

FATHER'S PRIZE.

PRIZE STORY.

BY E. W. THOMPSON.

Concluded.

'Still there was a wall at your back,'

observed Jack.

'That made it worse! The cliff

seemed to press outward against me.

It did, in fact, incline very slightly

outward. It seemed to be thrusting

me off. Oh, the horror of that sensa-

tion! Your toes on the edge of a

mountain apparently weighing you

slowly forward.'

Beads of sweat broke out over his

white face as the horror he had called

before him. Wiping his lips nervously

with the back of his hand, and

looking upward, as at the narrow

path, he passed long. I saw its cruel

edge and the dark gleams of its abys-

mal waters.

'I know,' he resumed, 'that with my

back to the wall I could never reach

the rope. I could not face towards it

and step forward, so narrow was the

ledge. Motion was perhaps barely

possible that way, but the breadth of

my shoulders would have forced me to

lean somewhat more outward, and this

I dared not and could not do. Also,

to see a solid surface before me became

unbearable. I desired to resolve and

try to turn round before resuming the

desperate journey. To do this I had

to nerve myself for one steady look at

my footing.

'In the depth, below, the myriad

sea-fowl were resting on the black water,

which, though swelling more with the

rising wind, had yet an unbroken sur-

face at some little distance from the

precipice, while farther out it had be-

come to jump to whitecaps, and in be-

neath me, where I could not see, it

dashed and churned with a faint, pe-

evading roar that I could barely dis-

tinguish. Before the descending sun

a heavy bank of cloud had risen. The

ocean's surface bore that appearance

of intense and angry gloom that often

heralds a storm, but save the deep

murmur going out from below, I per-

ceh, all to my hearing was deadly still.

'Cautionally I swung my right foot

before the other, and carefully edged

around. For an instant, as my shoul-

der rubbed against the rock, I felt that

I must fall. I did stagger, in fact, but

the next moment stood firm, face to

the beetling cliff, my heels on the

very edge, and the now sensation of

the abyss behind me no less horrible

than that from which I had with diffi-

culty escaped. I stood quaking. A

delicious roar thrilled every nerve.

The skin about my ears and neck, sud-

denly cold, shrank convulsively.

'Wild with fear, I thrust forward my

head against the rock, and rested in

agony. A wild and wind of sudden

bracing made me conscious of outward

things again. Then a mad eagerness

to climb swept away other feelings and

my hands attempted in vain to clutch

the rock. Not daring to cast my head

backward, I drew it ferocious-like

upward, my raised shoulders and chin

against the precipice—gazed upward

with straining vision from under my

eyebrows.

'Far above the dead wall stretched.

Sideways glances gave me glimpses of

the projected summit coping. There

was no hope in the instinctive work of

the distraction of scanning the cliff-side

had given my strained nerves some re-

lief, to my memory again returned the

promise of the Almighty and the con-

sciousness of His regard. Once more

my muscles became firm-strung.

the hungry air beneath—I offered deep

thanks to my God for the delivery that

seemed so near.

The old man's lips continued to move

but no sound came from them. We

waited silent while, with closed eyes

and bent head, he remained absorbed

in the recollection of that strange min-

ute of devotions.

'I stood there,' he said at last, 'for

what now seems a space of hours, per-

haps half a minute in reality. Then

all the chances to be run crowded upon

me. To turn round had been an at-

tempt, almost desperate before, and

certainly, most certainly, the ledge

was no wider where I now stood. Was

the rope within reach? I feared not.

Would it sway towards me? I could

not hope for that.

'But could I grasp it should I be

saved? Would it not yield to my

hand—coming slowly down as I pulled

unrolling from a coil above, trailing

over the ground at the top, running

fast as its end approached the edge,

falling suddenly at last? Or was it

fastened to the accustomed stake? Was

any comrade near who would summon

aid at any signal? If not, and if I

grasped it, and if it held, how long

would I swing in the wind that now

bore the freshness and tremors of an

imminent gale.

'Now again fear took hold on me,

and as a desperate man I prepared to

turn my feet once more to the vast

expanse of water and nothing beyond

that awful cliff. Closing my eyes, I

swayed, with I know not what mo-

tions, easily around till again my back

pressed against the precipice. That

was a resolute decision. And now

for the decision of my fate! I looked

at the rope. Not for a moment could

I fancy it within my reach! Its swing-

ing was not, as I had expected, even

slightly inward, but when falling back

against the wind, it swung outward as

though the air was eddying from the

wall.

'Now at last I gazed down steadily.

Would a leap be certain death? The

water was of immense depth below.

But what chance of striking it feet?

head first? What chance of preserving

consciousness in the descent? No, the

leap would be death; that at least was

clear.

'Again I turned to the rope. I was

not perfectly desperate, but steady,

nerved beyond the best moments of

my life, good for an effort surpassing

the human. Still the rope swayed as

before, and its motion was very regu-

lar. I saw that I could touch it at

any point of its extension by strong leap-

ing. What then I grasped it. What use

it were not firmly secured above! But

all time for hesitation was gone by.

I knew too well that strength was

mine but for a moment, and that in

the next reaction of weakness I should

drop from the wall like a dead fly.

Bracing myself, I watched the rope

steadily for one round, and as it re-

turned against the wind, jumped

straight out over the heaving Atlantic.

'By God's aid I reached, touched,

clutched, held the strong line. And it

held! Not absolutely. Once, twice,

and again it gave, gave with jerks

which tried my arms. I knew these

indicated but tightening. Then it held

firm and I swung turning in the air,

secure above the wave that beat below.

'To slide down and place my feet in

the loop was the instinctive work of

the moment. Fortunately it was of dimen-

sions to admit my body barely. I

slipped it over my thighs up to my ar-

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