was impatient of the inactivity to which he was condemned. It was all very well to keep the *Fury* spick and span, her deck as white as the sails, her brass rails polished to a dazzling brilliance; but he would have liked work a little less domestic—work for the two brass guns that Joe Turley caressed as though they were living creatures.

"Won't you venture over to the French side, sir?" Jack asked Lieutenant Blake one day. "We aren't doing any good hugging our own shore."

"No, I won't. I can't blockade a French port with a cutter of two guns. If we run too close to the French shore we might easily be snapped up, and for nothing at all. Besides, orders are orders. I've got mine as plain as a pikestaff, and I can't go beyond 'em."

Jack was disappointed, but clearly there was nothing to be said.

One evening the *Fury* was making toward Wynport. She had overhauled a suspicious looking brig passing down Channel, but found that she was a harmless Portuguese sailing in ballast.

"I know she was a Portuguese," said Joe Turley to his messmates on the forward deck. "But old Turnip-tops, of course he must take his Bible oath she was a Spaniard, and so we've wasted three or four hours, on the very night, too, when we're due at the *Goat and Compasses*."

It had been arranged that half the crew should have a night ashore at Wynport—the first since the *Fury* had spread her sails.

"True, old Sparrow-grass is a nuisance, though he's got a good heart. Here he comes."

The bo'sun came forward and joined the group.

"Well, messmates," he said, "we'll be late at the *Goat and Compasses*, and I'm sorry for that, but whenever I'm sorry I think of my brother Sol, who always says, 'Cheer ho! my hearty,' and slaps your back in a way that warms the very cockles of your heart. I remember—but what's that light?"

"What light, Mr. Babbage?" said one of the men.

"There, to larboard."

He pointed toward the shore. A strong light was shining intermittently, remaining steady for a few seconds, then disappearing, then flashing out again.

"'Tis a signal, sure enough," cried Turley; "but what for? That's the point."

"No, it ain't the point," said Babbage. "The point's a good deal east of that light, and it's Bantock Point."

"Well, I meant point in a manner of speaking. The light's at Luscombe; any one can see that."

"More like at Totley."

"I say Luscombe, Mr. Babbage," was the stubborn rejoinder.

"Totley, I say, and what I say I stick to, as brother Sol says."

"Ahoy, there!" called Jack from amidships. "What do you make of that light, Babbage?"

"Some one showing a signal from Totley, sir, two miles t'other side of Luscombe."

"No, it can't be at Totley. That's round a bend of the shore. It's at or near Luscombe itself. A smugglers' signal, eh?"

"Like as not, sir. They've been too quiet of late: a sure sign of something brewing, like a calm after a storm, as brother Sol might say."

"I'm pretty sure it's at Luscombe. But 'twill be rather hard to determine exactly in the darkness. Run her in a little toward shore, so that we can take a look at things."

A few minutes later the dim outlines of two prominent cliffs to the north-east and west-north-west respectively could be seen. Jack saw that he could determine the general direction of the light by those two well-known landmarks. Accordingly he ordered the cutter to be hove to; he then took its position with reference to the two cliffs, and the angle of the light. When this was done he went below and reported to Lieutenant Blake, who was enjoying a nap in his tiny cabin.

"You did very well, Hardy. We'll return to-morrow and test your observa-

tions. There's no confounded lugger or anything of that sort in sight, eh?"

"Nothing, sir."

"Well, I'll leave things to you. Run closer in shore, and keep a bright look-out. If there's nothing in sight, head her for Wynport, but keep a good offing off Bantock Point."

Carrying out these orders, Jack found that a mile farther in he lost sight of the light. He thought it worth while to run out again and see if it had disappeared altogether, but on returning to nearly the same spot at which the cutter had been hove to, he saw that the light was burning as brightly as ever. All at once it went out. Jack waited for some time to see if it reappeared, but the shore remaining in perfect blackness he saw no good in delaying further, and weathering the Point, with its spine of jagged rocks running out to sea, ran straight for Wynport.

They had not gone far when Babbage declared he saw a sail on the weather beam. Jack instantly put down the helm, but after cruising about for some time and finding nothing he concluded that the bo'sun had been mistaken.

"Another facer for old Onions!" whispered Turley.

At Wynport Mr. Blake put up at the *Dolphin*, leaving Jack on board. Early in the morning Jack met Mr. Goodman, the riding-officer, on his way to the inn. He had been informed, Goodman said, that the smugglers had made a run in the night, and that their cargo had been concealed somewhere about the premises of Gumley, the one-legged mariner on the hill. This news surprised Jack. It had never occurred to him that Gumley could have anything to do with the smugglers. But when he thought of Gumley's seclusion, his mysterious ways, the defenses of his cottage, and his bulldog, he began to wonder whether dust had been thrown in his eyes, and the apparently law-abiding gardener was after all engaged in the illicit trade. He told Lieutenant Blake what he knew of Gumley.

"Depend upon it, that's your man," cried that officer. "You'd better search his place, Mr. Goodman."

"Unluckily, sir, most of my men are off rummaging in another direction and won't be back till to-morrow."

"Well, I'll lend you some of my crew. And as you know the place, Mr. Hardy, I'll send you in charge."

"Very well, sir," said Jack, and he went off immediately to collect the men. Within half an hour he set out with a dozen of them, well armed with pikes and cutlasses. They marched through the fields and over the cliffs to Luscombe, avoiding the highroad. Arriving at Gumley's cottage, Jack rapped smartly on the gate and was answered as before by a furious barking from the dog. Gumley was some time in making his appearance, and Jack, becoming impatient, pulled off his coat, and hoisted himself on to the fence. Seeing who it was, Comely ceased to bark and wagged his tail in friendly recognition. Jack could not help feeling

a little mean as he stooped and patted the dog's head, still more when Gumley appeared from the direction of the cottage, with his board in one hand and a fork in the other.

"Morning, sir," he said, with a smile. "I was looking for another visit from you."

"I'm afraid you won't think me very welcome this time, Gumley," said Jack gravely. "'Tis an unpleasant job, but I've got to search your place."

"My place, sir? And what do you expect to find?"

"'Tis reported that the smugglers ran a cargo ashore last night, and that you've got it, or part of it."

"Me! And you believe it, sir?"

"I don't know anything about it. My orders are to search, and I must do it. A dozen men are outside: you'd better open the gate and let them in."

"Very good, sir. But I must lock Comely up first, sir, else he'll leave the marks of his teeth somewhere. You're a friend of his; I introduced you proper myself, but I'll not introduce him to any preventive men that ought to know better than to come a-nosing round my little place. Who said as how 'twas here the smugglers brought their cargo, sir?"

"I don't know. Mr. Goodman heard it from some one."

"One of those villains down in the village, I'll be bound. Well, I might have expected it, sooner nor this. I tell you straight out, sir, never a shilling's worth of smuggled goods have passed my gate. I'm a king's man, leastwise was till I got my stump, and arter that I wouldn't demean myself by going a-smuggling. Howsomever, orders is orders, and search you must. I'll just tie up the dog, sir, and then open the gate, for Gumley bean't the man to shut his doors upon the king's orders."

Gumley's quiet manner made an impression on Jack, and he was half inclined to leave his errand unfulfilled. If the man had protested and blustered Jack would have been at once convinced that he was guilty, but his readiness to submit to the search was hardly that of a guilty man. Then it occurred to him that Gumley might be trying to throw dust in his eyes again. At all events, he could not return to Mr. Blake and confess that he had not carried out orders; so when the dog was secured and the men admitted he directed them to begin the search.

It was but the work of a few minutes to ransack the little cottage. Cupboards were opened, the stone flags of the floor tested, the loft between the rafters and the roof explored, but nothing was found. Gumley watched the operations in silence, puffing at a big pipe in which he was smoking cabbage leaves.

"We'll have to search the garden now, sir," said one of the men.

Gumley took his pipe from his lips.

"The garden!" he said. "Well, mind my artichokes. They bean't ripe, not

till the first frost, and it won't do 'em no good to disturb 'em."

He knew that in expeditions of this kind every inch of ground would probably be explored. Smugglers had been known to have cunningly devised hiding-places beneath the soil, under the roots of apple trees, or pear trees, or raspberry bushes. He watched with a grim smile as the men spread out over the garden, falling on all fours to smell out any traces of brandy or tobacco. He said nothing when they dug over a plot of ground from which he had recently taken the last of his late potatoes. But when they approached a flourishing bed of artichokes he heaved a great sigh, and said:

"There goes two-pun-ten in Wynport market, and all in the king's name."

Jack had felt more and more uncomfortable as the search proceeded. When a square yard of the plot had been cleared of its tall green stalks he suddenly shouted:

"Give over, men. This is all a blind. There are no smuggled goods here. Gumley was a king's man like yourselves. I don't believe he has anything hidden; we'll sheer off and report to Mr. Blake that we can't find anything. Some one must have a spite against you, Gumley."

"I could have told you that, sir, but I keeps myself to myself, and 'twas not for me to stand up against the king's orders. Messmates all, I'm sorry you've had your blood warmed for nothing. Bless you, I don't bear you no ill-will; orders is orders, and God save the king!"

He took off his glazed hat as he spoke.

"Well, Gumley I'm sorry we disturbed you. Look here, take those artichokes up to the Grange when they're ripe and ask my cousin, the squire, to give you fifty shillings for them. Say I said so. Now, men, we'll get back. We owe the smugglers one for this, and we'll pay it back, all in good time."

CHAPTER VII

THE BEST-LAID SCHEMES

There was a good deal of grumbling among the men as they trudged back to Wynport. No man likes to be made a fool of, and a Jack Tar as little as any.

"This is what comes of doing landlubbers' work instead of fighting the French on sea," growled Turley.

A heavy rainstorm that came on did not improve their tempers, and when,

just as they marched into Wynport, they were overtaken by Mr. Goodman, riding at a smart pace from a cross-road, they began to mutter uncomplimentary remarks about the zealous officer.

"Any luck, Mr. Hardy?" he cried, as he passed.

"None," replied Jack shortly.

"Sorry for that. Perhaps your search was not thorough enough: your men aren't used to it."

"Confound his impudence!" growled Turley, as the officer rode on. "One of us is worth three of his landsharks, anyway."

When Jack arrived at the *Dolphin* Mr. Goodman was just leaving.

"Oh, Hardy!" cried Lieutenant Blake, as he entered, "Mr. Goodman tells me you've found nothing."

"Not a ghost of a thing, sir. Gumley's as honest as a judge, in my opinion. Some one has played a scurvy trick on him and us."

"Well, look at this."

He handed Jack a dirty, crumpled piece of paper, on which he read:

"*Mr. Goodman, sir, a runn will be made at binsey cove tonite.—From a frend.*"

"Another trick for certain, sir," said Jack.

"Very likely. Goodman says 'tis a sure sign the run will be made somewhere else, if made at all, and in the opposite direction. He wants the cutter to cruise off Totley Point to-night after dark. His idea is that if we stand away in the afternoon as if for Luscombe, we shall lead the smugglers off the scent; then if we return after nightfall we shall take 'em unawares. He'll have a strong force in hiding at Totley Point; that's where he thinks the run will actually be made, right under his nose. It would be like the villains. Only a year ago, just after he came into this district, he got a similar letter, and the cargo was run miles away."

"Well, sir, if he's been caught that way once, the smugglers will hardly expect him to fall into the trap a second time."

"I'm not so sure about that. I don't fancy our friend Goodman has much of a headpiece. If he is the simpleton I imagine he is, he will think that the smugglers will take your view and expect him to be this time at Binsey Cove. Therefore, he'll go to Totley. The question is, where will the run be made?"

"Perhaps the light we saw last night may have something to do with it. Don't you think, sir, it would be a good plan if I took a boat's crew and watched the shore off Luscombe, leaving you with the rest of the men in the *Fury* to assist Mr. Goodman in case of need?"

"Not a bad idea, Hardy. We'll drop a boat some distance out at sea at dusk; you can pull in with muffled oars if you come across anything suspicious."

"The first thing, sir, will be to find out about the light we saw."

"Right. Find Babbage and get the crew together. We'll be off at once."

When the *Fury* reached the position from which the light had been observed it was at once seen that, unless Jack had been wrong in his bearings, the signal had not been made from the village.

"It was more in the direction of Congleton's Hollow, sir," said Jack. "We can't see the Hollow itself, but there's the Folly to the left; you can just see it over the trees: a tower where an old hermit lived alone with his broken heart. That would make an excellent signal station."

"You know it, eh?"

"Yes, sir. But it didn't look as if it was ever used now. The only doorway is barricaded, and my young cousin told me it had been like that ever since he could remember. He said the top was supposed to be dangerous, and the place was boarded up after an accident that happened ever so many years ago. There was no other way in; the youngster—an inquisitive little chap—has tried more than once, and always failed."

"Humph! Is it worth trying again?"

"I'd be mighty glad to see, sir. But I couldn't do it in daylight. I might be seen from the village. Yet I could hardly do much good at night unless some one happened to be there at the time."

"Well, we can't risk discovery. We don't want to scare the signalers away."

"Wouldn't it be best to land some distance down the coast one night, and get to the Folly about daybreak? I'd have the place to myself then."

"Right. We'll bide our time. Meanwhile, there's this anonymous letter to remember. I gave out at Wynport that we're going to run over to Weymouth; perhaps that will put our smuggling friends at Luscombe off the scent."

The *Fury* kept away all day, returning to a point opposite Luscombe after nightfall. Lieutenant Blake told off Babbage and Turley and eight more of the men to accompany Jack, and, a boat being lowered and provided with muffled oars, the little party set off, while the *Fury* set a course for Totley Point, where Mr. Goodman had a posse of preventive men on the watch.

It was more than an hour and a half's steady rowing to the shore, and Jack was not at all sure where he would strike the beach. Thinking over the likely places along the shore, he felt certain that the run would probably be attempted at a spot not far east of the path up which he had followed De Fronsac. He wished the smugglers to get there before him, for if the vessel they expected had not yet arrived, they would be keeping a good watch seaward, and his boat would run a great risk of being discovered. But he had found out that Turley was

born at Wynport and knew the coast pretty well, having spent several years as a fisherman in the neighborhood, so that he was likely to recognize any landmarks as soon as they came in view.

It was a still night, and very dark. The oars made scarcely any noise as the men pulled steadily in toward the shore. At last Turley declared that he could just see the copse that crowned a chine leading down to the beach, near the path that Jack had followed.

"You're sure, Turley?" asked Jack in a whisper.

"Sartin sure, sir."

"He've got cat's eyes, sir," murmured Babbage.

"We need them to-night," said Jack, peering anxiously into the darkness. "Easy all, men."

He listened for sounds along the shore or from the sea. The breeze was very slight; it had become less as the boat neared the shore; and if it continued to die away there would soon be scarcely enough wind to carry a vessel in.

"We're about half a mile off, I think, Turley?"

"Just so, sir," replied Turley.

Jack was about to give the order to pull in a little closer when the man just in front of him, who was facing seaward like the other rowers, raised one hand from his oar, and pointing to the right said in a whisper:

"Sail on the larboard quarter, sir."

Glancing backward in the direction indicated, Jack could just distinguish in the distance a black shape gliding slowly up. He felt his heart jumping; the vessel had come so suddenly, so stealthily out of the blackness. Could his boat be seen from its deck? It was so low on the water that he hoped it might pass undetected. The men were crouching over their oars; there was dead silence in the boat, the crew scarcely daring to breathe. The dark shape came steadily on; it passed, and faded again into the darkness. Allowing time for it to get nearly in shore, Jack ordered the men to give way, and the boat again quickly moved landward. He knew he was risking discovery, but hoped that the attention of the watchers on shore would be directed on the larger vessel, and altogether overlook the smaller.

The coast hereabouts was rocky, and the approach to the shore had to be made with care. Jack heard low voices ahead; he guessed that the people on shore were giving directions to those on the vessel.

"Channel's narrow, sir," whispered Turley, "but there's a good depth of water at all states of the tide; 'tis nigh high tide now, and that there craft'll be able to run almost on to the beach and save a good deal of fetching and carrying."

"How far are we out now?"

"About a couple of cables' length, to my thinking, sir."

"Easy all, men. Cutlasses ready!"

Jack had already decided that it would be useless to attempt to land at any point on either side and creep on the smugglers, for there would certainly be watchers along the cliff. The attack, if made at all, must be made direct from the sea. He feared that, when the men gave way for a final dash in, the boat might strike a rock; but he could still see dimly the chase ahead, and the tide being high, as Turley had said, he resolved to take his chance of running aground. The boat had followed quickly in the wake of the larger vessel; with a little luck a straight dash might be quite successful, for where the smugglers' craft drew feet, his own scarcely drew inches, and he was so much excited at the prospect of his first encounter with the smugglers, that he was prepared to run no little risk.

Suddenly there was the sound of a sail being run down, of tackle creaking, of low voices. The smugglers worked quickly, he knew; the vessel would scarcely have anchored or otherwise made fast before they began to carry their cargo ashore. The moment was come. He caught his breath for an instant; then, gripping the tiller ropes firmly, he said:

"Now, men, lay out—send her along!"

The sounds of the muffled oars were smothered in the noise from the lugger and the men tramping on shore. So intent were the smugglers on their work that they were unaware of what was upon them. The boat dashed straight for the lugger, which had swung round so that her bow was first met. There was a shock; then a loud shout; and as Jack's men swarmed over on to the lugger's deck, they came face to face with a small knot of men at the foremast, who had evidently hurriedly collected to dispute the passage with the boarders.

Now shout answered shout. Barrels were dropped by the carriers and fell with sharp thuds on the deck or with loud splashes into the water. Cutlass clashed on cutlass. At the first alarm the men on shore came dashing back to rejoin their comrades, springing across the long double plank that formed the gangway, to a bold ledge of rock serving as a kind of natural quay.

"Surrender, in the king's name!" shouted Jack, rushing forward.

He was answered by a vigorous French oath. Next moment the foremost of the smugglers, singling out the young officer coming at the head of his men, aimed a shrewd blow at him with a cutlass. It was so dark that Jack could barely see the movement, but he just managed to swerve out of the way; then, shortening his arm he lunged, and felt with no little satisfaction that the weapon had got home.

At this moment he was almost carried off his feet by the vehemence of his own men, who in a compact body were sweeping all before them. In the rush and tumble Jack felt a heavy blow on his head and staggered, saving his fall by clutching at a halyard and leaning half-stunned against the mast.

To the din of shouting and blows was now added the shrill screech of the

bo'sun's whistle. Having cleared the deck aft of the mainmast, Babbage and his men were making a dash for the gangway, upon which the smugglers were crowding back toward the lugger. But Babbage's zeal had outrun his discretion. Before he knew it his party was beset on all sides. French and English cries were mingled in one furious babel. No firearms were used; the sound of shots would carry far in the still night air, and might bring support to the king's men from a distance. But cutlasses and hangers were plied with vigor; the crew of the lugger, reinforced by the men from shore, outnumbered Jack's party by four to one, and these had much ado to defend themselves in their turn from the sturdy assaults of their opponents.

With an effort Jack pulled himself together and pressed forward to lend a hand. His men were being remorselessly driven back. Doggedly they fought, yielding only inch by inch; but it was clear that they were outmatched, and at length, by sheer weight of numbers, they were forced over the bulwarks into the sea. Turley, who had all his wits about him, contrived to cut the painter holding the boat to the lugger's side; and, hardly aware how he came there, Jack found himself hanging to the side of the boat, unable to do more than cling on for dear life. Two or three men managed to scramble into the boat; they rowed it ashore. When it beached, Jack and the men ran up across the shingle toward the cliffs. In a few minutes they were joined by others of their party, all dripping wet, and furious with rage at their defeat.

"'Tis all through old Turnip-tops," growled Turley. "The idea of his losing his head that way!"

"Anybody seen him?" asked Jack, whose teeth were chattering; he had not yet recovered from the blow on his head.

"Never a man, sir. But there's the lugger making sail. We've lost the cargo and got nothing for our pains but broken heads and such like."

Jack saw the dim shape of the lugger disappearing seaward. In five minutes every trace of the smugglers had vanished, except a broken keg or two on the shingle, from which gusts of the odor of spirits reached the men gathered in a knot above. By and by Babbage turned up, declaring that if it hadn't been for Turley the attack would have been a great success. Before long the party was complete, none having been killed, though several had had a narrow escape from drowning. They had been saved by the planks of the gangway, which the smugglers, in their haste to escape, had allowed to fall into the water.

Jack wondered why the smugglers had fled when it would have been an easy matter for them to overwhelm the king's men.

"Why, they were afeard, sir," said Babbage. "The noise was enough to bring all Dorset upon 'em, and how did they know but that the riding-officer was nigh, ready to come down on 'em? And so he ought to ha' bin."

"Well, they've let us off easily," said Jack. "We'd better get our boat afloat and hunt for the *Fury*."

"Ay, sir, and won't Mr. Blake be in a fury when he hears the tale! All we've got is cuts, bruises, and a ducking!"

CHAPTER VIII
CONGLETON'S FOLLY

It was several hours before the boat fell in with the *Fury*. Jack and the men were heartily glad when they saw the cutter's mast-head light. They scrambled on board, and while the men had to stand a good deal of rough chaff from their messmates, Jack's account of his failure was received by Lieutenant Blake with a quizzical smile.

"Ah, my boy, we have to take the rough with the smooth," was all that officer said. "I suppose you don't feel in very good trim for that little expedition you proposed?"

"Indeed, sir, I'm ready for anything. I must change my things and have the best supper the cook can give me; then you can put me on shore when you please. I've got a bone to pick with those rascals."

Consequently, about half an hour before dawn, Jack was landed at a spot about two miles east of Congleton's Folly. Lieutenant Blake arranged that the boat should be in waiting for him three or four hours later some two miles farther east, at a little cove which was fairly well sheltered from observation.

"Keep your weather eye open," were the lieutenant's parting words.

Jack climbed the cliff and arrived at the Hollow just as dawn was breaking. It was a misty morning; the shrubs and grass were thickly besprinkled with frost; and he was glad he had taken the precaution to wear a greatcoat of frieze, which kept him warm in spite of the nipping air.

