

THE LITTLE STOWAWAY.

"Would you like to hear about it?"

I eagerly assent, and the narrator, knocking the ashes out of his pipe, folds his brawny arms upon the top of the rail, and commences as follows:

"'Bout three years ago, after I got this berth as I'm in now, I was second engineer aboard a Liverpool steamer bound for New York. There'd been a lot of extra cargo sent down just at the last minute, and we'd no end of a job stowin' it away, and that ran us late o' startin', so that, altogether, you may think, the cap'n warn't in the sweetest temper in the world, nor the mate neither; as for the chief-engineer, he was an easy-go'in' sort of a chap, as nothing on earth could put out. But on the mornin' of the third day out from Liverpool, he came down to me in a precious hurry, lookin' as if somethin' had put him out pretty considerably.

"'Tom,' says he 'what d'ye think? Blest if we ain't found a stowaway.' (That's the name, you know, sir, as we gives the chaps as hide themselves aboard outward-bound vessels, and gets carried out unbeknown to everybody).

"'The dickens you have' says I. 'Who is he, and where did you find him?'

"'Well, we found him stowed away among the casks for'ard; and ten to one we'd never ha' twigged him at all, if the skipper's dog hadn't sniffed him out and began barkin'. Such a nice little mite as he is, too! I could ha' most put him in my baccy-pouch, poor little beggar! but he looks to be a good-plucky un for all that.'

"I didn't wait to hear no more, but un on deck like a sky-rocket; and there I did see a sight, and no mistake. Every man-Jack-o' the crew, and what few passengers we had aboard, was all in a ring on the fo'c'stle, and in the middle was the first-mate, lookin' as black as thunder. Right in front of him, lookin' a reg'lar mite among them big fellers, was a little bit o' a lad not ten year old—ragged as a scarecrow, but with bright, curly hair, and a bonnie little face o' his own, if it hadn't been so woful thin and pale. But bless your soul! to see the way that little chap held his head up, and looked about him, you'd ha' thought the whole ship belonged to him. The mate was a great big, hulkin' black-bearded feller, with a look that 'ud ha' frightened a horse, and a voice fit to make one jump through a key-hole; but the young un warn't a bit afear'd—he stood straight up,

and looked him full in the face with them bright, clear eyes o' his'n, for all the world as if he was Prince Halfred himself. Folk did say afterwards"—lowering his voice to a whisper—"as how he comed o' better blood nor what he seemed; and, for my part, I'm rayther o' that way o' thinkin' myself; for I never yet see'd a common street Harab—as they calls them now—carry it off like him. You might ha' heered a pin drop, as the mate spoke.

"'Well, you little whelp,' says he, in his grimmest voice, 'what brought you here?'

"'It was my step-father as done it,' says the boy, in a weak, little voice, but as steady as could be. 'Father's dead, and mother's married again, and my new father says as how he won't have no brats about eatin' up his wages; and he stowed me away when nobody warn't lookin', and guv me some grub to keep me goin' for a day or two till I got to sea. He says I'm to go to Aunt Jane, at Halifax; and here's her address.' And with that, he slips his hand into the breast of his shirt, and out with a scrap o' paper, awful dirty and crumpled up, but with the address on it, right enough.

"'We all believed every word on't, even without the paper; for his look, and his voice, and the way he spoke, was enough to show that there warn't a ha'porth o' lyin' in his whole skin. But the mate didn't seem to swallow the yarn at all; he only shrugged his shoulders with a kind o' grin, as much as to say, 'I'm too old a bird to be caught by that kind o' chaff;' and then he says to him, 'Look here, my lad, that's all very fine, but it won't do here—some o' these men o' mine are in the secret and I mean to have it out of 'em. Now, you just point out the man as stowed you away and fed you, this very minute; if you don't it'll be the worse for you!'

"The boy looked up in his bright, fearless way (it did my heart good to look at him, the brave little chap!) and says, quietly, 'I've told you the truth; I ain't got no more to say.'

"The mate says nothin', but looks at him for a minute, as if he'd see clean through him; and then he faced round to the men, looking blacker than ever. 'Reeve a rope to the yard!' he sings out, loud enough to raise the dead, 'smart now!'

"The men all looked at each other, as much as to say; 'What on earth's a-comin' now?' But aboard ship, o' course, when you're told to do a thing, you've got to do it; so the rope was rove in a jiffy.