

military talk, and I asked him whether he had long been wearing the Queen's uniform.

"Yes, sir," he answered, "I've been serving ever since I was a kid so high," with his hand just above his knee, "My father was a soldier and I was born in barracks, and when old enough became a drummer boy."

"And was it a pleasant life? Were you kindly treated?"

"Oh! yes, sir; kindly enough. I was rather a favourite with the men; then there were other lads of my age or thereabouts, and we had many jolly sprees. It was the schoolmaster who was our trouble; he did not like us much."

"Ah! I see; rather too free with the birch, eh?"

"Well, he did use it sometimes; but I got one good birching that I shan't forget in a hurry. That was from the provost-sergeant, though, not from the schoolmaster."

"What dreadful military crime had you youngsters been up to?" I queried, laughing at the wry face made by my six-foot companion.

"It was desertion, I think, sir, or rather absence without leave. And sore enough we were after it, too. Yes, sir, I'll tell you all about it, if you care to know."

We were leaning over the steamer's side, watching the animated scene as we swiftly made our way down stream. The sergeant passed a bronzed hand across his forehead, pushed back his cap, and settle down to his yarn.

"Among the youngsters in the regiment there were two—Jim Bates, 'Curley Head,' we used to call him, and Arthur Brown, 'the Tough-un'—who were my particular chums. The schoolmaster said we were the plague of his life, but we got on all right with the drum major and instructors, for we really liked soldiering, and thought no 'small-beer' of ourselves, I can tell you. The other boys in the barracks used to tease us a bit, which only made us closer chums. We were then stationed at Dover. Curley, the Tough-un and I were regularly cracked on fishing, and we got into many a scrape owing to our giving way to it. But Tough-un wasn't quite satisfied with the fishing we could get off the shore, and so one day when we had got a good long afternoon before us, he dragged us off to the harbour, and showed us four or five shillings he had in his pocket.

"My captain gave me that for saving his dog from being run over," said Tough-un, "and I tell you what it is, boys, we'll just hire a boat, and have a good row and fishing."

"Curley didn't quite like the idea, for he thought we might get into a mess of some sort. But the Tough-un only laughed at him, and as I liked the idea we soon agreed to chance it. We knew most of the boatmen, and as the Tough-un could fork out three or four bob as a deposit, we had no trouble in getting what we wanted. Taking off tunics, Curley and I took to the oars, young Brown taking the rudder. After a steady pull my back began to ache, so we lay to a bit, and Tough-un threw out some lines. But we

didn't have much luck. We pulled out a goodish bit further, and then set to fishing in real earnest. It was in Mid-August, I must tell you, and the sun was jolly hot. Well, at last I felt so warm that I could hardly stand it any longer.

"Here, Curley," said I, "I'm going to have a swim; come along with me, while old Tough looks after the boat." We had soon stripped and took a header into deep water. Curley and I were good swimmers, and enjoyed our spree immensely; we had short races; the Tough-un pulling after us. Then we would scramble on board again and take fresh headers. At last Tough-un wanted to have a dip, too, so Curley got into the boat, and Arthur was soon by my side. He was fresh, and challenged to race, and of course beat me; and so we tried our luck over and over again; until Curley called out that we had better come out, as we were far away from shore and it was getting late. The Tough-un, however, had not had enough of it by long way, and so he would not get in the boat, but just to make Curley waxy swam out faster than ever.

"Bob," cried Curley, "I wish you would get out. It is getting late, and there are no end of clouds out there."

"We'll soon row in, Curley, never fear," said I, clinging to the gunwale. "I'll have just one race more with old Tough, and then we can turn back."

"Bob—look, Bob, we're an awful way from Dover," and Curley pointed over his shoulders.

"You're right, Curley! it's a longish bit away. Here, Tough, come back; why we're right half-way across the Channel. Come back or we'll be no end late." But old Tough only kicked up his heels, and put his fingers to his turned-up nose, and dared me to come and catch him. Curley was getting funky, however, so I scrambled into the boat, and got into my clothes in double quick time. Tough then wouldn't come, so I told Curley we'd row off and catch the beggar. He was away ahead of us by this time, and the more we rowed the faster he'd swim away from us.

"Oh! stop this, Bob," gasped poor Curley, mopping his golden-haired pate. "I am about done up."

We called to the Tough-un and as he wouldn't listen we turned the boat's head round, and began to pull back. It was rather hard rowing, but I didn't think much of that till Arthur yelled out for us to stop. This we did, resting on our oars watching the poor chap struggling after us. He seemed rather exhausted, so I pulled towards him.

"Hallo, Curley, it's easier to row this way."

"Yes," said he, "the tide is coming out. It'll be an awful job to row back; it is sure to be a double case of row."

"Cheer up, Curley, we'll do it all right." Poor Curley had lost his dad and had a bit of a Turk for step-father, so he had more to fear than the rest of us. We now came up to the Tough-un, who caught hold of the boat, but couldn't come in, he was so tired. Curley and I had to help him over the side, and then he lay down in the boat, puffing and grunting like an old lady's pet pug.

"You're a nice sort, running away like a couple of cowards," were the first angry words of Brown as he glared at us.

"It serves you right, for not coming when we called. Now, none of your cheek, Arty Brown; get into your togs and help to pull back," and by way of making him hurry up I just got hold of my cane. The Tough-un thought he had better get into his clothes before he argued the point, and so he tugged them on. But by that time it was getting quite dark, and we soon found that we had drifted into a fog or the fog had come upon us. We all three did our best to get back, but we had to row against a strong tide, and the fog swiftly overtook us and then shut out all view of Old England. Well, by that time it wasn't only Curley who was in a funk. Tired out though we were we rowed away like mad towards Dover, as we thought, but we must have got wrong somehow, I fancy. Anyway, at last we had to give up the struggle and rest. What made our position all the more unpleasant was the heavy swell we began to notice. We had no time to be ill, though, for presently the wind began to rise. It drove the fog away, but that didn't help us, for it was pitch dark, and the sea began to look ugly. Let me tell you, sir, a rough sea in a big steamer is a different thing to a rough sea in a little boat. We had to take to the oars again to prevent our being swamped by the huge waves. Perhaps they may not have been quite so big as old Greenwich Hospital that we see over there, sir, but to us, boys in that boat they looked every bit as big as great mountains, threatening to tumble down on us. We tumbled up into the clouds and sunk right out of sight, with the green water like moving walls on all sides of us. Now and again our boat got into the wrong position, and then it was shaken all over with the blow of the green water, which came splashing over us and into the boat. To make things worse for us frightened lads, lightning flashed and thunder rolled over fit to blind and deafen anyone. All this time the Tough-un and I had been sticking to our oars as best we could, while Curley tried to keep the boat going with the waves. But the sea was so rough that we could stand it no longer. It was a dreadful job to get in our oars, and then things seemed to get worse, with the waves breaking over us, and the lightning and thunder. We got off the seats and crouched down in the bottom of the boat, clinging on to each other and the boat for fear of being washed off. I thought it was all over with us, and somehow, now that nothing could be done, felt awfully sick at dying right away from home in the cruel sea. Well, we'd been clinging to each other like this for a bit, when it began to rain just like buckets of water. I thought it was the waves coming to swallow us up, but Curley, who was the coolest of us three, said, "No, it is rain," and luckily it was rain. For this seemed to calm down the sea and presently Curley got up and staggered to the stern, trying to make out where we were. However, we had another good hour of rain and storm before it began to clear. We saw the sun rise, and, at no