He came to the Folly, and took a more careful look at it than he had done when he visited the spot with Arthur. It was a brick tower, about sixty feet high, built somewhat like a lighthouse, but four-sided, not rounded. The base was about twenty feet square; the tower tapered to within a few feet of the top, where it broadened out so that it looked not unlike a mushroom on a particularly long stalk.

On the side facing the sea was the doorway giving access, as Arthur had

told him, to a spiral staircase leading to the single chamber above. This overhanging part was supported by stout oaken beams resting on the brickwork of the central tower. On the inland side, in the floor of this room, there was a trap-door opening inward; it was through this that the late Congleton had been accustomed to hoist his provisions. The summit of the room was crowned by a parapet, crenelated like the walls of a fort.

The door, as Jack had already seen, was strongly barricaded. On the inner face of the tower, less exposed than the others to the sea winds, ivy had grown more than half-way up, and from this a number of sparrows flew rustling out when Jack appeared.

He walked round and round examining the tower from every point of view. What a strange man Congleton must have been to choose this lonely spot in which to pass so many years of a solitary existence! Jack closely inspected the doorway. The wood was worm-eaten, the heads of the iron nails thick with rust, and the barricading had been so thoroughly done that it would take a long time to free the entrance. It was quite clear that no one had gone either in or out for many years. Yet, if the tower had indeed been used for signaling, as he suspected, there must be a way in. Where was it?

He might have thought he was mistaken but for the marks of many feet around the base of the turret. The grass had recently been trampled down, especially on the inland side. Could there be another entrance, concealed by the ivy? He pulled the strong tendrils aside, and more birds came twittering out; but there was no sign of a second door. Somewhat perplexed, Jack raised his eyes and scanned the brickwork above, which the ivy had not yet reached. There was the wooden trap-door, let in the floor of the turret chamber, and a foot or two of rusty chain hanging down.

"That must have been part of old Congleton's machinery for hoisting his stores," thought Jack. "I wonder if the trap-door is fastened."

It was quite clear that it opened inward, for there was no sign of a bolt outside. When the room was last used a bolt inside might have been slipped. If not, the trap-door could be opened from below. But how could it be reached? Only by a ladder, apparently. Was there a ladder hidden somewhere among the trees? He saw no other means of gaining the summit, for while the ivy was strong enough to bear his weight for a good many feet up, the brickwork above was smooth, in spite of the weathering it had undergone, and offered no grip for hands or feet.

"I must look for that ladder," he thought. But after spending at least half an hour in searching the surrounding thicket he almost gave up the problem in despair. There was no sign of a ladder, and he had searched so carefully that one of the requisite length could not have escaped his eyes, however well hidden.

What could he do? He did not like the idea of being beaten; especially as he had already failed once in his contest with the smugglers. Just then there seemed nothing for it but to go back to the boat, and perhaps bring a number of handy men from the cutter to break open the doorway. But before doing that he would have one more look.

He returned to the tower. The mist was clearing somewhat. Once more he scanned each face of the tower in turn. And now he noticed, on the inland side, what had escaped him before. On the brickwork between the ivy and the chamber there were a number of small apertures dotted about, forming a kind of pattern—a spiral. The holes could not have come by accident, for they appeared to be at equal distances apart. He counted ten on the bare portion of the brickwork, and, looking intently, believed he caught sight of one more where the screen of ivy thinned off.

His curiosity was now thoroughly awakened. What was the meaning of these holes? Were there more, concealed beneath the ivy? He pulled the strands of the plant aside, and with eye and hand examined the wall. There were no more holes, but what was this? He grasped an iron staple firmly imbedded in the brickwork; and three feet above, surely that was another!

"Oho, my hearties!" he thought; "have I got you at last?"

Setting his foot on the lower staple he hoisted himself up, pulled aside the ivy above his head, and found, as by this time he expected, still another staple. Without more ado he began to climb, nimbly, eagerly, until he had to stop, for he had come almost to the top of the ivy, and there were no more staples! What was to be done now?

True, there were no more staples, but three feet above the last was the lowest of the holes that had attracted his attention. He was able to examine it. A circular hole, seemingly drilled with some care; he put his finger in, but could not touch the end of it. And it appeared to be bored at a downward angle with the face of the wall. He felt that he must find out how long it was, though for the moment he did not see what good the information would be to him. Descending quickly, he found a long twig, and climbing up again, he inserted it into the hole. About a foot of the twig went into the wall.

"The hole is made to receive a movable step, or I'm a Dutchman," he said to himself. "It's long enough, and it's bored downward to prevent the step from slipping out. A mighty clever notion! The holes must have cost a deal of work, for the fellow who bored them must have been pretty awkwardly placed. I wonder if they were made by old Congleton, or after his time. Now what I want to know is, where are those steps?"

Once more he descended. The steps, wherever they were, were probably made of iron, and there must be about a dozen of them. Where were they? Were

they carried backwards and forwards between the tower and the house of the person who used them? That seemed hardly likely. It was much more probable that they were hidden somewhere near at hand.

Jack hunted about the neighboring thickets. He might easily have overlooked small objects when searching for the ladder. But after what seemed a long time he still found no trace of them. Determined not to give up his quest, he was wondering how best he could make steps for himself when he caught sight of the summer-house, about two hundred yards away, where he had found the wounded lace-peddler.

"That's the place to rummage!" he thought.

He hastened to the summer-house. There were two rooms. Part of the roof had fallen in over one of them, and, encouraged by the marks of muddy boots about the doorway, Jack decided to search there first. The room was bare; he turned over the debris on the floor; nothing rewarded his efforts. But there was the chimney, a wide square recess in the wall; he would try that.

He almost shouted for joy when, far back in the opening, he came upon the object of his quest—a pile of rusty iron implements that seemed exactly suited for the purpose. They were stout rods about a foot long, with a loop at the end that might serve either as a hand-grip or a step. And the loop was at just such an angle with the rod as would correspond with the apertures in the walls.

There were a dozen in all. Gathering them, no light weight, into his arms, he returned to the tower, and with two of the rods climbed up by the staples and tried one in the first hole. It fitted exactly. He fixed the second, then descended for the others. Being a sailor he knew how to avoid unnecessary expenditure of time; he slung the rest of the fittings over his shoulder with his handkerchief, and carried them up with him once for all.

By their aid he mounted to the top of the tower, and found himself just below the trap-door. But it was not quite within reach. There was the hanging chain, however, coming through a hole in the floor; would that stand a tug? He made the attempt, intending to hoist himself up with one hand, and push with the other against the trap-door. But he found that when he exerted a little force the chain moved; it seemed hardly safe to trust to it. He was about to let it go when he noticed that the trap-door seemed to have risen slightly. Again he pulled at the chain, using more force. It gave to his tug, and as it descended he saw the trap-door open slowly upward. The chain at length stuck; the door was wide open, and a rough rope-ladder was hanging some ten feet below the hole.

Jack found that if he eased the pressure on the chain the trap-door tended to fall back. It was a simple matter to prevent this, for, just at his hand, there was a staple to which the chain could be hooked; it was evidently intended for that purpose. To swing himself on to the ladder was the simplest of feats, and in half

a minute he had climbed through the open trap and stood in the turret.

"A fine old musty smell, that's what first struck me," he said afterward. "The dust of ages; cobwebs galore. Only one window, looking seaward, and that shut fast. 'Twas stifling to a fellow used to the fresh air. There was a ramshackle old bedstead in one corner; a four-poster, with a canopy and crimson hangings; at least, they had been crimson; the dust was so thick on 'em that I couldn't see what the color was till I'd rubbed a bit of it off. That was where the old eccentric breathed his last, I suppose; and no one thought it worth carting away. In the middle of the room was a deal table and a chair with a broken back; not another stick of furniture.

"But in the corner near the window I saw something that told a tale—a pile of kegs, almost reaching to the low roof. 'Empty or full?' thought I. I lifted one; it was full. I knew they weren't old Congleton's property, or they'd have disappeared with the rest of his furniture. How did I know he had any? Why, because I noticed nails on the wall, where pictures had hung, and a clean patch on one of the walls—cleaner than the rest, that is—where a bureau or something of the sort had stood. Besides, no man who'd have a mahogany bedstead and hangings that once were splendid would have been likely to be satisfied with a deal table and a common rickety chair. They were the kind of things you'd expect in a plowman's or a fisherman's kitchen.

"At any rate, I saw that somebody had used the room since Congleton departed this life, for there were some crumbs on the table, and a chipped tumbler that smelt uncommonly like the kegs. Ghosts don't eat bread and cheese and drink spirits! And there was a coil of rope under the table, and by the window a cheap sort of curtain that just fitted. I held it up to see; right in the middle of it was a round hole. And when I came to look at the bed I saw that the mattress had a big dent in it, and no dust on it. Somebody had had a nap there since old Congleton died.

"Of course I saw all this in a very few seconds. Then I went on the prowl. I pulled out the bedstead; by George! didn't it creak! I thought the old thing would fall to pieces. Behind it was a cupboard, and in the cupboard a large bull's-eye lantern, and a long cylinder of cardboard about eighteen inches long. 'What's that for?' I thought. It didn't strike me at the moment, but I took the things out and put them on the table. The lamp leaked a little; I found I'd got some spots of oil on my breeches.

"When I put them on the table I noticed something I'd missed before. In the middle was a sort of pattern in red chalk—a circle with a tail to it; and at the edge of the table two parallel strokes. They'd been done some time, for the marks in the middle were almost hidden by oil stains. Those stains puzzled me for a bit. I could have understood wine stains better. But at last I tumbled to it. That was

the place where the lamp was put for the signaling. I set it down on the circular mark; it just fitted. But I could not make out at first what the two straight strokes at the edge were for. Then I caught sight of the roll of cardboard and another idea struck me. I lifted it and stuck it on the bull's-eye; it fitted like a glove; and when I turned the lantern so that the handle was over the tail of the circle I found that the cylinder just reached to the two marks.

"But that only puzzled me more than ever, for the lantern and cylinder were now pointing straight at old Congleton's bed. Would you believe it?—I didn't at first think of turning the table round! Of course it wasn't a fixture, and when I did think of it I saw through the whole scheme. Turned round, the lantern pointed through the window. The cylinder was a clever notion. It would prevent the light from the bull's-eye spreading, so that while it would be seen a good distance out at sea, it wouldn't attract notice in the neighborhood, except that a faint glow might be seen from below. But the Folly wasn't in sight from the village, and there'd be precious few of the ordinary country folk who'd care to be near the spot after dark. They'd be in mortal fear of seeing old Congleton's ghost.

"I was still a little puzzled. What need was there to mark the place of the lantern so exactly. Anywhere near the window the light would be seen clearly enough out at sea. But now that I had moved the table I noticed four red marks on the floor. 'Here's another discovery,' I thought; 'there's a mark for each leg of the table.' I slewed it around again, so that the legs stood on the marks. Then it flashed on me; if the table was always in the same place, and the lantern always exactly on the marks, the light would always hit the same point out at sea. 'A very pretty scheme!' says I to myself. 'Good master smugglers have all their wits about 'em.'

"It was clear as daylight now that the Folly was a signal-station, and sometimes, as the kegs showed, a storehouse as well. Of course they used old Congleton's machinery for hoisting the kegs. That coil of rope, now! I pulled it over, and there, just underneath, was a pulley—an iron bar fitted with a small grooved wheel, and resting at each end on a wooden block; little grooves had been chiseled out to keep the bar steady. And when I came to look at 'em I saw, as I might have expected, that they'd been oiled not long before.

"By this time I'd found out all I wished to know. The only thing left to be discovered was, who used the Folly? I made up my mind to get Lieutenant Blake to let me bring some men to the place one night when we saw the light, and catch the men in the act. But before I went away I thought I'd go down the staircase and see if there was anything there. I couldn't find a door, yet the staircase must lead direct into the room; there was no other. I had another look at the cupboard, and found after some trouble that half the back of it was movable—it was a sliding panel. I pulled it aside; it moved quite easily; and I stepped through—carefully, I

can tell you, for it was pitch dark.

"I got on to the staircase, and went down gingerly, a step at a time. It was wooden, and the stairs were pretty rotten; they creaked as I moved, and I clung on to a rope that made a sort of hand-rail, afraid of pitching head first to the bottom. It smelled very close, and I took some time to go down, for the stairs were narrow, and as it was a winding staircase they scarcely gave foothold except at the wall end. At last I got to the bottom, and then I saw a glint or two of light coming through chinks in the doorway.

"I had only just got there when I fancied I heard a rustling outside. 'Mercy me!' I thought; 'this isn't signaling time; but I hope no one is coming for the kegs.' I scrambled up the staircase a good deal quicker than I picked my way down, and crawled through the hole in the cupboard. Then I nearly jumped out of my skin, for I saw a man sitting on the rickety chair. It was Monsieur de Fronsac."

CHAPTER IX
CLOSE QUARTERS

"Ah, Monsieur Jack!" said De Fronsac, with his agreeable smile; "I see you!" Jack laughed. It was only the Frenchman after all! His fear that it might be a smuggler was groundless.

"Yes; I'm too black for a ghost; 'tis a confoundedly dirty place, Monsieur. But how do you come here?"

"It is ver' simple, ver' simple indeed. I came out in de early morning, to promenade myself, and to compose a new sonnet on de Monstair. Behold! Vat do I see? De trap-door of dis tower is open; and, vat is dis?—assuredly I see steps mounting up to de very sommit. I am romantic, as you know, Monsieur; I love de bizarre. Can I venture myself? Dat old Congleton—vat a strange, an eccentric! I would like to see de place vere he lived so solitaire. I climb; I have a little fear; but I make de ascension; I arrive. Ho! Dis, den, is de place. Vat a magnificent spot for to compose poesy! How beautiful de spectacle over de blue, blue sea! Magnificent! Glorious! Old Congleton had a genius, hein? But you, Monsieur Jack, how came you here?"

"The same way as you, Monsieur."

"Ah! remarkable! You do not compose poesy in de early morning! You, I t'ink—and your good cousin t'inks—you sail on de blue, blue sea. De steps, too;

surely dey are new. Never have I observed dem before. It is remarkable! Old Congleton—did he ascend de tower in dat manner? Or perhaps de steps are your vork; you invent dem, Monsieur Jack?"

"No," said Jack shortly. He had never liked De Fronsac's smile.

"Den of whom? Who invent dem? Dey demand much care and skill; yes, and industry. And for vat good to spend so much time? It vould be easier to valk up de stairs—if de door is open, of course dat is understood. But truly it is more romantic—it has more of de fun, as you English say, to mount on de outside, on little steps, from hand to foot, vun may say. Yes, and if in my youth I had not lived much among de sailors of my little village, assuredly I should not have had de courage to make an attempt so perilous. Ve sailors, indeed, have de firm leg, de fixed eye."

De Fronsac's eye was certainly fixed—on Jack, who had an uncomfortable feeling that the Frenchman was not only trying to find out from his manner what he had discovered, but was talking to gain time. He was resolving to cut the interview short, when De Fronsac, turning round suddenly, appeared to catch sight for the first time of the kegs.

"Ah! Voila! Ve have it! Dose barrels Monsieur Jack—you see dem? Dey are put dere vizout doubt by dese smogglairs. Ah! de rascals! Certainly ve must tell your good cousin, Monsieur Bastable. He vill know de means to take. He vill come, and take an inventaire. Certainly dat is vat ve must do. You come viz me; ve both tell him; ve go at vunce."

"Very well," said Jack. "We'll go down. Will you go first?"

"I t'ink better you."

"But I opened the trap-door. You won't know how to shut it. You go first and I'll see that it is properly closed."

"Ver' vell. It is a good idea."

De Fronsac accordingly stepped on to the rope-ladder, and descended with a rapidity that seemed to show he had indeed had no little experience amongst seamen. Jack followed, closed the trap-door, and, as he went down, threw the iron steps one by one to the ground, where the Frenchman stood awaiting him.

"Now vat shall ve do viz dem?" asked De Fronsac, when Jack stood beside him. "It vas you dat discovered dem, Monsieur Jack. It is to you to decide vat ve do. It is right. You vill get great honor viz Monsieur Bastable, and de Lor' Lieutenant, I t'ink you call de great man of de county."

Jack did not wish to return the steps to their original hiding-place. It would be better, he thought, to hide them among the bushes. Accordingly with De Fronsac's assistance he carried them into the thicket, and concealed them under a heap of dead leaves.

"Now ve go to de Grange?" said the Frenchman.

"Yes. We shall be rather early; Mr. Bastable will not be up yet."

He intended to keep De Fronsac in sight until he had an opportunity of sending a messenger to the boat for a number of men to remove the kegs. He did not feel sure that the Frenchman's visit to the tower was so accidental as he declared; and a bird in the hand was worth two in the bush.

They made their way through the undergrowth. With the frost the trees had now lost nearly all their leaves, which thickly covered the grass. Jack led the way, the Frenchman following a yard or two behind, maintaining a running fire of small talk, to which Jack replied with an occasional monosyllable. On the edge of the Hollow they entered a dense copse; there was a sudden rustle, and half a dozen rough-clad men with blackened faces sprang from behind the trees. Jack's hand flew to his breast-pocket where he kept his pistol, but before he could draw it, De Fronsac caught his arm, crying:

"Save me, Monsieur Jack, save me!"

In spite of his apparent alarm, his grasp was so firm that Jack was quite unable to draw his weapon.

"Let me go!" he cried angrily, trying to shake himself free. But De Fronsac clung to him still more desperately, repeating his cry "Save me!" In another moment the men were upon him. Then at last the Frenchman let go his hold, and Jack found himself in the grip of two stalwart fishers. He struggled violently, but in vain, and in a few seconds more he was lying on the ground securely gagged and bound.

Then his eyes were bandaged, he was blindfolded, lifted, and carried rapidly for some distance. When he was set down and the bandage removed from his eyes, he saw that he was in an underground chamber, dimly lit through a barred grating in the roof. He tried to speak, but his words were choked by the gag.

"Now you listen to me," said one of the men, whose voice he thought he recognized. "'Taint no good shouting or struggling. We've got ye firm, Mr. Hardy, king's officer though ye be. So long as you give us no trouble you'll take no harm. I'm gwine to ease that there gag; but if you shout, I'll clap it on again and keep it there. That's plain. Not that it be any good shouting, for there's never a soul hereabout but the men who'll guard ye."

Jack was not so foolish as to spend his strength and his breath uselessly. He saw that he was helpless, and mentally vowed to be even with De Fronsac at the first opportunity. Suspicious before, he now felt certain that the Frenchman had deliberately trapped him, though he was amazed to find that the poetical tutor was a smuggler.

He remained throughout the day in the under-ground room, guarded all the time by one man, who sat by the grating and refused to be drawn into any talk. He was given some bread and cheese, and spirits and water to drink; and he

spent the long hours in wondering what was to become of him, and in relishing beforehand the punishment he meant to administer to De Fronsac some day. To think of escape was vain; the men had evidently brought him down by a ladder, which they had drawn up when they left, closing and bolting the trap-door.

Who were they? Jack wondered. What was their real connection with De Fronsac? What would they do with him? What would Babbage and the men at the boat do when he did not return? What steps would Lieutenant Blake take when he found, as he must soon do, that his midshipman was missing? There was no doubt that the smugglers would promptly remove the kegs and the signaling apparatus from the Folly, and they would have plenty of time to get clear away before the boat's crew became suspicious.

Late in the afternoon, as Jack guessed by the dimness of the light through the grating, he heard voices above. A heavy object was dropped on the floor; the trap-door was lifted, a ladder let down, and three men descended into the room.

"You be coming along of us," said the man who had before addressed him.

"Look here, whoever you are—" Jack began; but he said no more, for the gag was roughly thrust into his mouth, he was once more blindfolded, and taken up the ladder. Then he was lifted from the floor and lowered into what he judged to be a large empty water-butt.

"Double up your knees, Mr. Hardy," said the man. "You be going a little journey."

There was no help for it. Jack feeling, as he afterward said, like a trussed turkey, sat crouching in the butt. The top was hammered on. Then the butt was lifted, carried a few steps, and hoisted on to a cart, which rumbled away. Jack was more angry than alarmed; the men evidently intended him no harm, or they would have knocked him on the head before this; but a water-butt, even though holes have been bored in its sides to let in air, is not the most comfortable of vehicles, and Jack was beginning to feel cramped and bruised and half-stifled when the cart stopped. The butt was lowered, not too gently; Jack was pretty well shaken up. But his former experience was pleasant compared with his sensations when the butt was rolled round and round on its lower edge, as he had seen draymen rolling barrels of beer. His head fairly swam by the time the teetotum movement ceased.

Then he heard voices again, and the creaking of tackle.

"I'm at the shore," he thought. "Surely they're not going to set me afloat!" The idea of going adrift in a water-butt made him feel seasick, till he remembered that it was impossible; the butt would fill with water, and if they wished to drown him they would not have taken so much trouble.

"Why, 'Zekiel," he heard a man say, "was your tub leaking?"

"A trifle, but we've bunged it up; 'tis all shipshape and seaworthy now."

"'Tis mortal heavy, blamed if 'tisn't."

"Course it is; 'tis well-nigh full."

Two or three low chuckles followed this sentence. Then the butt was rolled up what seemed to be a gradual incline, and dropped a foot or two with a bump that set Jack's bones clashing.

"I'm on a boat," he thought, "this is a voyage of adventure. Wish to goodness I could knock the top off this cage of mine and get a little air."

As if in answer to his wish, a few minutes later, when he felt by the motion that the boat was putting out to sea, the lid was knocked off, the gag removed, and he drew a long breath of relief.

"I say, you men," he said, in a husky voice that sounded like that of a stranger, "undo my eyes and hands, and let me out."

There was no answer. He remained in his cramped and uncomfortable quarters for some hours, his repeated requests to be taken out passing unheeded. He began to feel very low-spirited. His body ached all over; his hands were still bound; and the butt was so narrow that he could hardly shift his position by an inch. His chief feeling was no longer rage against De Fronsac, but an intense longing to stretch himself. And then, strange as it appeared to him, he began to feel sleepy.

