

support the platform of the bridge, whilst each pier was strengthened and supported, and strengthened and supported its neighbour, by an arrangement of cross-beams and ties.

When I reached the bank of the river with my guide, Evan Rowlands, I found that there was a considerable hiatus between the shore and the nearest pier—about a hundred yards. Evan, however, was prepared with a plan for reaching it. A friend of his was the master of the little sloop, the *Ann Jones*, which was lying in the tiny creek above. He and his mate were now on board her, and they had got their little dingy with them. Evan would borrow the boat, and drop down with the stream, and deposit me at the foot of the nearest pier.

‘But why not ferry me right over the river?’ I asked.

‘Not possible,’ said Evan. There were shallows and quicksands at the other side which at this time of the tide were very dangerous.

So we made our way along the road which overlooks the estuary, till we came to the little harbour. Evan had no difficulty in borrowing the dingy, and we were soon afloat, shooting quickly down the stream.

It was almost dark now, for although the sun was not yet down, the storm that was gathering up on the horizon obscured his light. Great volumes of clouds and vapor were driving up before the wind, which howled and moaned intermittently, as blast succeeded blast, and died away again. The wind and the tide in opposition made the water pretty rough, and our boat danced up and down in a very lively way. Presently the black skeleton of the bridge loomed upon us through the mist, and Evan dexterously brought up his boat in the little eddy that was formed by the abutments of the pier, and then he called to me to jump from the stern of the dingy on to a cross-piece that formed a sort of platform a foot or so from the water’s edge.

I jumped, and landed safely on the balk, and then I found that my way upwards was by climbing the nearest pier, across which were nailed rough, irregular staves, which constituted what is called a workman’s ladder. I had no intention of undertaking any acrobatic feats, and the idea of climbing up to that giddy height by such rough, unreliable supports, was distasteful enough. I wouldn’t try it. I would go back in the boat to dry land once more. But the boat had spun away on the tide, and was now far out of carshot, or indeed eyeshot either. There I stood, then, in the midst of a rushing, raging sea, upon a balk of timber, embracing a huge black pier, the head of which was lost in the gloom and mist overhead. I couldn’t stay here; I must get across the bridge at all hazards, and my only way was upwards.

Up I went slowly, step by step, testing each frail splintered stave ere I trusted my weight to it. More than one broke away in my hands, and fell into the sea below. But when I reached the top, I thought, then all this danger would be over. I should find a firm, secure platform—a rail, or, at least, a rope for the hand.

When I came to the top of the pier, I saw stretched out before me a beam, suspended, as it seemed, in mid air, a narrow beam—more like a rope, it seemed to me—stretched over this wild abyss of raging waves—that, and nothing else. There were footprints in the narrow ridge of timber—it was not more than two feet wide at the broadest—and the sight of them gave me courage. Men had passed over here before me; I would pass too. And so, without giving myself a moment more to think, I stepped, and the moment when letting go with my hands, I stood upon that topmost round of the ladder, and balanced myself for an instant, as I placed my foot upon the plank—that moment in which