

away among the casks for'ard, and ten to one we'd never ha' twigged him at all if the skipper's dog hadn't sniffed him out and began barkin'. Such a nice little mite as he is, too! I could ha' most put him in my baccy-pouch, poor little beggar! but he looks to be a good-plucked un for all that.'

"I didn't wait to hear no more, but up on deck like a skyrocket, and there I did see a sight; and no mistake. Every man-Jack of the crew, and what few passengers we had aboard, was all in a ring on the fo'c'stle, and in the middle was the fust mate, lookin' as black as thunder. Right in front of him, lookin' a reg'lar mite among them big fellers, was a little bit o' a lad not ten year old—ragged as a scarecrow, but with bright, curly hair, and a bonnie little face o' his own, if it hadn't been so woful thin and pale. But, bless your soul! to see the way that little chap held his head up and looked about him, you'd ha' thought the whole ship belonged to him. The mate was a great hulkin', black bearded feller, with a look that 'ud ha' frightened a horse, and a voice fit to make one jump through a keyhole; but the young un warn't a bit afeared—he stood straight up, and looked him full in the face with them bright, clear eyes o' his'n, for all the world as if he was Prince Halferd himself. Folk did say afterwards"—lowering his voice to a whisper—"as how he comed o' better blood nor what he seemed, and, for my part, I'm rayther o' that way o'thinkin' myself, for I never yet see'd a common street Harab—as they calls them now—carry it off like him. You might ha' heered a pin drop, as the mate spoke.

"Well, you young whelp," says he, in his grimmest voice, 'what's brought you here?'

"It was my stepfather as done it," says the boy, in a weak little voice, but as steady as could be. 'Father's dead, and mother's married again, and my new father says as how he won't have no brats about eatin' up his wages, and he stowed me away when nobody warn't lookin', and giv me some grub to keep me goin' for a day or two till I got to sea. He says I'm to go to

Aunt Jane, at Halifax, and here's her address.' And with that, he slips his hand into the breast of his shirt, and out with a scrap o' paper, awful dirty and crumpled up, but with the address on it, right enough.

"We all believed every word on't, even without the paper; for his look, and his voice, and the way he spoke, was enough to show that there warn't a ha'porth o' lyin' in his whole skin. But the mate didn't seem to swallow the yarn at all; he only shrugged his shoulders with a kind o' grin, as much as to say, 'I'm too old a bird to be caught by that kind o' chaff'; and then he says to him, 'Look here, my lad, that's all very fine, but it won't do here—some o' these men o' mine are in the secret, and I mean to have it out o' 'em. Now, you just point out the man as stowed you away and fed you, this very minute; if you doan't, it'll be the worse for you!'

"The boy looked up in his bright, fearless way (it did my heart good to look at him, the brave little chap!) and says quietly, 'I've told you the truth; I ain't got no more to say.'

"The mate says nothin', but looks at him for a minute as if he'd see clean through him, and then he faced round to the men, looking blacker than ever. 'Reeve a rope to the yard!' he sings out, loud enough to raise the dead, 'smart now!'

"The men all looked at each other, as much as to say, 'What on earth's a-comin' now?' But aboard ship, o' course, when you're told to do a thing, you've got to do it; so the rope was rove in a jiffy.

"Now, my lad," said the mate, in a hard, square kind o' voice that made every word seem like fittin' a stone into a wall, 'you see that 'ere rope? Well, I'll give you ten minutes to confess, and if you don't tell the truth afore the time's up, I'll hang you like a dog!'

"The crew all stared at one another as if they couldn't believe their ears (I didn't believe mine, I can tell ye), and then a low growl went among 'em, like a wild beast awakenin' out of a nap.

"Silence, there!" shouts the

mate, in a voice like the roar of a nor'easter. 'Stand by to run for'ard!' as he held the noose ready to put it round the boy's neck. The little fellow never flinched a bit, but there was some among the sailors (big, strong chaps, as could ha' felled an ox) as shook like leaves in the wind. As for me, I bethought myself o' my little curly-haired lad at home, and how it 'ud be if any one was to go for to hang him, and at the very thought on't, I tingled all over, and my fingers clinched themselves as if they was a-grippin' somebody's throat. I clutched hold of a hand-spike, and held it behind my back, all ready.

"Tom," whispers the chief engineer to me, 'd'ye think he really means to do it?'

"I don't know," says I, through my teeth, 'but if he does, he shall go first, if I swings for it!'

"I've been in many an ugly scrape in my time, but I never felt 'arf as bad as I did then. Every minute seemed as long as a dozen, an' the tick o' the mate's watch, reg'lar, pricked my ears like a pin. The men were very quiet, but there was a precious ugly look on some o' their faces; and I noticed that three or four on 'em kep' edgin' for'ard to where the mate was, in a way that meant mischief. As for me, I'd made up my mind that if he did go to hang the poor little chap, I'd kill him on the spot, and take my chance.

"Eight minutes," says the mate, his great, deep voice breakin' in upon the silence like the toll of a funeral bell. 'If you've got anything to confess, my lad, you'd best out with it, for your time is nearly up.'

"I've told you the truth," answers the boy, very pale, but as firm as ever. 'May I say my prayers, please?'

"The mate nodded, and down goes the poor little chap on his knees, and puts up his little hands to pray. I couldn't make out what he said (fact, my head was in such a whirl that'd hardly ha' knowed my own name), but I'll be bound God heard it, every word. Then he ups on his feet again, and puts his hands behind him, and says to