He was wakened from a half-doze by a loud hail, answered by a fainter one from a distance. A few seconds later he was released from the butt, and lowered, still bound, over the side of the vessel into a smaller boat. The boat did not go far; after a few strokes of the oars Jack felt a slight bump; he was unceremoniously hoisted again; and when at last his eyes and hands were unbound, and he had recovered the use of his sight, he found himself on board a lugger, whose crew had the swarthy faces and red caps of French fishermen. Greetings were exchanged between the men of the two vessels; then the French lugger made sail and stood out into mid-channel.

Jack was too much relieved at having recovered his freedom to mind where he was going. For a time he had not even the curiosity to ask; it was quite enough to breathe freely, and use his eyes and stretch his limbs. But night was drawing on, and when a meager supper was brought to him he asked in French for what port the vessel was making.

"No port, Monsieur," replied the man with a grin.

"Well, what place, then?"

"Where the captain commands, Monsieur."

"And where does the captain command? Speak out, man."

"Only the captain knows, Monsieur."

Jack gave it up. The man's answers were perfectly polite, but it was evident he had received orders to tell nothing. Jack was taken below and made fairly

comfortable. When morning dawned and he was allowed to go on deck there was no land in sight. But about midday a coast-line came into view, and in the evening, after beating about for hours, a strong land wind keeping the lugger off shore, the skipper managed to run into a little cove beneath high cliffs. It was a wild part of the Norman coast; there were no dwellings where the lugger ran ashore; and Jack had to tramp for several miles among the Frenchmen, over a rough road, before they arrived at a little fishing hamlet. Here he had to share a pallet bed in the auberge with one of the fishermen, two others occupying a similar bed at the other side of the room.

Jack and his bedfellow both found it difficult to sleep, and the Frenchman proved more loquacious than any of the others. He could speak no English save a few words, and his French was so broad a dialect that Jack, who knew little French at the best, was often at a loss to understand him. But he understood enough to learn that he had been kept in an underground chamber near the Hollow until the time came when a boat might put off, ostensibly for night fishing, really to convey the prisoner to the French lugger, the whereabouts of which would be known to the Luscombe smugglers. He had been carried on board the boat from the cart openly at Luscombe quay.

"Whose boat was it?"

"It was to a man—Monsieur might know him—who calls himself Goujon."

"No, I don't know anybody of that name. Who is he?"

"He is Goujon; that is all."

"Is he a fisherman? What is he like?"

"I have never seen him, Monsieur. For myself, I have never put foot to land in England. But the captain knows him; ah, yes! the captain knows Goujon."

And Jack at last went to sleep, wondering who Goujon could be.

CHAPTER X
A PRISONER OF FRANCE

Next morning Jack was awakened early and told that he must march.

"Very happy," he said, "but where to?"

He had recovered his spirits. No misfortunes, no bufferings, can long depress a healthy boy of sixteen. Consequently when he learned that he was to tramp to Boulogne, more than fifty miles away, he received the information with

a smile. His chief thought was: "Perhaps I shall see that Monstair, Boney himself!" The prospect of a fifty-mile walk in keen, bright weather did not daunt him.

He was accompanied by the skipper of the lugger and several of the men. Now that they were on French soil they had lost their reluctance to talk, and before many miles had been covered Jack was chatting as freely as his command of the language permitted, and laughing at the misunderstandings that occurred on both sides. He learned one fact that made him feel sorry. A few days before, Admiral Keith had exploded some vessels among a hundred and fifty of the French praams at their anchorage outside the pier at Boulogne. But this attempt to destroy the flotilla had not succeeded, the vessels having been separated by distances too wide for the explosion to have the destructive effect intended. The French smugglers were much elated at Admiral Keith's failure, and amused Jack by their confident assertion that before long Bonaparte, or the Emperor Napoleon, as he was beginning to be called, would make himself King of England.

Boulogne was reached at the end of the second day's march. Jack was taken to a commissary of the forces. He did not learn till some time afterward what story the skipper told. It was to the effect that his lugger, while making for Boulogne from St. Malo, had been becalmed off Barfleur, within sight of an English frigate which lay about two miles astern. A boat had been sent from the frigate to capture the lugger. Attempting to board, the English crew had been driven back with severe loss, and this young officer, who had been foremost of the boarding party, had been left in the Frenchmen's hands.

Whether the commissary believed the story Jack never knew. Certainly it was acted upon. He was handed over to the keeper of the town prison, and lodged in the cells below the old belfry tower. Next day, however, he was removed and conveyed under a guard a few miles westward toward Etaples. As he left the belfry with other prisoners amid an escort of gendarmes, he saw riding up the hill towards Wimereux a group of horsemen, led by a stout little soldier in brilliant uniform. The gendarmes saluted; the little man gave a curt and careless acknowledgment, and cantered on. It was Bonaparte himself, riding to review the army he was collecting for the invasion of England. Jack recognized him by his likeness to the caricatures he had seen at home.

"'Tis something to have seen the wonderful Boney!" he thought.

Not far from Etaples he was placed with a number of other prisoners, all English seamen, in an old château about a mile from the sea. It had evidently been at one time a pleasant country-house, but from its partly dilapidated condition Jack inferred that it had suffered during the revolutionary riots thirteen or fourteen years before. It was now used as an overflow prison, the regular prisons

of the town being filled. The English prisoners in France always outnumbered the French prisoners in England, owing to the greater enterprise of English seamen, which often led them to attempt impossible feats and threw them into the power of the enemy.

The prisoners were kept on the top floor of the château, several rooms having been knocked into one. The windows were barred; there were two stories beneath; outside, the walled park all round the house was regularly patrolled by sentries; and there was a guard constantly at the gate. The wall bordering the grounds was about nine feet high and spiked at the top. These facts were at once noted by Jack, for the instant he was shut up he began to think of escape; but the outlook was not promising.

If he wished to escape at the first, his longing was intensified after a few days of prison regime. There were about seventy prisoners altogether, and twenty jailers. The treatment was not far short of brutal. The prisoners had to sleep on coarse pallets of straw, the stalks cut so short that they were like beds of spikes. The food consisted of nothing but brown bread and more or less dirty water. One and a half sous a day were allowed by the government to each prisoner for the purchase of extra food—a miserably insufficient sum; yet, poor as it was, it more often found its way into the pockets of the jailers than into those of the prisoners. The rooms were never properly cleaned, and the jailers thought nothing of bullying and assaulting brutally any man who had the audacity to grumble.

Jack had the good luck to be spared some of the worst hardships. He was allowed the use of a small room off the larger one—a kind of antechamber, the partition of which was only half demolished where the separate rooms had been knocked into one for the reception of the prisoners. A door opened directly on the staircase; it was kept closed, and it had a grating through which the sentry on duty could watch what was going on.

The warders, drafted from two companies of infantry in the neighboring town, were relieved daily. This was a precaution taken, no doubt, to prevent them from getting tired of their job and relaxing in their watchfulness. At all hours of the night the steady tramp of the sentries round the house could be heard by wakeful prisoners above. And many were wakeful, for their poor fare was ill calculated to encourage sleep, and as the days passed they shivered with the cold. It did not occur to the officer in command, a rough-tongued captain who had apparently risen from the ranks, to provide a fire; and when one of the prisoners ventured to ask for one, he got a snubbing.

Jack was the only officer among the captives. He learned afterward that officers were often liberated on parole, but this was entirely in the discretion of the district commandant, and Jack was unlucky in coming into the hands of a

bully. He tried to keep cheerful, but it was hard in such depressing surroundings. The only pleasant part of the day was the short interval allowed for exercise in the park. A space was roped off within which the prisoners might run or walk; it was a considerable distance from the wall, and sentries with loaded muskets stood on guard. There was thus no chance of making a dash for liberty; but the opportunity of stretching their legs in the open for twenty minutes was a boon to men accustomed to the freedom of life on the sea.

Thus four months passed. Every day was like another. A little news came to the prisoners at times through the jailers—how further attempts to destroy the flotilla of praams at Boulogne had been defeated; how the English had attacked in vain Fort Rouge at Calais Harbor; how Napoleon had been at last crowned emperor by the pope in the church of Notre Dame. But the news which Jack eagerly awaited, of a great victory won by Admiral Nelson at sea, never came.

One day in February, when snow was falling, a new batch of prisoners was brought in, to the disgust of the others, for the room was already overcrowded. But Jack was pleased and vexed at once to see that the new arrivals were no other than Babbage, Turley, and a dozen more from the *Fury*.

"Well! I never did see!" ejaculated the bo'sun, when Jack hailed him. "Bless my eyes, sir, but I thought as you was gone to glory—leastways to Davy Jones, and so did we all. How did you go for to come to this here dirty old hulk of a French prison, sir?"

Jack told the whole story.

"What happened to you and the boat?" he asked.

"Why, sir, we waited for you three hours or more, as we was bid, and when you didn't come back, I said as how we ought to go up along and find you."

"No, you didn't!" interrupted Turley; "that was me. You said our orders was to wait for Mr. Hardy three hours, and the three hours being up, 'twas our dooty to go back and tell Mr. Blake. There, then, old Sparrow-grass!"

Evidently Turley supposed that on French ground the claims of discipline might be ignored. But he was mistaken.

"What do you mean by Sparrow-grass?" demanded Jack as sternly as he could.

"Well, sir, I know that his rightful name is Ben Babbage, but among ourselves, sir, when we thinks of it, we calls him Turnip—"

"That'll do, Turley. You'll call Mr. Babbage by his right name, here and anywhere else; remember that. Go on, Babbage."

"Well, sir, as I was saying, I said as how we ought to go up along and find you. So go we did; but though we spent a couple of hours a-prowling round that there tower, and about the village, and went up to the Grange and all, never a word did we hear of you. So we had to give it up, and we went back and reported

you missing to Mr. Blake. He put in at Luscombe himself, and raised a deal of dust, sir, but 'twas no good. So he reported you to the admiral at Portsmouth as missing, and we got another officer in your place, a slack-twisted young—beg pardon, sir, I was a-going to do what Turley done, sir, call names; but I won't—leastways, not in your hearing, sir."

"And how did you become prisoners, too?"

"Why, sir, a Mounseer's sloop set on us t'other day when we was running before a stiff gale. The poor little *Fury's* topmast was carried away and the mainmast sprung. The sloop hugged us till the wind dropped; then she came up alongside and boarded. She had three times our number, and they must have bred different Frenchmen in the days when one Englishman was equal to three; we did our best, as you may believe; she lost half her men, but the other half was still double what was left of us, so we had to haul down our colors, in a manner of speaking. Mr. Blake and the new midshipman have been marched off, I did hear, to a place called Verdun; here's the rest of us, what was left, and if you'll look out of the window, you'll see the poor little *Fury* lying off the quay there. I s'pose they'll patch her up and call her by a new name, and that's enough to make any Englishman's blood boil, it is."

Jack was angry as Babbage at the success of the sloop in capturing the cutter. But he felt somewhat cheered at the sight of the faces of his messmates; and their presence, strangely enough, set him again thinking of escape. Babbage was a seasoned and knowing old salt, and Jack resolved to have a long and private talk with him at the first opportunity.

But though in the course of a week they had many such talks—in the park while exercising, in the little antechamber at dead of night—they almost despaired of hitting upon any likely plan of regaining their liberty. There was no chance of silencing the sentries at the head of the staircase; any attempt to break open the door would at once be heard outside, and the whole force of warders, all soldiers, would be on the alert. The bars across the windows might indeed be loosened or forcibly wrenched out, and the bedclothes—if the material of which they were made was not too poor—might be torn up and knotted to form a rope; but a small light was kept burning in the room all night, and any work at the windows would certainly be seen by the sentries at the door and by the men patrolling outside.

"Ah now! if only brother Sol was here!" sighed Babbage one evening, when Jack and he had been talking over every plan that suggested itself, possible and impossible.

"What could he do?" asked Jack.

"'Twas a saying of his, sir, 'Nary a way in but a way out,' though I said to him, 'What about a mouse-trap?' Ah, brother Sol 'ud see the way out of this here

trap if any man could."

"Well, I wish this brother Sol of yours would get himself captured and come here. Where is he?"

"I don't know, sir; I haven't seed him for four and twenty year. But well I mind the last thing he said to me when he went away. 'Ben,' says he, 'God bless you!' I never forgot them feeling words, sir."

"I suppose not. As he isn't here we must do without him. We *must* get out somehow, Babbage. I, for one, am not going to rot in France for half a dozen years. Is there anything we haven't thought of?"

Babbage pursed his lips and pondered.

"We've thought of everything from window to ground," he said presently. "The only thing we haven't thought of is the roof, and we want to go down, not up—leastways, not yet."

"I don't know. What about the chimney?"

"No good, sir. Haven't I seed the sergeant of the guard poke his nose up every day to see if the bars are safe? They're just fixed so that no nat'ral man's head could pass between. Must ha' bin done a purpose."

"Does the sergeant examine them carefully?"

"No, sir; he just stoops down, and cocks his head around, and gives a squint up, and many's the time I'd ha' liked to take advantage of the sitivation to kick him, only I thought I'd better not. 'Kicks is poor tricks,' too, as brother Sol used to say."

"Well, I'll come into your room to-night, and have a look at them. Luckily the chimney is on the same side as the door; the sentry won't see me. We might be able to loosen those bars and clear the chimney."

"And what then, sir?"

"I'd climb the roof and take a look round. Can't say more at present."

"Very good, sir."

In the small hours Jack crept quietly into the larger room and got into the chimney unobserved. The bars were just above his head, and he very soon decided that with a sufficiently hard implement he could loosen the mortar about their ends. That was the doubtful matter. The knives supplied to a few of the prisoners who were given meat for their dinner were removed by the jailers after the meal, and all weapons had of course been taken from the men before they were brought into the room. But next morning Jack managed to force a long rusty nail out of one of the planks of the floor of his room; it seemed to him stout and strong enough for his purpose.

It was necessary to take the rest of the prisoners into his confidence. He got Babbage to tell them what he had in view, and as they were all Englishmen, with just as keen a longing for liberty as himself, there was no fear of their betraying

him. As soon as the jailers had distributed the morning rations he slipped into the chimney. Half a dozen of the men, gathered as if casually near the fireplace, screened him from any one who might suddenly enter the room. He began to scrape away the mortar at one end of each of the bars, working as quickly as he could. Turley swept up with his hand the flakes of mortar that fell to the floor. By the evening Jack had worked so well that one bar was loosened sufficiently to be bent down when the time came. Then he got some of the men to tear off scraps of their woolen shirts, and with these he filled up the holes, so that even if the bar was tested by the sergeant there was a good chance that it would hold well enough to prevent discovery.

The scraping occupied him for two more days—one bar a day. By the time he had finished he found that the nail which had served him so well was worn to within half an inch of the head.

He determined to make an expedition up the chimney on that third evening, if circumstances proved favorable. After the evening meal of bread and water he got Ben to use his strength in bending down the bars. Then he crawled through and began to ascend. It was a tight fit. The chimney was narrow; but Jack, never stout, had grown thin on the prison fare, and he wormed his way up by the aid of projecting bricks left for the chimney-sweep; those were the days of chimney climbing. The flue was not very dirty; evidently no fires had been lighted below for a long time.

He reached the top without mishap. There was no chimney-pot. Looking cautiously out, showing as little of his head as possible, he saw the sea rippling far below in the distance, shining ruddy in the glow of the setting sun. A strong easterly breeze was blowing. To the right lay the harbor and town. To the left were two sloops and three or four praams; alongside the nearest sloop a coasting brig; then two fishing smacks. A cable's length from these lay the *Fury*, now apparently refitted with new main- and topmasts, and eastward of her, a little farther out, a lugger and another smack. Jack guessed that, besides the *Fury*, only the sloops and the praams were likely to be armed with cannon, though the lugger might carry a small gun.

The immediate surroundings of the château were out of sight, except to his left, being screened by the parapet of the flat roof some feet away from the chimney. Except at one point, where the roof of an outbuilding rose nearly to the same elevation as the part where he was perched, there was a sheer drop of fifteen feet from the top of the chimney-stack.

It was a sloping roof, and Jack made up his mind to crawl down it until he came to a chimney of the outbuilding, from which a thin spiral of smoke was rising. But he waited until the dusk had deepened before he thought it safe to emerge. Then he crept carefully down till he reached the smoking chimney. The

roof there was not quite as high as the other; the drop was about five feet; and he guessed from the position that below the chimney were the servants' quarters. Two other chimneys beyond were smoking; these, he thought, must belong to the rooms occupied by the guard. The other chimneys, from which no smoke was rising, could only be reached by dropping some twelve feet and climbing an equal distance; and to do that would involve the risk of being seen or heard.

Jack placed his hand on the side of the chimney from which a thin smoke was coming. There was so little heat in the bricks that he guessed the fire below had been allowed to die down. His guess was confirmed when he put his hand in the air over the mouth of the chimney: it was scarcely warm. He resolved to climb down and find out whither the chimney led. Thin as it was, the smoke in the narrow space was rather suffocating, and he felt a certain dread lest he should cough and betray his presence. There seemed no end to the chimney, as step by step he let himself down, moving with extreme caution to avoid making any sound that could be heard below. As he approached the bottom he was relieved to find that the heat did not perceptibly increase. The fire must be almost dead. He was dislodging soot from the walls; would it be seen by the persons in the room? Perhaps if they saw it they would think it due to the strong wind. Perhaps there was nobody in the room. He heard no voices, no sound of movement, though he saw there was a light. The chimney was a good deal wider at the point he had reached, and he wondered if it led to the kitchen.

Waiting a little to make sure that the room was unoccupied, he at length ventured to slip down to the grate and peep into the room. It was empty of people. A large table stood in the middle; kitchen utensils hung from pegs on the walls; the door was ajar, and he now heard voices, proceeding evidently from an adjoining room.

On the hearth was a long iron poker. "That may prove useful," he thought; and leaping lightly down he seized it. A large chopper hung to a nail at the side of the chimney. This also he secured. Then creeping to the door, he peeped round from the level of the floor. Three men were seated at a table enjoying their supper. This was apparently the cook's room. The men were very much at their ease. A large fire of logs threw a glow upon their faces; a bottle of wine had been emptied; the smell of fried onions teased Jack's appetite. He listened to the men's conversation.

"*Monsieur le capitaine* will bring two guests to supper," said one.

"*Peste!*" growled a second, the fattest of all, by whom, as Jack now saw, a cook's white cap lay, "he will keep us up late. *Monsieur le capitaine* is so particular. A supper fit for Bonaparte is not good enough for him. The kitchen fire will have to be made up. Go and see to it, Jules."

The man addressed scraped his plate and drank his wine before lazily rising

to do the cook's bidding. Jack flew back with the speed of a hare, and before the man had pushed back his chair the adventurer was several feet up the chimney, grasping his precious spoil, the poker and the chopper.

CHAPTER XI
A BREAK FOR FREEDOM

"By Jove!" thought Jack with a chuckle as he scrambled out of the chimney, "won't there be a rumpus when the cook misses his poker! Luckily, he'll never think it has gone aloft!"

It was a very sooty object that descended, after pausing to make sure that all was safe, into the prisoners' room. Jack was immediately surrounded by a group of the *Fury's* men, so eager to hear what had happened that they raised their voices and provoked an angry reprimand from the sentry at the door.

"Silence, you donkeys!" whispered Jack.

"Avast your jabber!" said Babbage, scowling upon Turley. "Me and Mr. Hardy have got to lay the course for this little venture."

After this the men behaved more discreetly, and left Jack alone with Babbage.

"Now, Babbage," said Jack, when he had finished his story, "we're going to escape, and I'll tell you how."

"Not up the chimbley, sir? I'd squeeze myself as small as I could, but I'm afeard I should stick fast and spoil the whole boiling."

"No, no; you're too fat for the chimney. You'll be left in charge till you hear a hubbub below; then you're to break open the door and make a dash for it at the head of the men."

"Why, I'll obey orders, sir; Ben Babbage always obeys orders; but, begging your pardon, it beats me how I'm to break the door open with a poker and a chopper—"

"Babbage, if you make any more difficulties you'll never see your brother Sol, for here you'll stay. You shall have other tools by and by. You understand, nothing is to be done until you hear the signal; it will be loud enough, I promise you. I shall wait until the captain's guests have gone. That will probably be late; so there'll be plenty of time for us to make a rope. No, don't speak. I haven't done yet. We'll tear up the coverlets—they're precious thin, but we haven't any

better—and twist up a rope long enough to reach from the top of the chimney to the bottom: about fifty feet, I should think. Then I'll take it with me and four or five of the men, Turley for one—

"Begging your pardon, sir—

"What?"

"Begging your pardon, sir,—not Turley, but me."

"Oh, very well! You're too fat for the chimney at present, as you owned yourself, but we could get something off you with the chopper."

Babbage grinned sheepishly, and made no further suggestions.

Several hours later, Jack, at the window, heard loud voices and laughter in the courtyard below. The captain's guests were evidently departing. Allowing an hour to pass, sufficient, he thought, for the captain and the servants to have settled into their beauty sleep, he signed to his four selected men, and led the way up the chimney, Turley carrying the rope. They clambered across the roof and came to the kitchen chimney.

"Now, Turley," said Jack, "pay out the rope as I go down. By George! 'tis a good deal hotter than when I was here before."

He got down into the chimney, leaving the four men on the roof. It was indeed very hot; the kitchen fire, made up for cooking the supper, had evidently not yet died down. Fortunately there was little smoke; even without it the air was so stifling that Jack was surprised that he reached the bottom safely. He jumped when his feet touched the grate; they were protected only by his stockings.

There was no light in the room, but the glow of the dying fire was strong enough to show him that it was empty. He tiptoed to the three doors. The back door was locked and bolted; the door of the cook's room was closed but not locked, and he heard snores from within; the third door, leading to the rest of the house, he supposed, was ajar, and a dim light came through the opening.

A little more light was necessary. Not without a tremor, Jack ventured to put on the embers one or two small chips of wood that were drying at the side of the grate. They kindled, and lit the room with a dancing flame, which Jack fervently hoped would not attract the attention of the sentry outside. He had already seen that the shutters of the window were closed; he trusted there was no chink to betray him.

The first thing was to get arms of some kind for his men. A poker and a chopper he had already purloined, much to the mystification of the cook, no doubt. Ah! there was a rolling-pin hanging by a loop from a nail in the wall. Down it came; in a trice he tied it to the thin rope. Giving this a gentle tug, he saw the rolling-pin disappear up the chimney.

