

sententiously. "Captain's not quite straight yet."

"Good heavens!" cried the emigrant. "Here's a pretty look-out, Laycock!"

The two consulted together for a moment.

"We shall remain on deck all night, sir," said the man to the mate. "You can command us for any aid we can render. I have taken my turn at the ropes on a yacht now and then. How do you dare to leave port under such conditions," he continued warmly. "I shall enquire into this matter personally——" He checked himself.

"Well, sir," replied the mate, dodging a sprinkle of brine that came hissing over the weather bow, "I don't know who you may be, but how are you to help it? We were ready to sail at four o'clock yesterday afternoon, but our fellows were all ashore, spending the last of the credit they had on their *advance-notes*. There was no one aboard but Jim Rousby there at the wheel, and we mates. The captain was terribly put out—he ain't naturally sweet-tempered, anyhow, and he likes his glass of grog when he's going to sea, though he doesn't take any on the voyage. Six-bells struck,—an hour before midnight,—and he would stand it no longer. 'Merton,' he said, 'you take Jim Rousby and go ashore and get a couple of policemen, and bring those fellows off, or lock 'em up, one or the other.' I can assure you, sir, it's no fun going ashore to look up such a crew as this in Plymouth hells. Low, dirty places they are, where the crimps get hold of poor Jack, and prey on him as if he was a pig or a sheep. And I'll tell you what does it—it's those *advance-notes*. The owners think they bind the sailors by them, and they do; but I don't like such security. It plays the devil with the shipping. We had to go and drag those fellows out one by one; some dead drunk, some mad drunk, and we got the whole lot off by early morning; and my belief is they haven't done yet. They have some stowed away in the fo'ksle, or my name's not Merton."

On went the noble ship, the gale increasing every minute. With great difficulty at four-bells, aided by one or two stewards from the stern cabin, the chief mate, who had charge of her while the captain was sleeping off his annoyance and his grog, managed to take in the main and fore sails, and she went plunging forwards under a jib and reefed fore-top-sail. The sea began to sweep the deck from end to end, but the two emigrants still clung to the rigging by the bulwarks on the lee side.

Wildier and wildier grew the night. Angry scream of furious wind through strand and rigging; fierce plash and boom of billows breaking over the bow; roar of the great waves far and near wrestling with the gale; rattle of rolling blocks; squirm and creak of stay, and girder, and beam, and planking; and on the decks below, among the crowded emigrants, noises, and groaning, and women's shrieks, and the cries of children. Still gallantly onward went the ship, straining to her work, shaking off the storm, and swiftly winning her way. And

well and warily did mates and steersman handle her till eight-bells struck for the noon of night. Then the storm seemed to be moderating, and Delamarre, for it was he, turned to his companion and said:

"I think we may go down now. I am fearfully cold and wet. Everything seems safe."

Yes; everything is safe, as far as foresight of generous owners could make it. A good ship, picked captain, sufficient crew; with these they could face old ocean and laugh at the boisterous elements. But there is one element no care can outwit, no forecast guard against, able at all times to cheat caution and probability, to defy skill and regulation—and that element was aboard the ship that night.

The two men had reached the forward companion, leading to the emigrants' quarter, for they were travelling in disguise. Laycock opened the door; a puff of smoke, a flash of lurid light athwart the lower deck, and a shriek of "Fire!" came at the instant from the fore-castle of the ship—flash of flame caused by the spirit from a broken bottle which a drunken wretch had fired with the match he struck to see what had come of it.

"Fire! Fire! FIRE!" sharp shrieks and shouts of men and women; wail of frightened children rushing to and fro, and deadly struggling for life in the midst of blinding smoke; curse and scream of drunken sailors rolling in avenging flames; loud alarm of hurrying stewards rousing the passengers in the stern cabin, and these, unmindful of the bitter blast, rushing wildly upon deck, and clinging together upon the poop near the wheel. Here come strong men with a mad rush for the boats, thrusting aside and trampling down weak women and children. The captain, wakened out of his sleep, stares in half-drunken incapacity at the dreadful scene, or shouts incongruous orders. Ignorant hands have swamped two boats, and paid the penalty. William Merton, like the brave young fellow he was, fought desperately to save a third boat-load, and had nearly succeeded, when a charge of frantic laborers overpowered him, and he went down among those he was trying to save—last hope of that poor widow at Cherry-Luton, last of three hopes, three several times blighted by the same fell destroyer!

And now at length two hundred souls are crowded shivering on the stern poop, where Jim Rousby still stands, with his mouth shut and his eye keenly watching, keeping the tossing furnace before the wind, the bright flames licking out from the fore-hatchways, and fighting their way slowly but surely against the storm along the deck—while the lurid light gleams on cringing forms and pallid faces, and praying lips, and eyes fixed in horror, and a scene of helpless despair. Facing the flames, in front of all, stands Delamarre, without his cloak, which he has thrown over a half-naked girl, his hatless head erect, his teeth clenched—recalling to himself the long distinguished and degraded past, and bravely awaiting this obscure doom.

The flames, raging now with fierce heat,