

What to do I could not tell, in spite of all experience, but rubbed the sand from both my eyes, as bad as the beard of an oyster, and could see no clear way anywhere.

Now the sky was spread and traversed with a net of crossing fires, in and out like mesh and needle, only without time to look. Some were yellow, some deep red, and some like banks of violet, and others of a pale sweet blue, like gazing through a window. They might have been very beautiful and agreeable to consider, if they had been further off, and without that wicked crack of thunder through the roar. Worse storms I had seen, of course, in the hot world and up

mountains, and perhaps thought little of them; but then there was this difference, I had always plenty of fellows with me, and it was not Sunday. Also, I then was young, and trained for cannons to be shot at me. Neither had I a boat of my own, but my dear wife was alive.

These considerations moved me to be careful of my life—a duty which increases on us after the turn of the balance; and seeing all things black behind me, and a world of storm around, knowing every hole as I did, without many commendations of myself to God for the sake of Bunny, in I went into a hole under a good solid rock, where I could watch the sea, and care for nothing but an earthquake.

CHAPTER X.—UNDER THE ROCK.

For a while the power of the lightning seemed to quench the wind almost, and one continuous roar of thunder rang around the darkness. Then, with a bellow, the wind sprang forth (like a wild bull out of a mountain), and shattered the rain and drowned the thunder, and was lord of everything. Under its weight the flat sea quivered, and the crests flew into foam, and the scourge upon the waters seemed to beat them all together. The whirlwinds now were past and done with, and a violent gale begun, and in the burst and change of movement there appeared a helpless ship.

She was bearing towards Pool Tavern, as poor Bardie's boat had done, but without the summer glory and the golden wealth of waves. All was smooth and soft and gentle, as the moonlight in a glass, when the little boat came gliding with its baby captain. All was rough and hard and furious as a fight of devils, when that ship came staggering with its load of sin and woe. And yet there had not been so much as twenty-four hours between the two.

Not one of our little coasting vessels, but a full-rigged ship she loomed, of foreign build, although at present carrying no colors. I saw at once what her business was, to bring from the West Indies sugar, rum, and suchlike freight, to Bristol, or to the Dutchmen. This was in her clearance-bill; but behind

that she had other import not so clearly entered. In a word, she carried negroes from the overstocked plantations, not to be quite slaves (at least in the opinion of their masters), but to be distributed, for their own Christian benefit, at a certain sum per head, among the Bristol or Dutch merchants, or wherever it might be. And it serves them right, I always say; for the fuss that we now make about those black men must bring down the anger of the Creator, who made them black, upon us.

As the gale set to its work, and the sea arose in earnest, and the lightning drifted off into the scud of clouds, I saw, as plain as a pikestaff, that the ship must come ashore, and go to pieces very likely, before one could say "Jack Robinson." She had been on the Sker-weather sands already, and lost her rudder and some of her sternpost, as the lift of the water showed; and now there was nothing left on board her of courage or common seamanship. The truth of it was, although of course I could not know it then, that nearly all the ship's company acted as was to be expected from a lot of foreigners; that is to say, if such they were. They took to the boats in a kind of panic when first she struck among the sands in the whirlwind which began the storm. There could have been then no great sea running, only quiet rollers; and being but two miles off the shore, they hoped, no doubt, to land well enough, after leav-