Then he looked round quickly for more weapons. Yes; there was a cleaver, a gridiron, a frying-pan.

"I must have them," he said to himself. By the time he had taken them down from their nails, the rope was hanging once more within reach. One by one they followed the rolling-pin. Another hunt on tiptoe round the room yielded a brass candlestick, a braizing-pan, several dish-covers which he rejected as being too clumsy to wield, a big soup-ladle, and a couple of long carving-knives. There were saucepans in plenty, but too big for his purpose. He had to be content with the ten articles he had obtained—rude weapons, indeed, but likely to be formidable in the hands of determined and desperate men. As the utensils of metal passed up the chimney they clicked more than once on the wall, and Jack's heart beat faster as he wondered if the sounds would be heard. But no doubt there were mice and rats behind these old walls; blessed rats and mice!

After waiting a little to make sure that the cook and his assistants had not been disturbed, he prepared to go farther afield. Creeping to the door that stood ajar, he pushed it a little. It moved with a creak which must surely, Jack thought, be heard all over the house. He waited breathlessly; there was no sound. But he could not risk a continuous creaking. Taking his courage in both hands he pushed the door quickly, stopping it with a jerk. It made never a sound. Jack saw by the light of a small lamp that it opened into a narrow passage, with a door at the end. He crept along the wall. The farther door was not closed. He peeped in.

"The *salle à manger*!" he thought. There was the table at which the captain had entertained his guests.

To the left there was another passage at right angles to the first. A narrow staircase led, he supposed, to the servants' rooms. A few steps along the passage brought him to the entrance hall, from which sprang the main staircase. He looked up. He was at the bottom of a deep well, extending, it appeared, to the top of the mansion. He shrank back into the shade of the huge post at the foot of the stairs; for if the sentries outside the prisoners' room chanced to hear a movement below and looked over, they would certainly see him.

Then he cast back, and came to the back staircase. The steps were of stone; he might ascend without the danger of creaking; and he must see whither these stairs led. He went up the steps in pitch darkness, and found himself on a landing. Groping along the wall, he knew that he was in a stone-flagged corridor. Ah! at the end there was a streak of light. Tiptoeing along, he came to a door partly open. Dared he peep round it? He paused for a few seconds.

"Hang it!" he said to himself, "I wish my heart wouldn't thump so!" He listened: how these Frenchmen snored! Were they all asleep? He took a step forward; then felt a sudden unreasoning fear, and stole back for several yards. In a few seconds he had collected himself and returned to the door.

Now he ventured to put his head into the room. A dozen men—he would have said a score at the first moment—were asleep on rough settles against the

wall. They had their clothes on, as if in bivouac, ready for action at a moment's notice. A smoky lamp hung from a bracket on the wall. In the corner of the fireplace, where there was a faint glow, were stacked the men's muskets. The key of the room was on the inside.

Having taken all this in at a glance, Jack carefully withdrew, returned along the passage and down the stairs, and arrived once more at the kitchen. Two sharp tugs at the rope brought Turley to his side; at short intervals the other three appeared.

"All safe!" whispered Jack. "You've taken the things to Babbage, Turley?"

"Ay, ay, sir."

"That's well. Now, Turley, that's the cook's room. You'll stay and watch the door. If any one tries to break out, you'll know what to do. You other men come with me."

He led them quietly along the passage and up the staircase. At the landing he halted.

"The guards are in that room at the end of the corridor," he whispered. "I'm going in to try and get their muskets. If I'm discovered, you three make a rush and get hold of the muskets. Never mind about me. You understand."

"Ay, ay, sir."

He crept stealthily into the room. The men's cartridge-belts lay in a heap on the table. Taking care to make no noise, Jack lifted two or three, one at a time, and handed them to his men. Then he approached the pile of arms. With the gentlest of movements he released two of the muskets, one with each hand, on opposite sides of the pile. Would the balance be disturbed? No, all was safe. He passed the weapons out of the room, and turned to remove a third and a fourth. But who had make that click? It was one of the men outside. Jack looked anxiously at the sleeping forms. Had any of them been awakened?

One of the Frenchmen turned, sat up, rubbed his eyes—and saw the English prisoner!

"*Au voleur! au prisonnier! aux armes! Eveillez-vous, mes camarades!*"

He was so sleepy that he scarcely knew what he was saying; but his shout roused his companions. As they turned, too heavy with sleep to have all their wits about them, Jack's three men sprang in, and in a twinkling seized the remaining muskets and rushed back into the passage. The first Frenchman was now on his feet. Jack with a straight right-hander sent him spinning over; then he dashed to the door, slipped the key out of one side of the lock and into the other, and just as two of the other men were lurching toward him, skipped outside, slammed the door, and turned the key.

"Now, men, after me!" he cried.

He raced along the corridor, conscious of a tremendous uproar in the guard-

[image]

Jack, with a straight right-hander, sent him spinning over

room—cries, oaths, violent thumps and kicks on the door. Up the stairs! There were the sentries at the top, startled out of their wits. What was happening? Hubbub below, hubbub in the prisoners' room! The prisoners were actually battering at the door! And with heavy implements: where had they got them? Crash! There was a panel half driven out. The amazed soldiers raised their muskets; they could at least fire into the room. But at this moment they caught sight of Jack and the sailors springing up the back staircase. Another crash on the door! *O ciel*! They waited for no more, but with a yell turned their backs and leaped down the main staircase, taking three stairs at a time.

"Ahoy there, Babbage; stand clear!" shouted Jack.

"Ay, ay, sir!" cried the bo'sun from within.

Putting to the lock the musket he carried, Jack fired. The lock was burst; with a touch the door gave way; and a second later the prisoners began to pour out.

"Steady, men!" cried Jack. "No crowding, or we'll get jammed and be clapped under hatches again. Armed men in front."

They followed Jack down the same staircase by which he had come. As they passed the locked door of the guard-room they heard the imprisoned men making a furious assault upon it. But it was a piece of good oak; they had no firearms to blow away the lock; and Jack knew that they might hammer it for an hour without making much impression.

Down they go! Here they are at the kitchen. And there is Turley, a saucepan in one hand, a huge dish-cover in the other, holding at bay the fat cook and his two assistants, who are vainly attempting, with ferocious cries, to get within his guard. When they see Jack enter the room, and behind him a swarm of seamen, they wheel round and scurry like hares into the farther apartment, the fat cook going last, squealing.

"No danger there!" said Jack. "There's no time to lose, men. Now for the back door."

He ran to it, drew back the bolts, and throwing it wide dashed out into the open. There was a blinding flash close by; the shot missed; and with Turley and others hard on his heels Jack dashed straight in the direction from which the shot had come. But the sentry who had fired was already scampering away. A companion had joined him; together they made for the wicket of the front

gate; dashed through, and tried to close it. But Turley was just in time to slip his saucepan in and hold the gate open. The sentries waited no longer. They raced as fast as their legs would carry them toward the town.

To overtake them was impossible. In a few minutes the two companies of infantry would be on the track of the escaped prisoners. Was there time to reach the harbor before they came up? Had the shots already roused the officers of the vessels at anchor and caused them to despatch men ashore? Jack could not wait even to wonder. On he went, calling to his men to close up, straight along the road leading to the town. But to pass through the streets to the harbor would be fatal. Within half a mile of the town he halted.

"You, Mudge, and you, Folkard, cut off a quarter of a mile to port and fire your muskets. Then run as hard as you can in our wake. Quick, men!"

He hoped that the firing in that direction would mislead the enemy and give the fugitives the few minutes' grace they needed for the next move of his plan. When the two men had gone off to the left, he led the party rapidly to the right, hoping to strike the harbor at its eastern extremity.

As the fugitives, keeping perfect silence, stumbled in the darkness over fields and across ditches toward the harbor, they heard loud shouts to their left, followed by the roll of a drum. Clearly the alarm had been raised, the soldiers were turning out. All now depended on whether the direction of the escape was discovered within the next few minutes. If not, Jack thought that he might reach the harbor with his band in time to seize some boats before they were intercepted. He listened eagerly for shots behind; they seemed long in coming, and the outskirts of the village loomed up in the darkness ahead before the expected reports at last struck his ear. Fervently he hoped that the sound would draw the soldiers off in that direction.

He wished he could go faster, but many of the men were weak from the effects of imprisonment and meager fare, and he had to accommodate his pace to the slowest.

Making a fairly wide circuit, Jack steered for the extremity of the harbor, where only a few fishermen's cottages intervened between him and the waterside. Some fishers who had turned out of their dwellings on hearing the alarm scurried down the rutty road with loud shouts. The noise was bound to bring the soldiers to the spot within a few minutes. Jack's heart was pumping at a great rate, but he did not lose his coolness or his nerve. He must do something to check the soldiers, that was plain. Sending twenty men to search the shore for boats, he posted the nine armed with muskets under cover of the cottages with orders to delay the soldiers at all costs. The rest of his men, some armed with the spoil of the kitchen, others with bricks and stones snatched up on the way, he placed behind the nine to support them.

A minute or two—horribly long they seemed to Jack—of anxious waiting; then the two men who had fired the shots in the rear came panting up, and from the direction of the harbor a messenger brought the good news that six large boats had been found. Almost at the same moment the clump-clump of heavy boots and sabots on the road was distinctly heard, ever growing louder. If the runners proved to be soldiers it would be impossible to escape without a fight. Jack would rather have been allowed to embark in peace, but if there must be a fight—

"Well," he whispered to Babbage, "we'll show them what English Jack Tars are made of."

He at once sent the unarmed men down to the water under guidance of the messenger, bidding them get into the boats; then with the rest he prepared to fight a rear-guard action.

The Frenchmen came on helter-skelter. Not one of them imagined that they had any enemy more formidable than unarmed weaklings to deal with. Jack waited until they were within twenty yards; even in the dim starlight they could be seen distinctly enough. Then in a voice that rang clearly he gave the word "Fire!" The eleven rifles flashed; there were cries from the advancing Frenchmen; some of them, at any rate, must have been hit at this point-blank range. The head of the column was in confusion; men turned this way and that; they were apparently without leadership.

While they halted and wavered another word of command was heard above their cries and the sound of shuffling feet: "Charge!" The sailors responded with a cheer; some thirty strong, they dashed forward as one man; and in a few seconds the enemy were in full flight, struck by one of those sudden panics to which even the best troops are liable in night operations.

Jack also had his moment of alarm. Knowing the thoughtless impetuosity of the British sailor, he feared lest, with the enemy on the run, his men should forget everything else in the excitement of pursuit. But he had them soon in hand again.

"Now to the boats!" he said, "and as quickly as you can."

He had no difficulty in finding them. One of the sloops had already opened fire upon them; and the sound of oars in that direction showed that a boat, perhaps more than one, had been lowered, no doubt to pull in to the assistance of the soldiers. It was too dark for the fire of the sloop to be effective; Jack heard one or two shots strike the harbor wall.

Here were the boats, a few yards from the beach.

"Tumble in, men," said Jack.

In a few seconds all were aboard. Already Jack in the foremost boat was steering for a black shape almost exactly ahead, which he believed to be the *Fury*.

Scarcely was his craft well under way before he heard oars in that direction; the cutter also, it appeared, was sending a boat.

"So much the better!" thought Jack. "There'll be fewer men on deck to repel boarders."

In less than a minute he saw the cutter's boat ahead; it was turning, as if to regain the vessel—he wondered why.

"Give way, men!" he cried, and from the boat behind came Babbage's voice urging his crew: "Pull, shipmates; pull, my hearties; Mr. Hardy ain't a-goin' to do it all by his lone self!" And Jack heard Turley, somewhere in his own boat, mutter: "Bust yourself, old Artichokes, but we'll be there first!"

It was a race between them. The other boats were some distance astern, for two, being without oars, were being towed by the remaining two. In the two foremost boats the men were straining every nerve. They knew that their lives depended on success, and scarcely needed the encouraging words of Jack and the old bo'sun. They gained on the Frenchman; the three boats dashed almost together under the cutter's counter; then there was a tussle. Rising in the boats the crews shouted and cheered and belabored their opponents, Jack's men plying rolling-pins, gridirons, soup-ladles, frying-pans, shovels, candlesticks, with a hearty vigor that made them more formidable weapons than the Frenchmen's cutlasses. In half a minute the Frenchmen, outnumbered and outfought, were hurled neck and crop out of their boats, and the English sailors were swarming up the side of the cutter. In the short fight the cutter's crew had been unable to help their comrades; it was such a rough and tumble that they would as likely have hit a friend as a foe. But they gathered for a desperate resistance when the Englishmen poured on to the deck. Jack and his party boarded aft; Babbage's men forward; but neither made easy progress, for the Frenchmen fought like tigers, rallying twice after momentary set-backs, and taking advantage of their superior numbers to press forward in the attempts to drive the boarders into the sea. The mêlée was at its fiercest when the arrival of the other boats turned the scale. Cheering British tars beset the gallant Frenchmen on all sides; man after man of the defenders fell, and in two minutes from the time when the last boat's crew boarded, the cutter was once more in English hands.

"Secure the Frenchmen!" shouted Jack, when the enemy surrendered and cried for quarter. He himself rushed aft and cut the cable; and while Turley and some others were collecting the Frenchmen's weapons and escorting their prisoners below, a score of willing hands had run up the mainsail, jib and foresail. Grazing the side of the fishing smack to leeward as she gathered way, the *Fury* moved out to sea. As she emerged from the shelter of the brig a round shot from one of the sloops struck her full amidships, and the other sloop was seen making sail in pursuit.

"Any damage done?" sang out Jack.

"Not a farden's worth, sir," replied Turley. "Well above water-line."

"Here's another! Look out!" shouted Babbage.

But the second shot whizzed harmlessly by; then the sloops and other vessels faded from sight; and the buoyant little cutter began to courtesy to the waves of the Channel, showing white-crested in the gloom.

CHAPTER XII

THE CAPTURE OF THE *GLORIEUSE*

For some time Jack was too busy in navigating the vessel, too anxiously looking out for pursuers, to take stock of the situation on board the *Fury*. But as soon as he felt that he was fairly safe, he went round the cutter to inquire. One of his men and five Frenchmen had been killed in the boarding operations. These were at once committed to the deep, for with a crew of nearly seventy, and twenty prisoners, there was already too little room on board. Many had been wounded on both sides; and Jack found that his men had the more serious, though not the most numerous, wounds; for while they had been pinked and slashed with cutlasses, the Frenchmen had received only bad bruises from the unusual weapons wielded by their opponents. Several of the men who had served in the sick bay on English warships had already done their best—it was but little in those days of ignorance and unskilful surgery—to attend to the wounded.

The French crew had apparently consisted of about forty men; arms for that number were discovered. Among the prisoners were the captain and lieutenant, whom Jack at once sought out and invited to share the cabin with himself. They were very crestfallen at their defeat; but when Jack, mustering his best French (which was not very good), made his best bow (which was charming), and said—"*Je vous restore, Messieurs, vos épées, pour vous—vous—vous*—(Hang it! What's the French for 'show'?)—*pour vous displayer mon admiration de votre brave*—. (Can't think of the French for 'fight.')—*votre courage dans la bataille*"—when Jack came to the end of this halting speech and smiled very unaffectedly, the Frenchmen returned his smile and his bow, and the captain, as he received his sword, said fervently:

"*Monsieur, je vous rends grâce de votre noble conduite, qui est digne, assurément, d'un honnête homme.*"

Jack bowed and smiled again, wondering what he had done that was specially "honest." Like many another Jack since then, he was too apt to jump to conclusions.

He had never navigated the Channel, but he set the course of the cutter by the compass, intending to run as straight as he could for Wynport. Toward daybreak the wind shifted to the southeast and then to the southwest, and to Jack's disappointment dropped to a light breeze scarcely strong enough to disperse the thin fog that lay over the sea. There seemed little hope of a quick passage to the English coast. Jack was speculating on his chances of getting clear of the French shore when he was startled by the cry:

"Sail on the weather-bow, sir."

Diving into the cabin, he snatched up a spyglass and eagerly scanned the approaching vessel, which was coming up Channel, bringing a strong breeze with her. She was showing no colors, but there was something about her cut that made him feel a little uncomfortable. Turning to Babbage, who stood by, he handed him the spy-glass, saying:

"French?"

"French she be, sir, leastways furrin, and a spanking brig."

Jack looked a little blue.

It was difficult to estimate distances in the haze, but the stranger could scarcely be more than a mile away. Every now and again a gust of wind lifted the fog, and if Jack attempted to put about the movement would almost certainly be seen. Even if he could outsail the approaching vessel before the wind, which was at least doubtful, her bow-chasers would badly cripple him before he could run out of range.

"What chance have we of escaping, if she is French?" he said to Babbage, who was standing by his side.

"Not a brass farden's worth, sir. She carries thirty guns at the least; and if there is a man aboard that can shoot, she can hull us easy as winking without changing her course."

"That's bad, then."

"And worse to foller, sir, as brother Sol used to say."

Jack mentally anathematized brother Sol, who must have been a very Job's comforter. The outlook was black enough. Visions of a French prison again rose before him—if indeed prison should be his lot, for the French, if they captured him, might deal summarily with him in revenge for the men they had lost.

Babbage sat down on the deck and began to sharpen his cutlass.

"A nice little bit of arm-work coming, sir," he said cheerfully. "In course we'll fight 'em?"

Jack shook his head.

"That's the last thing I should think of doing—at present."

"Well, sir, she's coming on at a spanking rate, and if we're going to run, the sooner the better—meaning no offense, sir."

"We must either keep her closer to the wind, and hope to pass without notice, or put the helm up and run for it. We'd have a bare chance of outsailing her then."

"Yes, sir, and she'd give us her broadside fust and foller it up with her stern-chasers. She'd blow us out of the water, as sure as eggs is eggs, when they bean't pickles."

Jack stood for a few moments, gloomily pondering this desperate case. All at once his face brightened.

"I say, Babbage, we'll fight her."

"And God save the king, sir," replied the veteran, lifting his hat, and then vigorously whetting his blade.

The course which had suggested itself to Jack was one that he would scarcely have imagined in cold blood; but in the present crisis it seemed to him preferable to either of the two he had before mentioned. He had seventy men on board, thirty more than the cutter would have carried in the ordinary way. Most of them were well armed; and, well as British seamen always fought, they could be trusted in the present circumstances to outdo themselves, for defeat meant utter destruction. Could he lull the Frenchmen's suspicions for a few minutes? If he could!—well, the chance of success was small, but the smallest was better than none at all.

"Yes, by George! I'll do it!" he said to himself.

And he lost no time. He was astonished at the quickness with which his mind worked in forming his plan. Orders came to his lips in short, sharp sentences, and, thanks to the readiness of old Babbage and the fine discipline of the seamen, they were carried out as promptly as given.

A score of men went below, and in a few seconds returned to the deck, looking like Frenchmen. They had stripped the outer garments from the prisoners. Their weapons were completely concealed. Five men with loaded muskets stood guard over the real Frenchmen, four held themselves ready to board, with boat anchors as grapnels. The rest of the men, equipped with all the available armament, concealed themselves below, out of sight from the approaching vessel, but ready for action at a moment's notice.

These preparations were still being made when the French flag was run up on the brig. In response Jack hoisted the French colors found on board, and, bringing the cutter a point or two closer into the wind, made as if to hail the larger vessel. When only half a cable's length separated them he shouted:

"Ho! Hola!"

There was an answering shout from the brig. So far, at any rate, no suspicion had been aroused. Jack felt himself thrill with excitement and suspense; everything depended on the result of the next move. Turley was at the helm, his lips set, his eyes never leaving the midshipman's face. Two or three seconds after the hail Jack gave the word; Turley put the helm hard up, and the cutter, paying off from the wind, ran alongside the brig to the manifest amazement of the Frenchmen, the captain swearing with anger at what he supposed was rashness or utter stupidity on the part of the cutter's commander.

Barely two yards now separated the vessels, the side of the brig seeming to tower over the cutter. At a sign from Jack the men with the grapnels leaped up, and cast them in at the open ports of the brig. The ropes attached to them were instantly secured to stanchions on the cutter's deck, and with a slight movement of the tiller Turley brought the two hulls together.

Even before they touched, twenty men from the *Fury's* deck were clambering up the main chains of the brig, and forty more were swarming from below in support. By this time the French captain had realized that the commander of the cutter was neither stupid nor rash, but a dare-devil of an Englishman. Those were Englishmen's cries that he heard, mingling with the uproar made by his own men. Everything was in confusion. Only the marines were armed. What French captain would have dreamed of meeting a little English cutter so near his own coast? What audacity, what unjustifiable impertinence, for so small a vessel to engage a thirty-two gun brig, with a complement of probably two hundred men! It was ridiculous, thought the captain, even as he gathered his men for the fight.

He was taken by surprise, but what then? Snatching up any weapons that came handy, the Frenchmen came pouring out of the hatchways and from all quarters of the deck, and, forming a little knot, endeavored to stem the rush of the boarders. They fought, as Frenchmen always fight, gallantly and with fierce courage; but a boarding party of English seamen is not easily checked.

Jack at the head of a dozen men had already driven a group of the enemy from the fore deck into the foc's'le when, glancing aft, he saw that Babbage and a small band were in desperate straits. Sword in one hand, pistol in the other, the French captain was pressing them hard at the head of twenty well-armed marines and three of his officers. The remainder of Jack's party had scattered in pursuit of the enemy on the lower deck; and a hand-to-hand fight was raging near the armory, from which the watch below were hastily equipping themselves. It was impossible for Jack to collect his men; yet if Babbage and his gallant band were overcome all would be over.

"You four, watch the foc's'le!" he shouted. "Come on, you others! Babbage ahoy!"

With a shout he dashed aft, a dozen men bellowing as they sprang after him. Flash went a pistol; the clashing of cutlasses mingled with the various cries of the men; and Jack, cleaving his way through the press toward the old bo'sun's side, found himself face to face with the French captain. He had but just time to parry a shrewd thrust of the Frenchman's sword when a blow from a French sailor's pike, which must have killed him outright had it not been partly diverted by Babbage, fell obliquely upon his head with such force that he stumbled, staggered, and dropped senseless to the deck. His last conscious moment was filled with the din of fighting and the roar of his men.

