

MOMENTS OF TERROR.

"CAPTAIN, you have led a busy life—have seen much service both at sea and on shore.—We want to call on your experience, to settle a point of dispute between us."

"At your service, gentlemen."

"You are doubtless acquainted with the Orkney Islands, where the wild fowls breed in the cleft of the rocks which are piled in fearful height along the shore. The fishermen fasten a stick at the end of a long rope, which is well secured round a tree, or to a stake driven into the brow of the cliffs, and then placing one of their number astride the stick, he is lowered down the precipice in search of the game. You have most likely heard the account of the man who, in striking at the birds with an iron-pointed boat-staff, as they flew from their holes, cut two of the strands of the rope that suspended him between heaven and earth. He saw the severed strands slowly uncoil themselves, and run upwards, leaving his whole weight, with a heavy prize of birds attached to his girdle, dependant upon one small strand, which already began to strain and crack. Below him was certain death—above him, a terrific wall of rock, that seemed to reach the sky. He gave the signal for hauling up, by striking the rope twice with his staff. Never did his comrades pull the line so lazily. He plucked the birds from his belt, and dropped them on the rocky beach—he kicked off his heavy fishermen's boots—he threw away his staff. Slowly, slowly dragged the rope over the edge of the cliff, while the severed strands seemed to fly upwards with the rapidity of thought. Every instant he dreaded that a weak place in the remaining portion would be untwisted, and so certain appeared his doom, that he felt that every foot he advanced up the face of the precipice, would but increase the height of his fall. A sudden pause in the motion, struck him with a new fear—when the untwisting part of the rope came into the hands of the fishermen above, they at once perceived his danger, and instantly lowered another line. The fowler was rescued from his peril, but such was the effect of his terror during the few minutes of his frightful ascension, that his dark brown hair was changed to grey. I have often thought of this incident; and believe that nothing in man's experience can be brought to rival the agony of that situation. What think you, captain? my friend here, treats the fowler's danger light."

"Bad enough," said the captain, "but not

quite the worst in the world. I don't know whether the chance which a young neevy of mine run foul of, during his first v'yage, in the Bay of Biscay, wasn't just as bad. We were in a stumpy tub of a mafferdite brig, trying to claw off a lee shore, with a rolling sea, and plenty of wind in short sudden puffs. The boy—about sixteen—slim built and pale—was an out-and-out lubber, fond of reading, and skulking his duty whenever he could; his mother, my only sister, a widow, by the way, had made me promise to take care of him—but we were short-handed, and he was forced to work his turn. Some of the hands had gone aloft to shake out a reef in the fore topsail—the rigging was covered with ice—it was a January morning—well, the boy slipped, or was thrown, or blown from the yard—his foot caught in a bight of some of the running rigging, and he hung by the heels, head downwards from the end of the yard, dipping into the sea at each plunge of the old craft, and hoisted up again, high and dry, every time she came to the wind. I expected every roll, to see him washed or jerked from his foothold; and no boat that we had could have lived a minute in that sea. I did not dare to luff, for fear of being taken aback. When I thought of his mother, I had a great mind to save him, even if I beached the old tub; but the point I wanted to weather was close ahead, and the roar of the surf did not sound altogether the thing. We did save him, at last, and I guess his feelings were quite as queer as that of your friend, the fowler. He had but one pull up, while my neevy had better than a hundred—with a cold dip in a frosty sea, between each pull—nothing but an accidental half-hitch round his ankle—and head downwards all the while."

"Horrible, indeed. What did you say to the poor fellow when he was relieved?"

"Told him he deserved a starting for being so clumsy, when he knew I was short-handed—made him swallow some hot coffee, and turn in. He never went aloft again; and at the end of the v'yage, cut the sea, and took to carpentering. That's some years ago, and his hair aint turned grey yet."

"Pray, sir," said another of the passengers, "have you seen Hoffinan's tale of the drunken fireman who crept in at the man-hole of a boiler undergoing repairs, on board one of the western steamboats? it is very well told.—The poor fellow woke up in total darkness, as the water was being pumped in—then he heard the roar of the huge fire beneath, and felt the