"Mr. Babbage!"

"Wot?"

"I axe your pardon, true."

"Wot for?"

"For calling of you Artichokes, Sparrow-grass, Turnip-tops, and Cabbage. Wi' young Mr. Hardy a-lying here with all his senses knocked out of him, I couldn't abear to think as how I hurt your feelings, Mr. Babbage. I axe your pardon."

"Granted, Turley, granted, and more to foller," said Babbage, holding out a horny hand, which Turley grasped in one equally hard. Each man looked at the other, so long that they did not perceive that Jack's eyes were open, and that he was smiling.

"Oh, you solemn old donkeys!" he exclaimed. "You know you've been friends at heart all along."

They looked sheepish, like boys detected in something unboyish.

"Ah, sir," said Babbage, "brother Sol used to say 'tis not actions wot matter, 'tis feelings."

"Brother Sol was wrong, then. I shouldn't be feeling so dizzy but for the action of some Frenchman who got a cut at me. What's happened, Babbage?"

"The ship's ourn, sir, and we're making for Portsmouth."

"Hurray! Tell me about it!"

"Well, sir, arter you was down we got our monkeys up. 'Twas all over in half a minute. Turley and Mudge and a dozen more went at 'em 'longside o' me; we drove 'em back; Mudge tumbled the captain over, and the rest hauled down their colors and cried for quarter. Then me and some more jumped down the gangway and cleared the lower deck, where some mounseers was scrambling round the arm-chest. Bless you! it didn't last long. They did their best, to be sure, but we did better; and the end of it was they all flung down their pikes and cutlasses and gave in. Then we brought you down here into the captain's cabin;

I put the ship about, and cast off the *Fury* with ten men in her; she's following in our wake now, sir."

"Capital! And what of the prisoners?"

"Tied up, sir. There's a hundred and forty, sir, all told, and being such a terrible lot more than us I couldn't leave 'em loose. They're sitting on the lower deck, side by side, twenty of them slung on to one rope, and for every twenty there's a man with a musket. They don't understand plain English, sir, but they understand a loaded musket, and every man of 'em knows that if he tries any tricks 'tis good-by."

"Well, I'm only sorry I was bowled over. You've done splendidly. How long have I been here?"

"Somewheres about half an hour, sir. We couldn't do much for you, not having no surgeon aboard; but we tied up your head as well as we could."

"Oh, I'm all right. Just a little dizzy. Help me on deck; the fresh air will do me good."

He had lost a good deal of blood, and could scarcely have reached the deck unassisted. The Englishmen gave a cheer when they saw their young officer—a somewhat muffled cheer, for their mouths were full of the food prepared for the Frenchmen's breakfast. It was so long since they had had a square meal that they were making the most of their opportunity, and the prisoners sat glum and hungry, watching the disappearance of the soup intended for themselves.

"Find the cook and cast him loose," said Jack. "He can get something ready for them. Let 'em eat, forty at a time. Where's the captain?"

"Getting over his temper for'ard, sir."

Jack found the captain, and learned from him that the vessel, named the *Glorieuse*, had been cruising off Ushant, and three days before had captured an English merchantman, which she had sent to Brest with a prize crew. The *Glorieuse* was bound for Boulogne, and the *Fury* had been taken for a French despatch-boat bringing orders.

By midday the *Glorieuse* came within sight of Selsey Bill, and beating up against a westerly breeze made a slow passage to Spithead. It was almost dark before she ran into Portsmouth Harbor. Her signals had already informed the port officers that she was a prize, and she had hardly hove-to when a boat came alongside to make inquiries.

"I'll have to go and see the admiral and report," said Jack to Babbage. "Prob-

ably I shall not be back to-night. We'll see about the prisoners in the morning."

CHAPTER XIII
OFF LUSCOMBE

During the latter part of the voyage Jack had devoted a good deal of thought to his future course of action. To report to the admiral would be his first duty; when that was done he wished to wipe off a personal score. He had been shipped off to France by the smugglers of Luscombe; they had unquestionably been assisted by Monsieur de Fronsac; and, remembering the name Goujon mentioned by the Frenchman, he felt pretty sure that the boat in which he had been conveyed from the shore belonged to the sufferer from the flutters, Mr. Nathaniel Gudgeon. It was not in human nature that he should let slip his chance of having his tit for tat.

And apart from his personal feelings, there were other reasons for this determination. To put down smuggling was part of his duty as a king's officer; it was no less his duty to suspect a Frenchman whom he found in league with them. There was something mysterious in their connection with De Fronsac, and something very unpleasant in the idea of De Fronsac's sailing under false colors in the house of Squire Bastable. It seemed to Jack that he would only be fulfilling a public duty, as well as getting even with private enemies, if he probed the mystery and laid the offenders by the heels.

But to do this it was very necessary that his return to England should be kept secret. The Luscombe smugglers would, no doubt, have friends spying for them in neighboring ports, and if he were seen they would be on their guard, and De Fronsac would have time to get away. He was glad, therefore, that it was dark when the *Glorieuse* came to her anchorage. It increased his chances of escaping notice in preparing to take the smugglers by surprise.

Smartening himself up as well as he could, and removing as far as possible the traces of his wound, he went ashore and made his way to Admiral Horniman's lodgings in the Hard. He was admitted at once on explaining his errand, and found himself in the presence of a big man with rugged, weather-beaten face, fierce white eyebrows, and a wooden arm. The admiral was alone, examining a chart with the aid of a tumbler of toddy and a long pipe.

"Mr. Midshipman Hardy, sir," said the servant.

"Come in and shut that door," roared the admiral in a quarter-deck bellow. "Dash my buttons! Do you want me to catch my death of cold! Now what's this?"

"Come to report a prize, sir."

The admiral looked Jack up and down.

"You have come to report a prize, have you, sir? And what's your superior officer about when he sends a youngster like you?"

"He's in a French prison, sir. I—"

"The deuce he is! How do you come to be in charge of a prize, eh? What's your vessel?"

"The *Glorieuse*, sir!"

"Don't trifle, sir! I didn't ask you for French crack-jaw. Your own vessel, sir?"

"The *Fury*, sir," Jack responded.

"What! Are there two Furies? The only *Fury* I know was the cutter that that fool Blake allowed to be captured. Didn't they tell me she was carried into Boulogne?"

"Yes, sir, but we retook her."

"By George! I'm glad of it; a smart cutter, the fastest on the station. And you took a craft called the *Glorieuse* too, did you? What's your vessel, and who's your captain, and why isn't he here?"

"If you please, sir—"

"Answer my question, sir—a plain question and a plain answer."

"My vessel's the *Fury*, sir," replied Jack, "and it was the *Fury* captured the *Glorieuse*, a thirty-gun brig."

"What! that cockle-shell take a thirty-gun brig?"

"Yes, sir, we took her by surprise, and—"

"And who retook the *Fury*?"

"Some threescore English seamen, sir; I was in command, and—"

"You in command! Bless my soul, what are you talking about? What's your name, sir?"

"Jack Hardy, sir."

"Why, why, didn't Lieutenant Blake report you as missing? Haven't I got his report—somewhere, hang me if I know where. Where's Lieutenant Blake? Why didn't he come and report all this himself?"

"I'm sorry to say he's a prisoner in France, sir. He was taken inland, and—"

"Am I standing on my head or on my feet?" cried the peppery admiral. "What's all this beating about the bush? Explain yourself, sir!"

"Why don't you give me a chance?" thought Jack; but Admiral Horniman's impetuous manner was well known on the Portsmouth station; no finer sailor ever served his Majesty; and those who knew him knew what a sterling character

underlay his rough exterior. He raised his glass now and emptied it at a draft; and Jack took advantage of the action to begin his story, using as few words as possible, and hurrying on when he saw the admiral preparing to interrupt. Somewhat to his surprise, he reached the end without misadventure.

"Bless my soul! And you mean to tell me, Mr. Hardy, that you captured the *Glorieuse* yourself?"

"No, sir; I was bowled over; but the men fought splendidly, and Ben Babbage—"

"Turnip-tops! I know him! Brother Sol on the brain! but a good seaman. Well, Mr. Hardy, you'll write all that down—plain, mind you, so that I can read it, no finicking spidery scrawl for me, egad! Now run off and get a sawbones to look at that wound of yours, and take a few days' leave ashore. The sooner you're fit for duty the better. We'll take charge of your prize."

"Thank you, sir. But about the leave—if you don't mind, I'd rather not take it at present."

"What in thunder do you want to be at then?"

"You know what happened at Luscombe, sir—at Congleton's Folly?"

"Yes—no; hang me! I remember Blake reported something. He broke into a tower, or something of that sort, and found nothing—wasn't that it?—everything gone, lock, stock, and barrel."

"Yes, sir. I want to find out what is going on in Luscombe now. I can't do it if the smugglers learn that I've come back. Of course they're bound to know that the *Fury* has been retaken and the *Glorieuse* brought in a prize; but if my name's kept out of it they won't be on their guard; and if you would allow me a few days' absence, I'd—"

"So you shall, by the Lord Harry!" cried the admiral, without waiting to hear what. "And I'll tell you what I'll do. I'll keep the *Glorieuse* and the *Fury* in quarantine. Not a man from either of 'em shall come ashore till you've reported to me. They'd blab if they did. And there's blabbing enough. Egad! Several of our merchantmen have been scooped up lately, and I'll keel-haul the villain who betrays 'em to the French if I catch him. But what about your wound, eh? Won't that be troublesome?"

"'Tis just a flesh wound, sir," replied Jack; "I shall be all right in a couple of days. There's just one thing; may I have the *Fury* if I find I can use her?"

"Certainly, certainly, when you like; in fact, Blake being absent, you'll be in command till my lords make another appointment."

Jack took his leave, very well pleased with the result of the interview. He returned to the *Glorieuse*, waited until a lieutenant was sent by the admiral to take charge of her, and then, with twenty-five men, including Babbage and Turley, and stores hastily provided from the brig, he sailed out of the harbor in the *Fury*.

The admiral, he suspected, would be somewhat amazed when he learned of the sudden departure; but, having permission, Jack had resolved on his way back to set off at once on his quest. The sooner the *Fury* was out of sight the better; and by sailing in the darkness she would be most likely to escape observation.

The wind was not very favorable. A fresh breeze was blowing from the southwest, and it was a somewhat tedious beat down Channel to the point, abreast of Luscombe, where he had seen the signal light from Congleton's Folly. Had the signalers sufficiently regained confidence, he wondered, to resume their midnight work?

"What do you think of it, Babbage?" he asked of the bo'sun, who was at the tiller.

"Well, sir, I think of a saying of brother Sol's: 'When the cat's away, the mice do play.' There be several cats in the case, sir. One, the *Fury*—a good name for cat or cutter; two, Mr. Blake; three, you yourself, sir; four, me and Turley, for, having made up our little difference, we two make one; I've got the claws, he've got the caterwaul. All these cats being away, those there mice will have a rare randy. Why, that there tower was as empty as a blown egg-shell when we drove in the door, and climbed to the top; and the smugglers will be a-hugging theirselves that all's clear, and thinking they can go on with their work without any danger of a visit from the preventives. Lor' bless you, I were a mouse myself once."

"I agree with you. 'Tis six months since I disappeared, and they'll have had all that time to recover from any fright we may have given them. I wish the wind would change. I want to get opposite the tower before morning."

"But you can't expect them to do the signaling every night, sir. No smugglers ever I knew or heard of could be so spry as that would mean. Belike we shan't see the light for a matter of days—nights, that is—or weeks. Like as not they'll have their regular times and seasons, same as the herrings."

"That's just why I'm so anxious to get there to-night. 'Tis Wednesday; 'twas on a Wednesday I first saw the light; for all we know Wednesday is their regular day."

"There may be summat in that."

"And as we don't want to be discovered I'll have the tackle blocks oiled, and tell the men to keep quiet."

"Specially Turley, sir; but there, I take that back, sir, or he'll be a-calling of me Spring Onions again."

That night was so dark that Jack had some doubts whether he could hit the exact spot from which the light was visible. But he ventured to creep in toward the shore sufficiently near to descry the landmarks, and having at length assured himself on that point, he ran out again, and cruised about, keeping a keen lookout

for the light.

Two hours passed. It was near midnight, and he had almost given up hope of success when, to the southwest, he saw a gleam. At the moment the *Fury* was running up the Channel before the wind. The light evidently came from a vessel. But it had disappeared—no; there it was again; three times the same light was shown and extinguished.

"A signal, Babbage," said Jack. "Hope we shan't be seen."

"Better hold on our course, sir, then beat out. We've to get that there craft atween us and the shore."

Jack acted on the bo'sun's suggestion. In a few minutes the same signal was seen, this time full on the weather beam.

"They haven't answered her yet, sir," said Babbage, "and she won't sail in much closer, 'cos if she do, she won't see the light from the Folly, if so be 'tis that she's looking for."

"No. But I'm afraid she'll see us. She certainly will if we venture too close. Yet if we make too wide a sweep round her she may do whatever mischief she's about before we can make up on her. How far is she out, Babbage?"

"About five mile, I should say, sir."

"Well, I'm going to risk it. We'll run out beyond her, and hit the straight line between her and the Folly; we'll see then if any signaling is going on."

As soon as he thought he had made sufficient offing, Jack brought the *Fury* closer to the wind and crept toward the line he had mentioned. He no longer expected to see any signal from the vessel; the lantern would be turned away from him. But he looked anxiously toward the shore. Minute after minute passed, and yet he saw nothing. He began to fear that either he had lost his bearings and crossed the line while signaling had been going on between the tower and the vessel, or that there was no one at the Folly, after all, and both he and the commander of the other ship were to be disappointed.

Suddenly a light flashed out from shore, and remained gleaming brightly and steadily. So strong was it that Jack felt not a little anxiety lest it should show up the *Fury* to the vessel now between her and the land. But a moment's reflection reassured him. At this distance the light could have no illuminating power; and if he could not see the strange craft, it was not very likely that she could see him.

He was wondering what his next move had better be when the light disappeared. But only for a moment. Then it shone out again. Again it disappeared, and then for several seconds it alternately came and went, with regular intervals of very brief duration between the flashes. At last there was a longer interval; then the regular flashes began again.

"Heave to, Babbage!" cried Jack.

Springing down to the cabin, he returned in a few moments with a slip of paper, a pencil, and a shaded lantern. By the light of the last, Jack made a note. It would not have conveyed much or anything to an onlooker. It began— 17 — 3 — 18 — 2 —— 1 — 17 — 17 — 3 — 20 — 2 —— 16 —— 11 —— 15 — 1 — 20 — 3 — 17 — 2 ... and this succession of numbers and dashes grew until it completely filled the paper. After he had written for nearly half an hour the light disappeared altogether; he waited ten minutes on the chance of the flashes being resumed; then folded the paper, put it in his pocket, and ordered the men to crowd on all sail.

In a few seconds the *Fury* was running before the wind in the direction Jack thought the strange vessel might have taken. There was just a chance that he might overhaul and capture her, for he guessed that she was little if anything larger than the cutter, and in all likelihood the same lugger which had escaped Lieutenant Blake months before. But though he cruised about for a couple of hours he failed to find her.

"We'll give it up," he said at length to Babbage. "Now I want a little time to work out a puzzle. We mustn't be seen from Luscombe or the neighborhood, so we'll beat down Channel and make for Falmouth. That's far enough away to be out of reach of the Luscombe men or their spies; and I'll eat my boots if I haven't a pretty piece of news to report to Admiral Horniman to-morrow."

CHAPTER XIV
A DISCOVERY

About nine o'clock the next morning the *Fury* ran into Falmouth Harbor. Sending a boat's crew ashore to get fresh provisions, Jack closeted himself in the cabin, and, leaning his head on his hands, pored over the paper on which he had made the strange jottings the night before.

The numbers represented the flashes which had followed at intervals of a second; the short dashes represented intervals of five seconds, the long dashes intervals of twenty seconds. What was the explanation? It was clear that the signalers had a code; the flashes in some way spelt out words, and Jack guessed from the long time the message had taken that the words were spelt in full. How was he to set about finding out what they were? He had never in his life read a cipher, and for some minutes he was at a loss how to begin.

At last it struck him that the highest number he had written was 20. There were twenty-six letters in the alphabet, and some of the letters, such as Q, X, Z, were very seldom used. It was not unlikely that in a comparatively short message they would not be used at all. Each letter might be represented by a number. He wrote down the twenty-six letters of the alphabet, placing a number under each, from 1 to 26. Then he substituted the letters for the numbers on the paper, thus:

QCRB——AQQCTB——P——K——OATCQB

This was nonsense; the fact that most of the letters were consonants, and the one that most frequently occurred, Q, showed that he was on the wrong tack. He must try again. He was sure the long dashes represented the intervals between the words; what did the numbers stand for?

"I wonder what letter is most often used?" he thought. He wrote down the first thing that occurred to him, the first line of the song, *Heart of Oak*—

"Come, cheer up, my lads, 'tis to glory we steer."

"'Tis E!" he said to himself. "It occurs in four words out of ten. Now there are three words in the stuff that have 3 and 2 in them; depend upon it either 3 or 2 stands for E. Which is it? Why, E is the second vowel, and I is the third. Every word has one or two vowels in it, and two of these words have I in them. Perhaps the five vowels are numbered 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. Let's try that."

Recopying the alphabet, he found that on this system the message read—

PIQE——APPISE——N——H——MASIPE

"It looks a little more pronounceable, but hanged if I can make any sense of it. There's a French look about it. Why, what a dolt I am! If it's Fronsac who's signaling from the Folly, of course the message will be in French. Not that that helps matters!" he thought dolefully. "The French alphabet's the same as the English till you get to W, and W is number 23, which doesn't come in. Confound the thing!"

It was not until he had pondered and puzzled for more than an hour that Jack got any fresh light. Then it occurred to him that some of the less-used of the letters might have been dropped. After some thought, he left out K, Q, and all the letters after V, and renumbered those that were left. The first result of this change gave him a thrill. He spelt out the word "RISE."

"Now I'm on the scent!" he said to himself.

Next came the word "ARRIVE," then two initials—P, H, after them the word "NAVIRE."

"I can't make any sense of it at present. Let's go on."

At length the complete message was deciphered. It ran as follows—

RISE ARRIVE P H NAVIRE SOUS CONVOI E FREGATE PARTENT VENDREDI POUR JAMAIQUE SANDI COVE SAMEDI.

This was certainly clearer; it was decidedly French for the most part; but what did "RISE," "P," "H" and "E" mean? In a few minutes Jack jumped to the meaning of H and E; they were to be taken as numbers, not as letters; eleven merchant ships under convoy of two frigates were leaving on Friday for Jamaica. What about "RISE?" He remembered by and by that he had not begun to write until the signaling had been in progress for some time. "RISE" was probably the end of a word. What French word ended so? He put other letters in turn before the perplexing syllable: *brise, crise, grise, prise.* PRISE! Captured! He saw it at last. The signaler was informing the men of the lugger that a captured ship had arrived; P stood for Portsmouth; and Jack had no doubt that the ship meant was the *Glorieuse.*

All that was left of the message were the last three words: "SANDI COVE SAMEDI." These suggested that Sandy Cove was to be the scene of a cargo run on Saturday; but Jack had never heard of Sandy Cove. For the moment he gave no more thought to it; the first part of the message was of much greater importance than any smuggling business.

The mystery was becoming clear at last. No wonder the French showed a disconcerting knowledge of the movement of English ships! De Fronsac was a spy! So far from detesting the Monstair, he was actually in the Monstair's pay. His business was to supply the Monstair with information. And his cunning had found a means to avoid the perils that otherwise might have beset his task. He had made friends of the Luscombe smugglers, ostensibly cast in his lot with them, so that he might have opportunities of signaling information to the French. Jack saw through the scheme in a flash.

It was Wednesday. Obviously there was no time to be lost if the ships to sail on Friday were to be saved. The lugger would convey the message to one of the western ports of France, and the enemy's cruisers would come out in sufficiently large force to cut off the merchantmen and convoy. They could indeed afford to wait a few days, for even if the wind proved favorable for the sailing of the English

vessels, they would make such slow progress that a French fleet in pursuit could overhaul them speedily, and, knowing their destination, would probably have little difficulty in finding them. Admiral Horniman must be at once informed of the discovery.

The men having by this time returned from their errand on shore, Jack at once hoisted sail and ran back to Portsmouth, keeping well out in the Channel off Luscombe to avoid recognition. The admiral spent five minutes in blowing off a considerable amount of warm language when he heard the story.

"The merchantmen shall sail if the wind favors," he said, when he had recovered. "But I'll increase their escort, and the French shall get an unpleasant surprise, I promise 'em, if they act on the information they've got. And that Frenchman at Luscombe, I'll string him up to the yard-arm. I'll stop his signaling. I'll give orders for the tower to be occupied, and every one found there put in irons and clapped under hatches."

"I don't think you'll find any one there, sir," Jack ventured to suggest. "Fronsac's hand in glove with the smugglers, that's the meaning of 'Sandy Cove Saturday.' If any of our men are seen making a move in Luscombe direction the news will be signaled along the coast. They'd all clear out. Couldn't we play their own game, sir?"

"What d'you mean?"

"I don't exactly see all the way, sir; but what occurred to me was that we might do a little signaling and catch 'em in their own net."

"A capital notion! By gad, we'll do it! We'll have to let 'em make their run on Saturday?"

"Yes, sir, and arrange to signal from the tower next Wednesday."

"Very well. I leave it to you. You seem to have got some brains. Come to me if you want any assistance."

Before he returned to the *Fury* Jack scribbled a note to his mother announcing his safe return, and begging her on no account to let the news travel to Bastable Grange. It was better that for the present his cousins should be ignorant of his whereabouts.

On reaching the cutter he started on a run up the coast. He wished to keep away from Luscombe until Saturday. Though he had no intention of interfering with the smugglers' run on that day, he was anxious to witness it. For one thing, it would prove whether he had read the intercepted message aright; moreover, he particularly desired to find out who was engaged in the business. Knowing what a close watch was kept by the smugglers, he recognized that it would not be easy to learn what he wished; but his successes in France had tended to dim the memory of certain less fortunate incidents at Luscombe.

He now took Babbage and Turley into his confidence. When he mentioned

Sandy Cove he met with an unexpected check.

"There ain't no such place, sir—leastways, not on this coast," said Turley.

"Are you sure?" Jack insisted.

"Sartin, sir."

"That's strange. I don't think I read the word wrongly. I could be sure it was Sandi, the way a Frenchman would spell it. We'll have to go back to Portsmouth and get a chart of the coast; we may find something that looks like it."

But when he got a chart from the admiral he searched it in vain. There was no such name as Sandy Cove. He was convinced that he had not mistaken the signal; all that could be done now was to inquire in the neighborhood of Luscombe whether any of the inlets was locally known by that name. But with the exception of the Bastables he knew of no one whom he could trust, and he had a strong reason for avoiding the squire's house; nothing must be done that might put De Fronsac on his guard.

Then a thought of Gumley came to him—Joe Gumley, the one-legged sailor. He was Luscombe born; though he kept himself to himself, he would probably know the whereabouts of Sandy Cove. And he might safely be asked the question, for, never a friend to the smugglers, he had a distinct grudge against them since that day when his garden was ransacked, and he was the least likely of men to give them any information.

"Yes, I'll ask Gumley," thought Jack. "It can't do any harm."

It was afternoon when he steered the *Fury* into a sheltered cove some six miles west of Luscombe. He had chosen the spot because the coast there was rugged, and the shore uninhabited, and the cutter might lie safe from wind and wave, and from observation by too inquisitive people.

"Now, Babbage," said Jack as he stepped ashore, "I leave you in charge. Keep quiet, and be on your guard."

"Ay, ay, sir. And what if you don't come back, sir, like as 'twas six months ago t'other side of Luscombe?"

"Run back to Portsmouth and report to the admiral. But I'll be back, never fear."

He had exchanged his midshipman's hat for a wide-brimmed beaver, and wore a long cloak which made him look more like a magistrate's clerk than a sailor. Thus disguised, he walked over the beach, climbed the cliff, and struck into a path which would lead by a roundabout way into the Luscombe road. It was very unlikely that he would meet any of the Luscombe people in this direction; but Babbage's question reminded him of the unlucky end of a similar errand in the previous autumn, and he smiled somewhat grimly as he remembered his resolve to get even with his captors.

A white mist lay over the land, striking very cold against his face. But it

favored his chances of escaping notice if any one should meet him, and he was indeed glad of the obscurity when, in the driver of a gig that passed him, he thought he recognized the bulky form of Mr. Gudgeon. Save for this solitary traveler, the road was quite deserted, and he arrived without adventure at Gumley's cottage.

He looked over the fence. No one was to be seen. Though it was already almost dark, owing to the mist, no light appeared in the cottage window.

"Ahoy O!" he called, without raising his voice, making a trumpet of his hands so that the sound would carry. There was no answer.

He rapped on the fence, calling "Ahoy O!" again. Still there was no reply.

"Here goes!" he said to himself. Stripping off his cloak he folded it and laid it on the nails, then clambered over and hastened to the door.

"I say, Gumley, let me in," he said, rapping.

"Who be 'ee? This bean't no inn."

"It's me, Gumley—Jack Hardy, you know."

"Tell that to the marines. Mr. Hardy's far away. Get along with 'ee."

"Don't be a jackass, Gumley. Open the door. Comely will know me if you don't."

"'Ware dog, then, and if his teeth jine in your legs 'tis your own doing, whoever ye be!"

There was a rattling of the bolts. The door was opened. The bulldog rushed out, and with a growl of pleasure began to rub his nose against Jack's trousers.

"There you are, you see," he said, stepping into the cottage, to find Gumley standing on guard with a blunderbuss.

"Well, sir, this is a rare surprise. I seemed to know your voice, but thought for sure it must be your ghost. Never did I expect to see you no more in this world, sir, and right glad I be."

"So am I, Gumley. But fasten up again, and light your lamp. I want to talk to you."

"But how did ye escape, sir?" asked Gumley, as he shot the bolt and led the way to his kitchen.

"'Tis too long a story to tell you now. Another time. But why, man, what's the matter with you? You look very down in the mouth."

"Ay, and so I feels, sir. What with worry and the rheumatics I feel I be not long for this world. I've bin twisted up with it all winter, sir. Since I sold they artichokes to Squire Bastable I've bin as useless as an old hulk. In course, some folks might think me lucky having only one leg to get the rheumatics in; but chok' it all, sir, the pain's just as bad in the wooden leg as 'tis in t'other; ay, and worse, 'cos I can doctor my natural leg, whereas not all the surgeons of King Jarge hisself could do this old stump any good."

"'Tis hard lines, indeed. But what's been worrying you?"

"Sit ye down, sir, and I'll tell 'ee about it."

CHAPTER XV
TAR AND FEATHERS

"Fust and foremost, sir," said Gumley, having lit his pipe, "my poor old moke is dead. Ah! he served me well for many a year, and carried tons and tons o' garden stuff into Wynport. But now he's gone, and if so be I can do any digging and planting this spring I'll have no one to carry my vegetables to market."

"'Twas old age, I suppose. He looked on his last legs when I saw him first on the Luscombe road six months ago."

"No, sir, 'twarn't old age. If he had been left alone he'd have lived to be as old as Methusalum. No, 'twarn't old age, nor overwork neither."

"What was it, then?"

Gumley hesitated. He looked at the locked door and the shuttered window, got up and went to the back door, bending his head forward as if listening. Then he returned to his chair, and, between two puffs, said, under his breath—

"'Twere p'ison, sir."

"Poison!"

"Ay, sir. Jerry—so I called him, sir—were sound as a ship's bell one night, sir; next morning he were dead as mutton."

"But how do you know 'twas poison?"

"'Cos that very same day Comely was took bad and well-nigh went to glory, too. Where Comely goes, Gumley follers; my rheumatiz were very bad that day."

"'Tis plain you've got enemies, Gumley. I'm sorry for you. Comely looks all right now, at any rate. We'll see what we can do to get you a new donkey. But I mustn't waste time. I'll tell you what I've come for. Do you know where Sandy Cove is?"

Gumley gave a start, and looked round the room again with that uneasy glance which had attracted Jack's attention before.

"Axing your pardon, sir, would ye say why and wherefore you want to know that?"

"I don't think I can—at all events, not yet. But I'll tell you one thing. I'm on the king's business, and that will be enough for an old king's man, eh, Gumley?"

"True, sir, God save the king! All the same, I'd rather ye axed your question

of some one else."

"There is no one else. Come, Gumley, out with it. What is the mystery?"

Gumley still hesitated. He scratched his poll, rubbed the dog's head, stirred an imaginary fire with his wooden leg, and once more glanced uneasily at the window.

"This won't do," said Jack. "Joe Gumley, I call upon you, in the king's name, to answer this question at once. Where is Sandy Cove?"

"If you puts it like that, sir, as a king's man—leastways, I was afore I got this plaguy leg—I'm bound to make a clean breast of it. Sandy Cove is the name what the smugglers give to that there little chine just below Mr. Gudgeon's farm."

"Ah! And how came you to know that?"

"Well, sir, if truth must be told, in the king's name, I were a smuggler myself once, afore I became a king's man."

"I see! And the smugglers are down on you, are they, because you won't join 'em again?"

"How can I, sir? Once a king's man, always a king's man—to say nothing of the wooden leg. I served his Majesty for many a year, sir, and I bean't a-going to turn agen him. Not but what 'tis main hard, for smuggling's an uncommon fine trade—if so be I can make bold to speak free afore a king's officer."

"I won't peach," said Jack, laughing. "Speak freely? Of course you can. And you'd better tell me all about it now. You look as uneasy as if you were sitting on pins."

"So I be, sir, and that's the truth. No longer ago than last Wednesday, Mr. Goodman he chanced to come upon a string of carts carrying smuggled goods from Luscombe to Wickham Ferrers. He nabbed the whole lot, sir, horses and all. And my old mates got the notion into their noddles that 'twas me as blabbed—me, sir, what knowed no more about it than that there innocent dog. But they believe it; and there 'tis. They swore they'd make me smart for it, and I dursn't stir out o' my door for fear I get a good crack on the nob or something just as awk'ard."

"I don't understand why they're so down on you. You keep yourself to yourself, as you told me. Why should they think 'twas you split on them?"

"I make it out this way, sir. I'm a' old smuggler, and know all the secrets o' the trade. I'm a' old king's man, too. They don't square. I won't jine my old mates, and they, being a bit wooden-headed, thinks I'm agen 'em. I bean't agen 'em, only I bean't for 'em. I can't go agen the king, nor I can't go back on my old mates; but bless your soul, *they* don't see what I mean when I says I keep myself to myself."

"Well, you can't run with the hare and hunt with the hounds. But what's that?"

He sprang up from his chair and went toward the shuttered window. Comely went to the door, growling. From without, muffled by the distance, came the tramp of heavy feet along the road, mingled with the hum of voices.

"'Tis come, sir," sighed Gumley, leaning back in his chair resignedly. "Here they be at last. I knowed this would be the end of it. They said they'd tar and feather me, and they be come to do it."

"Two can play at that game, Gumley. I'd sooner not be recognized now, but I'll not leave you to deal with 'em single-handed."

"I take it very kind o' you, sir, but there's no call for you to be mixed up in it. If they mean to get in, in they'll get, sure enough; and ye'll only land yourself in a nasty rumpus, and do no good. Thank ye kindly. I'll let ye out by the back door afore they come, and me and Comely'll do what we can, for chok' it all, it bean't in human nature to be tarred and feathered without a bit of a scrimmage."

"No, no. If you're going to make a fight of it, I'll lend a hand. We're well armed. You've your blunderbuss and a cutlass; I've two pistols and a dirk; and our good friend Comely here has excellent teeth, I'll be bound."

At this moment a loud shout was heard from the road, followed by an insistent knocking on the gate. Gumley stumped up the rickety stairs to the floor above, threw open the windows looking on the garden, and shouted:

"Who be you, and what do 'ee want?"

"We want you, Joe Gumley," came the hoarse answer, "and we're gwine to have 'ee, too."

"I bean't deaf, Tom Berry, so ye needn't bust your fog-horn. What do 'ee want wi' me?"

"We'll show 'ee. You bin peaching, you dirty mean sneaker. Come down along, and we'll give 'ee a fair trial afore the men as used to be your mates."

"No, thank 'ee, Tom. Whoever says I bin peaching says a lie, and as for trial, why, I bean't a fool, I bean't. If I wants trying I'll go afore a justice o' the peace like Squire Bastable, or a judge and jury at the 'sizes, and not afore Tom Berry or Bill Widdicombe or any other mumble-chopped chaw-bacon. See then, I don't want to use hard words to old ship-mates o' mine, but—"

Jack heard no more, for Gumley's words were drowned by a volley of shouts and curses from the men below. He let down the window with a bang.

"They be coming over, sir," he called to Jack. "'Tis all hands to repel boarders. They're mounting on balks of wood to 'scape the nails. Now they're over. And they be split into two parties, half a dozen each; and one's coming straight for the front door; t'other's gone round to the back. I be coming, sir, I be coming."

By the time he reached Jack's side the men had begun to batter simultaneously at both the doors with the balks of wood which, knowing Gumley, they had brought with them, evidently anticipating resistance. The men at the front

door were protected by a narrow porch; those at the back were fully exposed; and Jack saw that unless something were done at once to check them they would soon be able to break a way in, for the doors were not very substantial pieces of timber, and could not long stand the heavy battering to which they were now being subjected.

He stood with Gumley and the dog at the front door.

"What's your blunderbuss loaded with, Gumley?" he said.

"Small shot, sir."

"Then I tell you what we'll do. I'll fling the door open; you fire at their legs; then we'll all three charge 'em. We've only half a dozen to deal with; the men at the back will stop work when they hear the row. They'll come rushing round. Be ready to get back and haul the dog off. I'll keep my pistols in reserve; the less firing the better; we don't want all Luscombe here. Lend me a muffler, quick!"

He pulled the brim of his hat down over his face, turned up the collar of his cloak, and wrapped the muffler Gumley gave him closely round his chin. All the time the men were hammering at the door, and Comely was moving restlessly about, uttering deep growls.

"Standby, Gumley!"

Jack quickly slipped the bolts, threw the door open, and dodged back. There was a blinding flash, a roar, and yells of pain and rage from the smugglers, who, crouching in the porch around their battering-ram, received the crammed charge of the blunderbuss about their legs. They dropped the timber, and gave back a little. Before they had recovered from their surprise, the bulldog, snarling with fury, was among them, and behind him came Jack and Gumley, who laid about them doughtily with cutlass and dirk—using, however, the flat, for neither wished to do any serious hurt unless they were hard-pressed.

Amazement was now turned to confusion and fright. The intruders had no thought but to hobble out of the way of these furious combatants. But as they pushed one another toward the garden they were met by their comrades from the rear, whom the shout and the cries had interrupted, as Jack expected. Their arrival only doubled the confusion. Amid the babel of shouts they could hear nothing of what had happened. Some of the men were still yelling under the blows of the dirk and cutlass; and when one howled "Ho! Hi! Help! The dog's got me!" they were seized with uncontrollable panic; and with one consent bolted down the garden and scrambled over the fence, with no small damage to their nether garments from the nails, never pausing until they perceived that no pursuit was attempted.

One man, however, was left on the field. In the entrance to the porch lay a big fellow groaning. Comely held him fast by the leg. Gumley hastened to him and tried to release him from the dog's teeth, but, finding that impossible,

he dragged dog and man bodily into the cottage, slammed the door, and bolted it. Jack was already inside.

"Let go, Comely, old boy," said his master, stooping to release the man, who, half dead with fright, lay groaning where Gumley had dropped him. "Why, what are ye bellowing like a sea-serpent for?" he added. "His teeth never went further than your leggings! Who be ye for a chicken-hearted—why, dash my buttons, 'tis Bill Gudgeon! Oh, Billy, what a' example to set your good feyther! Oh, my goodness, won't he be took bad with the flutters when he hears this! Ahoy, Mr.——! Avast there, Joe Gumley, blowed if you wasn't just a-going to put your foot in it. Billy, my son, you come along o' me."

He hauled the trembling youth into the kitchen, and pushed him into a chair, where he sat immovable, in mortal terror of the bulldog, which stood by, fixing him with his thirsty eyes.

Meanwhile Jack had gone to the upper window to see what had become of the enemy. They were out of sight, but when he opened the window he guessed by their voices that they were in conference just beyond the fence.

"Ay, and more'n Gumley!"

In the still air of the frosty March evening the hoarse whisper came clearly to Jack's ears:

"In course; there was his dog."

"I knows that. But I seed another man, all in black, with his hat over his eyes and his face all swaddled up: Goodman hisself, maybe."

"Well, I be gwine home along. I've got a score o' pellets somewhere about my legs, and they'll p'ison my blood less I pick 'em out soon."

"Ay true, and we'll go lame for a month or more. Chok' it all! Who'd ha' thowt old Joe would ha' bin so fierce!"

As they were moving away, a gig rattled up and stopped.

"'Tis Mr. Gudgeon, so 'tis," Jack heard a rough voice say.

"Not so loud!" was the hasty answer. "What luck, lads?"

"None at all, and be hanged to it. We've not got nowt but a trouncing, Mr. Gudgeon."

"Lower, speak lower, man. What happened?"

"Blunderbuss and cutlass and dog's teeth; that's what happened, Mr. Gudgeon, as your boy Bill could tell 'ee. Why, where be the lad?"

"Been and creeped home along, by the look o't," said another man. "He bean't here. There's blood for 'ee! There's spirit! What a bold-hearted first-born you have got, to be sure, Mr. Gudgeon!"

"Hush, man! Here, come along. I can take four or five of 'ee in the gig, and you can tell me the whole story as we go."

The gig rattled away; the men for whom there was not room shambled

after; and Jack smiled as he returned to the kitchen.

"There, Comely, watch him!" Gumley was saying. "I be gwine to look around the garden, sir, to make sure none on 'em be left."

Jack made no reply, but stood at the door while Gumley stumped round the inclosure. He came back by and by grinning.

"They be all gone, sir, all but this." He held up a pail out of which the handle of a brush was sticking, and a bundle of feathers. "'Twas by the back door, sir."

"Ah! I've a notion. Shut the door and come along, Gumley."

Keeping his feathers well covered, and deepening his voice to the lowest pitch possible, Jack addressed the prisoner, who sat in shivering stillness, his eyes fixed on the vigilant dog.

"Now, Bill Gudgeon, you shall choose. Spend the night with the dog, and go before Squire Bastable to-morrow; or use this brush you came to use—on yourself. 'Twould be a pity to waste such excellent tar."

"And the feathers be uncommon soft," added Gumley.

The victim lifted his eyes for one moment, but said never a word.

"Come, come, make up your mind. The dog—or the tar brush."

Still the lad hesitated. Fright seemed to have tied his tongue.

"Very well, the dog, then. If he goes for you in the night you'd better sing out."

"Watch him, Comely!"

The dog acknowledged the order with a growl of satisfaction, and Jack and Gumley moved toward the door.

"Stop, measter! Stop, Joe Gumley!" cried the unhappy youth, finding his voice at last. "Not the dog! For gracious goodness' sake, not the dog."

"Off with your coat then," said Jack, finding some difficulty in keeping his voice at the proper profundity.

"Ay, or your good feyther'll have the flutters worse'n ever," said Gumley. "Such a good coat, too good to spoil."

Bill Gudgeon removed his coat, always eying the dog, which stood watching with intelligent appreciation. Then Gumley handed him the brush.

"A little on the nose to begin with," said Jack.

Forthwith Bill's nose was black.

"Now the cheeks; no—a little more, if you please—yes, that's right. Now a dab across the forehead: don't spare the tar, there's plenty more in the pail—yes, that's capital! Now a few feathers, Gumley."

The trembling lad stuck the feathers, as they were handed to him, on the glistening tar. He groaned once, but Comely's echoing growl silenced him and made him hurry.

"Now I think he'll do," said Jack at last.

”Beautiful, sir! Whoever seed a better job this side of the line?”

”Listen, Bill Gudgeon! You’ll tell your father that if Mr. Gumley is molested again, you and your mates will be hauled up before Squire Bastable and sent to cool your heels in the lock-up. You can go!”

Bill took his coat, rose from the chair, and sidled to the door, his eyes never leaving the dog. He was gone!

Jack sat down and laughed quietly.

”I think he’s had enough, Gumley. Now I must go. I’ll see you again soon.”

CHAPTER XVI
A RUN AT SANDY COVE

It took Jack much longer in the darkness to return to the *Fury* than it had taken to reach the cottage, and he found that Babbage was becoming uneasy.

”All safe, men?” he said.

”Ay, ay, sir. And you, sir?”

”Right as a trivet. Heave the anchor, boys; I want to be fifty miles away by the morning.”

He required a little time for thinking out a plan for turning to account his discovery of the signaler’s code, and meanwhile it was desirable to keep out of the smugglers’ reach. Before dawn he dropped anchor at a little fishing village fifty miles west of Luscombe. It was a remote and secluded spot, and there was little chance of the *Fury’s* presence coming to the ears of the Luscombe folk for some days.

”I’m going ashore again, Babbage. Lie quietly here. I may be away a couple of days.”

Still disguised, he went into the village, hired a gig, and drove thirty miles in the Luscombe direction to the village of Middleton, about ten miles from the sea. He put up at the *Pig and Whistle*, scribbled a note to the riding-officer and despatched it by a horseman to Wynport.

”SIR” (he wrote),—

”Be good enough to meet me here this evening. Ask at the inn for Mr. Loveday.

The matter is urgent, and the business the king's.

"**Yours truly**, "JACK HARDY."

At six o'clock Mr. Goodman appeared.

"I am here, Mr. Hardy, but 'tis most inconvenient. I take it rather hard that a man of my age—"

"Exactly, Mr. Goodman. I'm not so old as you, and I should have come to you if I hadn't good reasons for keeping clear of the coast folk. I've information that the smugglers intend to make a run to-morrow."

"Is that all? Why, I often get such information, and nine times out of ten it is false. Besides, what's the good of knowing that a run is to be made if you don't know where?"

"I do know where."

"Oh, in that case leave it to me. I'll bag the whole gang. There's a score of rascals at Luscombe I'd like to hang—ay, and will, too. If your news is correct, 'twill be pretty soon, I promise you."

"Just so, Mr. Goodman. But meanwhile I've come to arrange that the run may be made without interference."

"What! Do I hear ye aright? A king's officer name such a thing to me! 'Pon my soul and body, Mr. Hardy, I'm surprised at you. 'Twill be my duty—a painful duty, Mr. Hardy—to report the matter. Never in the whole seventeen years of my service have—"

"Quite so, Mr. Goodman," Jack interrupted. "But Admiral Horniman thinks that in this case the king's service requires this little departure from the ordinary course. And 'twill only make the capture of your rascals more certain in the end. We have to meet them with their own weapons—match ruse with ruse; and that's why, with the admiral's approval, I want you and your land-guard to help me."

Jack smiled so pleasantly and spoke with such an air of deference that the riding-officer, taking what he said as a compliment to his own astuteness, thawed.

"A capital idea, Mr. Hardy! Exactly; play their own game. The admiral was always a man of sense. But what do you propose?"

Then followed a long conversation, in which Jack explained as much of his plan as he thought would suffice. Mr. Goodman was captivated with the notion, and left by and by in high good-humor with Jack, himself, and everybody.

Jack did not know the time of the intended run. It would certainly not be before dark, so when he left the inn on the following afternoon he timed his departure so as to arrive near Luscombe just after darkness had fallen. The distance was nearly twenty miles across country. He drove some ten miles directly

toward Luscombe, then struck inland for another seven miles, alighted at a cottage recommended by the riding-officer, and left the gig in charge of the owner, a trusty man, saying that he would meet him at the same place at daybreak next morning.

From the cottage to Luscombe the distance was about five miles. He knew the lay of the land, and, following unfrequented paths, came to the edge of Congleton's Hollow in about an hour and a half. Skirting this cautiously, he made his way along the edge of the stream that had formed the chine he now knew as Sandy Cove.

It was a good mile to the sea. Every now and then he stopped and listened, to make sure that he was not being followed; hereabouts he had come unexpectedly upon Gudgeon and De Fronsac. As he came near Gudgeon's farm he went with redoubled caution. He heard a sand-piper whistling; a few gulls screeched above his head; save for these there was silence.

He remembered having noticed, in the course of his rambles with Arthur, a large evergreen bush growing on a shelf of rock some distance above the bed of the stream. That seemed to him the very place at which to post himself, for while he could get from it a good view of what was happening on the shore only a few yards below, it was so thick, and so situated in relation to its surroundings, that he would run little danger there of being observed.

With some difficulty he clambered up to the bush. Looking round to make sure that he was not espied, he forced his way into it, and waited. The time passed slowly. It was a black March evening, with a nipping wind, and in spite of his cloak Jack felt bitterly cold. Hour after hour drawled away, and there had been no sound. He wondered whether the run had been abandoned. Or had he, after all, made a mistake?

At last, when, feeling numbed and depressed, he had almost resolved to leave the spot, he heard voices from just above—on the zigzag path from Gudgeon's farm to the sea.

"Send round the word; she'll be in in ten minutes. There's no preventives on the prowl, or we'd have heard afore now from Totley Point or Laxted Cove. Aha! Goodman and his joes have never yet got past Peter Bunce and Jan Derriman. Bill, a' believe I've got some o' they pellets in my calf yet."

"More fool 'ee for meddling wi' old Joe."

One of the men hurried down the path, while the other returned to the top of the cliff. Listening intently, Jack heard the man's footsteps sounding ever more faintly as they receded in the direction of the village.

He was right, then! This was Sandy Cove, and here the run was to be made. He felt impatient for the work to begin. The sky was very dark, there was no moon—smugglers avoided moonlit nights—but the air was so clear that

he hoped to see well enough for his purpose.

Ah! there were dark figures moving quietly about the beach below. The men had taken off their boots, it appeared, and there—yes! It was the black shape of a vessel slowly approaching the shore. The sails were run down with scarce a sound; the lugger hove to within a few yards of the cove; then, on a gangway invisible to Jack, the smugglers went to and fro, those coming shoreward bent under heavy burdens.

Jack watched eagerly. The carriers brought their loads up the chine, and disappeared along the same path that he himself had followed a few hours before. It seemed but a few minutes; then he heard a voice say "That's the last;" the lugger stood out to sea, and Sandy Cove was as quiet as though nothing had happened.

Slipping out of his hiding-place, Jack very cautiously followed the last man, who carried no load and seemed to be in some authority over the rest. Jack could never venture near enough to see his features, nor even to get a complete view of his form. He tracked him to Congleton's Hollow, and there was compelled to pause and dodge some of the carriers who, having finished their work, were making their way homeward across the fields. Waiting a little while until all seemed safe, he crept across the Hollow to the summer-house where he had found the iron steps. It was from this that the carriers had come. Clearly the smuggled goods had been deposited there. He searched as thoroughly as he could in the darkness, but could find no trace of them.

"'Tis a job for daylight," he said to himself. "Now for my tramp back."

He was dead tired when he reached the cottage where he had left his gig. The cottager awoke at his knock, put the horse in, and drove him at once to Middleton, where he slept heavily for three or four hours before Mr. Goodman arrived in the morning.

"Well, Mr. Hardy, I hope you spotted the rascals as we arranged."

"I saw the run," replied Jack, with an inward chuckle at the riding-officer's "we," "and a precious cold night it was. They've hidden the stuff somewhere in old Congleton's summer-house."

"Have they indeed? I'll seize it at once."

"No, no, Mr. Goodman, don't be in a hurry. You might send a few of your men to Luscombe, telling them nothing, of course. If they're seen about there for a day or two it will prevent the smugglers from removing their stuff until it is too late. And if you don't mind, send a messenger to Waddon for me, and tell Babbage to remain where he is till further orders."

"I will, Mr. Hardy. By George! I hope Admiral Horniman will be pleased with the way we are carrying out his plans."

Jack smiled as the riding-officer took his leave,—Mr. Goodman knew only half the plan; Admiral Horniman none of it.

The most important part of Jack's task was still before him. He had determined to be in the turret room of Congleton's Folly on Wednesday evening; how was he to get there? The removable steps were no doubt being used by the signaler; but it was not likely that they were still hidden in the same place. De Fronsac, of course, would believe Jack to be safe in a French prison; but the last hiding-place having been so easily discovered, he would certainly choose a new one. Yet, if the tower was to be entered, steps of some kind must be had.

Jack spent a quiet Sunday, and early on Monday morning drove a few miles inland to another village, where he entered the smithy and asked the smith if he could make him quickly a dozen iron loops with a tail to them.

"Well, maybe I might," said the smith, "if you showed me the pattern."

"Here you are," replied Jack, drawing a rough sketch of the article he wanted with a piece of charcoal on the side of the forge.

"And what might that be for, measter?" the smith inquired. "A cur'ous looking objeck."

"Yes, isn't it? 'Tis for a game I'm going to play—quite a new thing in these parts."

"Well, to be sure! And how thick do 'ee want 'em?"

Jack could only guess the dimensions. He tried to recall the size of the holes in the wall of the *Folly*, and gave the smith a thickness which he hoped would turn out within the mark. The steps were easily made when the man had grasped the idea. Getting them wrapped up, Jack drove back to Middleton, and thence to Waddon, where Babbage and the crew of the *Fury* were unfeignedly glad to see him once more.

"'Tis long waiting when you don't know, sir," said Babbage. "As brother Sol used to say: 'Wait not, want not,' and true it is, though so plain."

During the rest of Monday and all Tuesday the *Fury* cruised down Channel, merely to kill time. The men wondered why their young commander did not sail out to sea and do some scouting work, if nothing else, but Jack did not wish to run any risks; besides, he was busily occupied in drawing up a message in the cipher used by the signaler at the Folly.

On Wednesday morning the *Fury* put in once more at Waddon, and Jack left again. These mysterious absences were somewhat trying to Babbage's equanimity.

"But there," he said, talking the matter over with Turley, "to gentlemen of eddication, I s'pose, our heads—yourn an' mine, Turley—be only like so many turnips."

"Mr. Babbage?" Turley's tone was one of surprise and remonstrance.

"Wot?"

"Not Turnips."

"Why not?"

"Why, sir, 'cos they have Tops."

"Not when they're mashed, Turley, wi' butter, or dripping for cheapness."

CHAPTER XVII
DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

Unconscious of the bo'sun's melancholy reflections, Jack was hurrying toward the village. There he again hired the gig, and drove once more over the same road, leaving Middleton so as to reach the neighborhood of Luscombe about dusk. With him he took the iron steps.

He made his way with great caution to Gumley's cottage. This time he did not hail the old sailor from the roadway, but got over the fence and tapped at the window. When he was admitted, he announced without preliminary the object of his visit.

"I want you to come and lend a hand, Gumley."

"Might I axe how and wherefore, sir?"

"I'll tell you that as we go along."

"'Tis not to go back on old messmates, sir?"

"Your old messmates have gone back on you. But 'tis not that, and, anyway, I call upon you, Joe Gumley, in the king's name—"

"Oh, if you put it like that, sir, I don't axe no questions. The king's name is enough for me."

"I know it. Come along, and bring Comely with you."

The three set out, Gumley curiously eying Jack's bundle.

"We're bound for Congleton's Hollow, Gumley."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Any news since I saw you last?"

"Nary much, sir. Young Bill Gudgeon haven't bin seen since. And the preventives have bin paying surprise visits down in the village."

"That's well. The smugglers won't have dared to remove their cargo."

"Ah! I knowed as how they'd made another run."

"How did you know that? You keep yourself to yourself, you know."

"True, sir. But old Gudgeon's chimbleys do be uncommon foul, to be sure."

"What's that to do with it?"

"Why, sir, I were thinking that's the only thing I've seed to-day. But he'll soon be leaving off fires. Be you gwine to the Hollow by the lane, sir?"

"Yes. 'Tis a little longer way round, but I don't want to meet anybody."

"True, sir. Comely will give us good notice if any one is about."

They came at length to the Hollow. Jack led the way through the trees to within a hundred yards of the tower, and searched the neighborhood thoroughly to make sure that no one was on the watch.

"Now, Gumley, I'm going up to the room at the top. Not through the door, but up the outside with the help of these steps." He opened his bundle. "See, they fit into holes in the wall. Are you sailor enough still to come up after me and bring down the steps when I've got to the top?"

"Try me, sir. True, I've only one leg, but that's sound; and my arms—look at 'em, sir."

"That's all right. When you've got the steps, hide in the bushes with Comely until you hear me whistle. Then you'll come and take charge of a man I think you'll find here."

"Ay, ay, sir."

Jack mounted, Gumley after him. The latter removed the steps and disappeared into the thicket, while Jack closed the trap-door, and sat on the rickety chair, waiting.

Hours passed. It was very cold. Jack knew that De Fronsac would not leave the Grange until the family were asleep; he could only wait, wrapped up in his cloak, walking about quietly at intervals to keep himself awake.

At last he heard a slight click outside. Instantly he concealed himself in the hole behind the bedstead, leading to the staircase. To insure the full success of his plan it was necessary that the signaler should make his preparations undisturbed.

He heard some one enter the room by the trap-door, and immediately afterward saw a gleam of light. Peeping out, he recognized with a thrill that the intruder was De Fronsac, as he had expected, and that he was alone. He had lit the lamp, the glass of which was turned away from the window; the long roll of cardboard and a pistol lay beside it. Then he went to the window and looked out to sea. He was evidently waiting for a signal from the lugger.

"*Peste!*" he muttered, slapping his shoulders. "*Comme il fait froid! Il est en retard. Quand viendra-t-il?*"

Pistol in hand, Jack stepped quietly out of his hiding-place. De Fronsac started, swung round, and stared with amazement, for there, in the light of the lamp, stood the boy he had kidnapped, and a pistol was pointed full at his head.

"Yes, Monsieur de Fronsac, it is I. Stay where you are; if you make a movement I shall fire."

The statement was so cool and matter-of-fact that it appeared to carry con-

[image]

"If you make a movement, I shall fire"

viction, for De Fronsac arrested his first instinctive movement toward his own pistol. Still covering him with his weapon, Jack advanced to the table, turned the lamp so that the light fell on the Frenchman, and lifted the pistol. De Fronsac said not a word. There was no smile upon his face now, but his eyes gleamed, and Jack knew that he was watching for the slightest opening. De Fronsac felt the rope for a spy tightening relentlessly round his neck.

He glanced toward the lamp, within a few feet of him.

"No, Monsieur De Fronsac," said Jack, guessing his wish to knock it over: "it really is not possible. You would not live to reach the table. You will now go through the trap-door and descend the steps, as quickly and quietly as you can."

The man hesitated; Jack saw his fingers work nervously.

"I shall count three, Monsieur. At the word *three* I fire. One—"

De Fronsac moved sidewise toward the trap-door. At the opening he again paused, and appeared to be about to speak. But Jack gave him no opportunity.

"Again, Monsieur: one—two—"

De Fronsac pulled up the trap, and slowly lowered himself on to the top-most step.

"Remember, Monsieur," said Jack, before his head disappeared, "if you make the least unnecessary sound I shall send a bullet after you."

The gleaming eyes disappeared. Step by step the Frenchman descended. When he was a third of the way down Jack whistled gently. By the time De Fronsac reached the ground Gumley and Comely were one on each side of him.

"Evening, sir," said Gumley. "Orders are that you come along wi' me—and the dog. Watch him, Comely."

A deep growl caused De Fronsac to start.

"Harmless as a lamb, sir, while you goes steady. Bean't 'ee, Comely?"

The answer was another growl. They moved away, the dog keeping a few inches behind De Fronsac's heels, Gumley with a naked cutlass walking at his right hand.

Even before they were out of sight Jack had returned to the table. There he had noticed a sheet of paper. It was covered with figures—no doubt the message that De Fronsac was preparing to send.

"Wonder if there's time to make it out!" thought Jack. He looked out to sea; there was no signal light. With the aid of his key he scribbled below the figures

the corresponding letters, and read:

NELSON A SUIVRE VILLENEUVE 9 NAVIRE 2 FREGATE SORTENT DE P MERCREDI BINSEY COVE LUNDI.

"A clever villain!" thought Jack. "Who would ever have imagined that a French spy would be mixed up with English smugglers! And I wonder how he gets his information about Nelson's doings, and the sailings of English convoys? Well, his friends will have rather a different message to-night."

He took from his pocket a piece of paper, and made some alterations in the figures he had written in the cabin of the *Fury*.

"If they like news of Nelson, they shall have some, invented on the spot!"

Every now and then while writing he glanced out to sea to make sure that he did not miss the expected signal. It was nearly an hour after he had completed his message that he caught the three successive flashes. Then he fixed the cardboard, pointed it through the round hole in the curtain, and signaled:

NELSON MOURANT A PALERMO NAVIRE BRISE PLAGE FOWEY CONVOI PETITE CHALOUPE BINSEY COVE LUNDI.

The message completed, he extinguished the light and descended, removing the steps as he went. The other set had apparently been taken by Gumley. Wrapping up the original dozen he started for his long walk back.

He had not gone many paces when he heard hurried footsteps behind. Turning round with a start, his hand on his pistol, he was amazed to hear his name called.

"Jack!"

The next instant a slight figure sprang toward him.

"Oh, Jack! I'm jolly glad, I am! I thought it was you, but couldn't be sure till you came down. Oh, I *am* glad!"

"Well, don't make a to-do, youngster. And what brings you out at this time of night?"

"Why, didn't you tell me months ago to keep an eye on Fronsac? Well, I've done it. I've followed him several nights—not often, 'cos mostly I'm sleepy; but I've never caught him. He always disappeared, and I never knew where he went till to-night. And I shouldn't have known now if I hadn't seen him climb down the Folly and go off with old Gumley. Oh, it was fine! My eye! wasn't he scared at the dog! But what's it all mean, Jack? I say, you'll come along home, won't

you? They'll all be so jolly glad to see you."

"Not to-night, Arthur. I hope I shall come to see you all in a day or two. But not a soul in the village must know yet that I'm back, and the maids couldn't keep it in. Tell your father I'm here; and tell him that De Fronsac is a dangerous spy. We've got him safe now, but they mustn't suspect in the village. If any questions are asked you can say that he has gone away for a few days, and will be back on Monday night."

"Oh, I say, will they hang him?"

"Of course. Now cut and run; you'll catch your death of cold, and the squire will want to hang me."

"Not he. He likes you. So does—"

"Cut!" said Jack, putting an end to Arthur's confidences. The boy disappeared; Jack resumed his walk, and arrived dead tired at the inn at Middleton.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE BATTLE OF BINSEY COVE

"Ah! Patience is a monument, as brother Sol used to say. Tombstone I'd call it, 'cos this here waiting about in the cold'll be the death o' me."

"True, Mr. Babbage. It bean't Christian, let alone decent, to keep us poor fellers waiting here."

"Avast your jabber, Mudge. It bean't for the likes of you to grumble when 'tis a matter o' dooty, and love your neighbor as yourself. 'Tis a wonderful fine night, coldish, nat'ral for the time o' year. Mr. Hardy didn't make the weather, lads."

Ben Babbage, with a boat's crew from the *Fury*, lay off Totley Point, about a mile and a half west of Luscombe. It was about ten at night. They had been for two hours resting on their oars. A steady breeze blew from the west-sou'west, and a slight swell rocked the boat gently. Save for an occasional pull to keep her head to the wind the men had nothing to do except wait and watch; and Babbage, however he might grumble himself, was the last to permit grumbling in others.

But it was certainly a tax on their patience to wait hour after hour for a lugger which was slow to appear. Everybody was tired of inaction, and hoping for a signal of recall, when a shape loomed out of the blackness, passed on the starboard side of the boat, about two cable lengths away, and disappeared

shoreward.

Babbage lifted a dark lantern from the bottom of the boat; Turley and Mudge stretched a sheet of tarpaulin between him and the shore. Then Babbage, facing out to sea, and keeping the lantern at such an elevation that its light should not fall on the water, rapidly opened and closed the shutter, sending one flash to windward.

"Things is a-going to happen, mates," he said, as he replaced the lantern. "The owdacious moment is at hand, as brother Sol used to say."

Again they waited, but now with keen expectation. In ten minutes, which seemed hours, a dark shape appeared in the offing. Babbage making a bell of his hands, sent a low whistle across the water; an order was given on the approaching vessel; the steersman put up the helm, and in a few seconds the other was alongside.

"All well, Babbage?" said Jack, in a low tone.

"Ay, ay, sir."

A rope was thrown from the cutter and made fast in the bows of the boat. Another brief command; the steersman put the helm down, and the cutter, with the boat in tow, followed in the wake of the lugger. At nightfall she had crept in to within two miles of the shore, and sending out the long-boat as a scout, had hove to, lest her mast should betray her.

In ten minutes the cliffs were dimly visible, and Jack recognized the jagged gap at the top that served as a landmark in steering for the cove. The cutter headed straight for the gap. There was a shout from far up the cliff; the *Fury* had been sighted by the lookout. His call was answered by cries from the beach. On the cutter all the men lay ready with musketoon, pistol, and cutlass, except the few who had been told off to run down the sail when the word was given, and make the cutter fast to the lugger when she came alongside.

Jack's heart beat more quickly than usual; he felt excited, and anxious, too, for he knew that the whole crew of the lugger, probably quite as strong as his own, would be ready to repel boarders. If they were joined by the Luscombe men who were receiving the smuggled goods he would be greatly outnumbered. Everything depended on the handling of the men, and knowing how desperately smugglers fought when brought to bay, Jack felt the seriousness of the position. What would the issue be?

While the boat's crew had been waiting in the cold, strange things had been happening at Gumley's cottage.

Gumley's method of guarding De Fronsac was to make a temporary kennel for the dog outside the window of the front room in which the prisoner was

lodged, and a shakedown for himself by the door. He felt that he could not properly intrude upon De Fronsac, who was a person of quality. But he looked in at intervals to see that he was safe, on these occasions calling Comely into the room, to guard against any attempted surprise.

De Fronsac had recovered the use of his tongue after he reached the cottage.

"I protest, I say it is a scandal, an infamy, to shut me up as if I vere a t'ief. Vat right have you? Tell me dat—you—you—"

"Gumley, my name, sir. I've got my orders—in the king's name."

"Vell, I vill complain to de squire; I vill make to punish you—you—Gomley!"

"Orders is orders, sir. I can't say no more."

Gumley himself was somewhat anxious about his charge, for, not expecting such a drain on his larder, he had only his usual provisions for the week, and did not feel at liberty to leave the cottage and procure more. Thursday passed, Friday, Saturday, and still he had heard nothing from Jack. When Sunday came, there was only a half loaf of bread and a rind of cheese left, and these had to be shared among the two men and the dog.

On the second day De Fronsac began to beguile the tedium of confinement by writing poetry. When Gumley looked in at him on one of his periodical visits the Frenchman said:

"You have not a bad heart. You obey orders of—of—of a monstair. Vell, I read you vat I have now written about anoder Monstair—de great villain Monstair vat call himself Emperor of de French! Listen! You vill like it.

"'*De sky vas blue, de sea vas green,*
All beautiful for to be seen.
Vy den am I not gay and glad?
Alas! de Monstair make me sad.'

"Dat is good beginning, hein?"

"Reyther on the miserable side, don't 'ee think, sir? For myself, I like a rum-tum-tiddlum rollicum-rorum sort o' thing."

"Ver' vell, I write you someting of dat kind."

Gumley heard nothing more of this generous offer until Monday evening. Then, when he went into De Fronsac's room to explain with apologies that he had no more food, the Frenchman said:

"No matter not at all. Vizout doubt some vun vill come to-morrow. Be so good as give me a candle. I vish to write de poesy I speak of."

Gumley saw no reason for not humoring so harmless a hobby, and brought the lighted candle. But a couple of hours later he was awakened from his sleep at the locked door by a smell of burning. He soon satisfied himself that it came

from the prisoner's room, and opened the door.

"Ha! I see you!" said De Fronsac. "I am almost burnt alive. I am writing my poesy ven—*voilà!* de candle overfalls and burns a hole in de table-carpet. See it! I put out de fire, easy; but it make much smoke. I fear it vake you; pardon, my good Gomley."

"Granted, sir, ready. If I was you I'd go to sleep now and do your writing stuff in the morning."

"So I vill," was the response. "Pardon! I vill not vake you again."

Gumley returned to his shakedown and was soon fast asleep.

Nearly two hours later he was wakened by a growl from the dog outside. He got up, opened the outer door, and found Comely trying to get up to the shuttered window of De Fronsac's room.

"Don't like his poetry any more than me, don't 'ee? Come in. We'll tell him 'tis time he was abed."

He closed the door when the dog had entered, and together they went into the prisoner's room. There was still a good deal of smoke in it—but no Frenchman.

"Ahoy!" cried Gumley.

But the dog made a dash back to the front door, and, when Gumley followed and opened it, rushed growling down the garden, where he was brought up by the high fence. Seizing his cutlass, Gumley stumped as fast as he could to the gate.

"Chok' it all!" he muttered. "This is what comes o' losing a leg in the king's name."

It took some little time to draw the bolts and unlock the gate, and when the old sailor got out into the road the fugitive was out of sight. But Gumley thought he heard a man running down the cliff path to the village. Without hesitation he started in pursuit, whistling Comely to his side. Never had that wooden leg moved so fast; but with all his exertion his pace did not exceed that of a quick walk. He was half-way down the path when he heard shots in the distance. Hurrying still more, he came to the village just in time to see a group of men rushing out at the other end, and caught the words "Sandy Cove!"

"Fire and brimstone!" he muttered. "This is a desperate go, Comely. Come on, my lad."

And he stumped on gamely through the deserted street.

Meanwhile there had been brisk doings at Sandy Cove. When Jack judged that he was only a couple of cable-lengths from the lugger, he cast off the long-boat with Babbage and his men. They, resting on their oars, allowed it to drift slowly

in while the cutter disappeared into the darkness.

A few moments later Jack gave the word. The sail was run down. A round shot from the lugger whistled across the *Fury's* bows. Another few seconds; then, amid furious shouts, the cutter came against the larboard quarter of the lugger with a bump that caused the men on both craft to stagger. The *Fury's* bowsprit fouled the lugger's shrouds and hooked fast. Instantly half a dozen grapnels were out, and the two vessels were closely interlocked.

There was a deafening discharge of small arms from the deck of the lugger, but as most of the *Fury's* men were lying down awaiting the order to board, and the volley was fired at random in almost total darkness, hardly any damage was done. But the master of the lugger was clearly a man of action, for the echo of the shots had scarcely come back from the cliffs when he gave a loud order in French, and the smugglers swarmed over the bulwarks, intending to jump on to the deck of the cutter a foot or two below.

"Fire!"

The word rang out sharp and clear above the shouts of the Frenchmen. Their dark forms stood out clearly against the starlight; they were only a few feet from the muzzles of the Englishmen's muskets; and when at Jack's command the volley flashed, the front line of the smugglers disappeared as if struck by a thunderbolt.

With a loud cheer the English sailors, dropping their muskets, seized cutlass and pistol and dashed through the smoke, each man eager to be first on the enemy's deck. They needed no encouragement; most of them had a score to pay off for their defeat at the same spot in the previous autumn. While the Frenchmen were still half stunned by the scorching fire and the loss of so many of their comrades, Jack's men gained a footing on the deck.

But now the French skipper's voice could be heard rallying his crew, and the boarders were met by a serried mass armed with pistols and boarding pikes. And among the Frenchmen there was now a sprinkling of Englishmen, for the smugglers on shore had rushed over the gangway to their comrades thus hotly beset. Now a furious hand-to-hand fight raged about the lugger's stern. Great was the clamor as steel clashed on steel, pistols barked, hoarse voices roared encouragement or defiance, wounded men groaned. Again and again Jack and his men were flung back by sheer weight of numbers against the lugger's bulwarks; again and again they rallied and forced the enemy across the deck. No room here for fine weapon-play; men cut and thrust at random, met, grappled, flung away cutlass and pike to set to with nature's own weapons. Many a Frenchman fell under the sledge-hammer blows of British sailors' fists.

Jack had no clear recollection afterward of the details of the fight. At one moment he found himself leading a rush of his own men, pressing the enemy

back foot by foot until only a last desperate effort seemed wanting to drive them overboard. Then would come a check; a hoarse shout from the skipper, whom Jack by and by distinguished in the mêlée—a huge fellow of reckless courage; the tide turned, the smugglers rallied gamely, and Jack and his men, stubbornly as they fought, were borne back and back, losing inch by inch the ground they had so hardly gained.

It was at one of these desperate moments that Jack heard at last the sound for which, throughout the struggle, he had been anxiously waiting. From the forefront of the lugger came a sudden rousing British cheer. There was a rush of feet in the rear of the smugglers, and in a second, as it seemed to Jack, the deck in front of him was clear. Ben Babbage had arrived. Carrying out orders given him previously, he had brought the long-boat unseen to the starboard side of the lugger, and, before the Frenchmen were aware of his presence, he was on deck, with Turley, Mudge, Folkard, and half a dozen other trusty shipmates.

Beset now in both front and rear, the Frenchmen lost heart. Suddenly they made a rush for the gangway connecting the lugger with the land, and swarmed helter-skelter across, not a few stumbling over the edge and falling souse into the water.

"Huzzay! huzzay!" shouted the panting Englishmen, as they saw the enemy in flight.

But they were answered by a loud and confident cheer from the beach, and in the momentary silence that ensued they heard the rapid tramp of a large body of men hurrying over the shingle. Immediately afterward they saw the fugitives halt, and rush back, largely reinforced, to the gangway, led by the indomitable captain. On they came, tumbling into the water three or four of the Englishmen who had started in pursuit and were making for the shore.

The gangway, consisting of four stout planks laid side by side, was wide, and gave foothold for a throng at once. Jack and Babbage collected their men at the lugger's bulwarks to meet this new attack. And the former, amazed at this sudden turning of the tables, was still more amazed to see beside the French skipper the slighter form of Monsieur de Fronsac. Even at the moment of recognition De Fronsac's pistol flashed; the bullet glanced off Jack's cutlass within an inch of his body, and embedded itself in the mast behind him.

The two forces came together with a shock. Babbage dropped his cutlass and flung his powerful arms around the skipper. They swayed for a moment, then fell together with a tremendous splash into the water. De Fronsac had dropped his pistol, and made for Jack with a cutlass. Jack parried his furious cut, and before he could recover replied with a rapid and dexterous thrust that found the Frenchman's forearm. With wonderful quickness De Fronsac shifted his weapon from the right to the left hand, and, shouting encouragement to the men beside

and behind him, pressed forward indomitably.

At the same moment there was a rush of feet from the bows of the lugger. Her bowsprit came within easy reach of the rocky ledge, and a number of the smugglers had sprung on to it, scrambled along, and flung themselves on the flank of the defenders. Turley and others at Jack's right turned to meet this new danger; but the enemy had gained a firm foothold on the foredeck, and the fight once more became general.

Jack, fighting grimly with Mudge and Folkard at the head of the gangway, felt with a dreadful sinking at the heart that the tide of battle was turning overwhelmingly against him. It seemed only too likely that he must either take to the cutter and escape, or remain to be killed or captured. But at this moment there was a sudden uproar at the far end of the gangway; the cries he heard were unmistakably cries of dismay. The throng of men pressing from the shore to the lugger wavered; their rear was being attacked; the preventives must be upon them! So sudden and unexpected was the onslaught that they lost their heads; their confidence changed to panic, and as one man they made off, springing into the shallow water to right and left, and scurrying away into the darkness.

"Have at 'em, Comely! Have at 'em, my lad!"

The words rang clear above all the din; and ever and anon came a short yelping bark—the unmistakable war-cry of a bulldog. Jack felt a wonderful lightness of heart as the sounds came to him out of the dark. Then the press in front of him melted as by magic, and through the gap so quickly made stumped Gumley, wielding his cutlass like a flail, and shouting with the regularity of a minute-gun:

"Have at 'em, Comely! Have at 'em, my lad!"

Two men remained on the gangway, refusing to be intimidated by the tumult in their rear; nay more, adjuring the fugitives to stand fast. One was Monsieur de Fronsac, the other Kit Lamiger, the chief Luscombe smuggler, father of the lad whom Jack had fought.

The uproar, the flight, the appearance of Gumley and the dog, all happened in such rapid succession and amid such a clamor that to Jack the events seemed to take place in one crowded moment. As the last of the panic-stricken smugglers jumped sidewise from the gangway on to the rocks, De Fronsac, hearing Gumley's voice behind him, took a rapid step forward in a last desperate endeavor to dispose of Jack. But the middy marked his purpose. There was no time for deliberation. The Frenchman, wielding his cutlass as well with his left hand as with his right, made a fierce cut at Jack. The next moment he threw up his arms without a sound and fell backward across the gangway into the space between the lugger and the rocks. Jack's blade had pierced him through.

Meanwhile Kit Lamiger had found himself seized below in the vise-like grip of Comely's jaws. Struggling to free himself, he fell into the arms of Gumley, who,

with a cry of "In the king's name, shipmate!" swung him round, threw him on to the shingle, and bade the bulldog watch him.

The fight was over.

"Ahoy, Gumley! Come aboard!" shouted Jack.

Gumley stumped across the gangway, and this was drawn on to the lugger's deck. Jack intended to work the vessels out for a little distance until there was no chance of being attacked except by boats, for he knew that he was still outnumbered. But just as he was preparing to cast off there came a loud hail from the beach, and immediately afterward Mr. Goodman rushed up at the head of a force of preventive men.

"Just in time, Mr. Hardy!" panted he.

"A little late, Mr. Goodman," replied Jack. "I expected you some time ago. The fight is over."

"Dash my buttons!" cried the mortified officer. "'Tis my confounded ill-luck. I should have been here, but I got another note a few hours ago that I had to attend to."

"Anonymous, Mr. Goodman?"

"Yes, anonymous as usual, hang it all! I came up when I heard the firing. I see you've got the lugger, sir. Our scheme worked out to the letter."

"To the anonymous note, eh, Mr. Goodman? Well, we've good news for the admiral to-morrow. And as you've a good number of your men here, I'll go ashore and step up to the Grange. I want to see my cousin. Turley, where's Babbage?"

"Never seed him, sir, since he went overboard with the French skipper."

"Well, I must leave you in charge, then. The poor fellow's drowned, I fear."

"No, sir," shouted a voice from the beach.

"Who's that?"

"Me, sir, Babbage as was."

"All sound?"

"And fury, as brother Sol used to say. Me and the French skipper fell overboard together, me on top. He drownded hisself, sir, 'cos he wouldn't let go. When I come up, some o' they fellers bowled me over like a ninepin, and my senses was fair knocked out o' me. Next thing I knowed I heard you a-saying I were drownded, sir. Not so, nor never even seasick."

"Well, I'm glad you're safe. Come aboard. We'll see what damage is done here, and then I'll go ashore, and we'll get a doctor from Wickham Ferrers to

attend to the poor fellows who are wounded."

CHAPTER XIX
SOME APPOINTMENTS

Jack had but just reached the road above the cliff when he was somewhat startled to hear the regular clickety-click of a large number of horses trotting toward him. And surely, amid the clatter of their hoofs, there was the clash of steel!

He stood at the edge of the road, waiting. In a few moments, round the corner from the direction of Wickham, came two horsemen at a rapid trot, and behind them a troop, whose polished accoutrements gleamed in the light of the rising moon.

They rode on rapidly, and Jack had just recognized the uniform of the Dorsetshire yeomanry when the officer at their head caught sight of him, shouted "Halt!" and reined up his horse on its haunches.

"Where are they, my lad?" he asked in a tone of subdued excitement.

"Who, Cousin Humfrey?"

"Eh! Who are you? Why, bless me, 'tis Jack! Where are the ruffians?"

"Who, cousin?"

"Why, the French! Have they got a footing?"

"Most of 'em a wetting, cousin. But we've beat the whole crew and got the lugger."

"The lugger! Hang the lugger! What about the praams?"

"The praams!" Jack was puzzled; then a light dawned on him and he began to laugh.

"Come, come, 'tis no joke. Are they beaten back?"

"Oh, cousin, no joke! Did you really think it was Boney? Oh, I can't help it; excuse me, cousin."

It came out that Mr. Bastable had been awakened by one of his men, who declared that he heard cannons firing most horribly, and was sure 'twas Boney had come over at last. The squire got up, sent a rider post-haste to Wickham Ferrers for his troop of yeomen, and hurried into his uniform, which he kept always at hand by his bedside.

"And here we are, my lad, in an hour from the first alarm. There's quick work for you. But I'm glad 'tis no worse than a brush with smugglers. 'Twas a

false alarm, my lads," he added, turning to his men. "Boney has thought better of it. Didn't care to tackle us Dorset men. You can get back and sleep sound. Now Jack, you'll come with me to the Grange. Arthur told me he'd seen you—the young rascal, stealing out at dead of night! But a good plucked 'un too, eh, Jack?"

"A chip of the old block, cousin. Just the sort of fellow we middies like."

"And that villain De Fronsac, now! What of him?"

"He's dead, cousin," said Jack gravely.

"Ha! He's got his deserts. The villain, playing his double game for eighteen months in my house! And his humbug about the Monster, too. It makes me red in the face when I think of it. But you must tell me all about it when we get home."

They found the Grange almost in a state of siege. The windows were close-shuttered, the doors were double locked, and when Mr. Bastable rapped, the voice of old William, the gardener, was heard, threatening in accents of unmistakable terror that he'd b-blow out the b-b-brains of any Frenchman with his b-b-blunderbuss. When admittance was obtained, shrieks were heard from the top of the house.

"The maids in hysterics!" growled the squire. "Here, Molly and Betty," he shouted, "don't be a couple of geese. 'Tis not Boney—'tis Master Jack!"

A door above flew open; Kate and Arthur came bounding down the stairs, with Mrs. Bastable a pace or two behind them.

"Lawk a mussy! Only to think o't, now!" giggled Molly above. "Measter Jack! Well, I never did!"

Kate impulsively threw her arms round Jack's neck and kissed him heartily. A middy is not easily taken by surprise, but Jack was only just in time to return the kiss before Mrs. Bastable came and encircled him.

"My dear boy, this is delightful."

"So it is, cousin—if it wasn't so smothery!"

"Mothery!" shouted the squire in high good humor. "Now, you'll come along to my den and tell me all about everything that's happened since you were kidnapped by those villains, confound them!"

"But my dear Humfrey, Jack looks dead-beat."

"We'll cure that by any by. The fire isn't out; we'll make it up; and I'm sure you women won't sleep a wink till you've heard the story."

"Hurray!" shouted Arthur, capering.

So they trooped into the snuggery, and there Jack, fortified with a glass of hot cordial brought by Molly, related his adventures from the time when he was carried to France against his will.

"There are two things I can't make out," he said in conclusion. "One is, how

Gudgeon is mixed up in this. 'Twas his boat, I'm sure, that carried me in the tub to the lugger; and he drove to Gumley's the other night to hear what had been done. Where does he come in, cousin?"

Mr. Bastable laughed a little awkwardly.

"Go to bed, Arthur," he said.

"I know, father," said the boy, grinning.

"You do, do you, you young rascal! Well, Jack, I'll tell you. Gudgeon is a sly old dog. He's the smuggler hereabouts—but behind the scenes. His smoking chimney was the signal by day, as Fronsac's, it seems, was by night. But he's not a traitor; he knew nothing of Fronsac's double scheme, I warrant. He's a smuggler simply. Why, Jack, he has supplied me with smuggled brandy for years; so he does the parson at Wickham. The stuff you're drinking was smuggled; the lace your cousin Sylvia is wearing came from Valenciennes, and paid no duty. I'm afraid I must give it up now, my boy. There's not a squire on the seaboard but thinks it no harm; but with a cousin a gallant king's officer—yes, I must give it up." He sighed. "And I think I'd better go and see Gudgeon in the morning."

"He'll be transported, as sure as a gun," said Jack.

"Well, I don't think we'll go that length. You can't prove anything against him, you see. He's too sly for that—and—well, it might be awkward for more than one of us."

"All right, cousin," said Jack, laughing. "But there's another thing. That fellow who was wounded in the Hollow! De Fronsac shot him, I'm sure; I never told you that Arthur and I saw him bundled into a lugger that night we followed De Fronsac from the house."

"That's a mystery. I can't explain it. And it doesn't matter much, now that De Fronsac is gone. By George, Jack! I fancy you've killed smuggling at Luscombe—for some time, at any rate. Now to bed. We'll have another talk in the morning."

Jack was up early, in spite of the lateness of the hour when he went to bed. He was at breakfast alone with Mr. Bastable when Mr. Goodman was announced.

"Good morning, sir. Good morning, Mr. Hardy. I've come to you as a justice of the peace, Mr. Bastable. You've heard of our little exploit last night?"

"You were in at the death, I believe. Well, sir?"

"Well, sir, we went to the Hollow this morning to seize the goods we understood were hidden there. In the summer-house we found a man, sir; I have him outside now. He tried to run away; but we collared him, and as he wouldn't give an account of himself I've brought him along. Perhaps you'll commit him as a rogue and vagabond."

"Bring him in, Mr. Goodman."

The riding-officer returned with a heavy, undersized, beetle-browed fellow,

in very tattered garb.

"Why, 'tis the very man!" cried Jack. "This is the man De Fronsac shot."

"De Fronsac!" growled the man, with gleaming eyes. "Where is he?"

"No longer in this world, my man," said Mr. Bastable. "Now, who are you? Give a good account of yourself, or I shall have to commit you."

The man showed no hesitation now. He explained that he had been employed in London by a French family through whom De Fronsac obtained much of the information he signaled to France. Having discovered this fact, he had come down to Luscombe to levy blackmail on the spy; the consequences were as Jack had related. He had returned to England—there were means of coming and going between the two countries even in that time of war—to wreak vengeance on De Fronsac, and was lying in wait at the summer-house when the preventives appeared on the scene.

"There's your mystery unraveled," said Mr. Bastable, turning to Jack. Then to the Frenchman he said: "We'll send you off to London, my man; 'tis for folk there to deal with you."

After breakfast, Jack walked over to Gumley's cottage. He wanted to know how De Fronsac had escaped, and was prepared to read Gumley a lecture for his lax guardianship. But he found the old sailor so desperately upset at the trick played upon him, that he had not the heart to add to his chagrin.

"Only to think of it, sir!" said Gumley, thumping the table. "Poetry! All my eye and Betty Martin! Why, when he got that there candle, he stood upon this here table"—another thump—"and burned away the ends o' the matchboards up aloft where they was nailed to the beams. No wonder I smelled smoke! And he showed me a hole in the tablecloth! Then he pried up the boards, got up into the attic, out by the trap-door on to the roof, and when Comely and me was a-nosing round here in the smoke, chok' it all! Mounseer was down the rain-pipe and under full sail for the road. Never have I bin so done afore, sir, and in the king's name, too."

"Never mind, Joe. You came after him like a Briton, and if you and Comely hadn't arrived on the scene when you did, I'm afraid there would have been a different story to tell the admiral to-day. I'm going to Portsmouth this afternoon. And I'll take care the admiral knows about your pluck and your stanchness as a king's man under persecution."

"Thank 'ee kindly, sir. And you won't forget to say a word for Comely, sir?"

"Not I. Comely and Gumley—a fine pair of warriors. Good-by."

When Jack got back to the Grange, he found that the squire had paid his promised visit to Mr. Gudgeon. Mr. Bastable laughed as he related the interview.

"He had the flutters very badly, Jack. I put it to him as delicately as I could. Said that recent events had given the neighborhood a bad name, especially as it

had been found that some one had been selling information to the French. Suspicion might easily fall on the wrong person, I said; and I wound up by suggesting that when next winter comes he should see that his chimneys are swept regularly. The old rascal! 'Oh dear me!' says he, 'to think that a quiet law-abiding village like Luscombe should have harbored a French spy! It puts me in a terrible flutter, Cognac is the best cure I know, sir; maybe you'll do me the honor to take a sip with me?' and the rascal gave me a glass, Jack; contraband—capital stuff!"

"He'll be careful in future, I reckon, cousin. I must run over to Portsmouth after lunch and report to Admiral Horniman. I suppose I'd better keep Gudgeon's name out?"

"Certainly, my lad. You've snuffed out smuggling here—for the present; it is bound to begin again some day; but you may depend upon it that for a long time to come we're all king's men here, Gudgeon included."

It was a fortnight before Jack returned to the Grange. Then he came in a high state of excitement.

"Admiral Horniman is a jolly old brick!" he cried, after greeting his cousins. "What do you think he's done?"

"Resigned in your favor, Jack?"

"Pretty nearly!" returned Jack with a laugh. "No, he's written up a thumping report to the lords of the Admiralty, and got 'em to 'do a thing that's as rare as—as—"

"As Jack Hardys. Well!"

"Why, to let me off three years' service as a mid, and also the examination for lieutenant. Look here! here's my commission!" He flourished a paper, and cried for three cheers for Admiral Horniman. "And that's not all. I've got no end of prize-money for capturing the French brig, and retaking the *Fury*, and collaring the smugglers' stuff. My share alone comes to over a thousand pounds. And they've taken two French privateers and sunk another off Fowey. The signals worked splendidly; they were trying to cut out a disabled ship that wasn't there! The admiral's going to put in a claim to prize-money for me. He is a brick!"

"Oh, I say!" cried Arthur. "Don't I wish I was you!"

"I'm glad for dad's sake. He hasn't been over well off since he had to retire from the East India Company's service, owing to that wretched illness of his, and I'm afraid he had to pinch a bit for me. But now that's all changed. I shan't cost him another penny piece."

"Bravo! Arthur, you young dog, remember that, and hand over a thousand pounds to me when I'm bound for the poorhouse. Well, Jack, I congratulate you, my boy."

"But that's not all, cousin. I've kept the best for the last. Open your eyes! I'm appointed to the *Victory*, and sail to join Nelson in a week! Won't we pepper

the French! Won't we win a glorious victory! Oh! cousin, isn't it the finest thing in the world to serve your king and country!"

"If you please, sir," said the butler, putting his head in at the door, "Joe Gumley is outside, asking for Mr. Hardy."

"Show him in," cried Mr. Bastable.

"Arternoon, sir," said Gumley, stumping in with the bulldog at his heels. He held his glazed hat clumsily, and looked not quite at ease. "I be come over for two things, Squire; number one, to say thank'ee to Mr. Hardy; number two, to axe a question."

"Never mind about number one, Gumley," said Jack. "Heave away at number two."

"Begging your pardon, sir, one always comes afore two, and ye can't alter nature. I take it kindly, sir, and I thank 'ee from the bottom of my heart, for your goodness to a' old mariner what has only one leg sound and rheumatiz in both. Here I've got, sir, a paper, and as near as I can make it out—'tis terrible writing for a admiral, to be sure—Admiral Horniman says he has great pleasure in app'inting Joseph Gumley watchman at the dockyard, ten shillings a week, cottage and rum free. I know who done that: Admiral Horniman would never ha' heard o' Joe Gumley but for Mr. Hardy. God bless 'ee, sir, for remembering of a poor wooden-legged old sailor what had to take to growing artichokes and other landlubbers' thingummies in the king's name."

"The admiral couldn't have found a better man," said Mr. Bastable, to cover Jack's confusion. "But what's number two?"

"Number two is this, sir. Do this here app'intment take in Comely? 'Cos if it don't with all respecks to Mr. Hardy and the admiral, I sticks to artichokes. Comely and Gumley—they sign on together."

"And nobody wants to split you, Gumley," said Jack. "Go and see the admiral, and take Comely with you—only hold him in, because the admiral's rather peppery, and Comely might made a mistake. He will know that with Comely and Gumley to watch it, the dockyard will be as safe as the rock of Gibraltar."

"Ay, ay, sir. Then we takes on that there app'intment. Comely and me—in the king's name."

THE END

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