

Until then, the skipper had not more than once or twice left his own cabin, now, however, he was his appearance on deck, and took the command of the vessel. He was evidently intoxicated and in an ill humour because of the shifting of the wind.

'We shall have a hot time of it now,' muttered one of the sailors when the captain in language which I shall no further describe than that almost every other word was an oath, gave contradictory orders, and then stormed that he was not obeyed.

I shall give no further account of that wretched day, exhibiting, as it did most appallingly the misery that flows from unbridled passions. I could not help, however, wondering at that time, both how men could be induced to sail under the orders of a brutal desperado like this captain, and why they did not combine to resist such flagitious abuse of almost irresponsible power. I did not know, at that time, the fearful penalties they would have incurred by resistance. Probably, also, if resistance had been offered, as many of the crew would have sided with the tyrant as with the victim. My first wonder would perhaps have been solved, if I had known all the circumstances relating to the connection between the captain and his crew.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A STORM.—THE GOODWIN SANDS.—A SHIP-WRECK.

"ALL HANDS ON DECK!"

I was roused from a troubled slumber by this order, shouted down the hatchway by one of the watch, and on obeying, a new experience opened upon me. The wind had risen to a storm, and was whistling through the rigging, and beating the sails against the masts with frightful concussions, the vessel was rolling and pitching, so that it was impossible that a novice like myself at least, to keep his legs, and it was strange that I was not at once swept overboard, for heavy waves were dashing furiously across the deck. The night was not very dark, but a blinding heavy storm of snow was falling, so that not only the sea and sky, but almost every part of the vessel was hidden from sight. The snow froze, too, as it fell, and every rope seemed to be encased in a coating of rough ice.

It did not take long to discover all this, but I was not to be a mere spectator of the storm, if that term may be allowed, where literary scarcely anything could be seen. I was holding,

on to a rope, when the sailor Ned stumbled against me, and the next moment, with a volley of abuse, I was ordered aloft to assist in reefing sail.

I had scarcely scrambled up the ratlines, when a sudden cry of 'breakers' reached me. I did not know what was meant, but the men who were already laying out the mainsail yard well enough understood the alarm; and it was echoed back by their lips in tones of terror which I have never forgotten. By this time, either the snow storm had partially lulled, or my eyes had become more accustomed to the misty light, so that, casting my eyes in the direction the vessel was taking, I fancied I perceived, within pistol shot of its bow, a long broad line of foam; and I was not deceived in thinking that I heard, above the turmoil of the wind, a sound like that of waves furiously dashing on shore.

'We are on the Good'ens,' shouted one of the men near me, sliding down as he spoke by a rope to the deck, and followed by another and another, who thus left the sail to its fate. I followed them more slowly, not the loss alarmed perhaps, that I was unconscious of the cause of their alarm, and was not fully aware of the precise danger close at hand.

On deck, all was confusion and dismay. The men were hurrying to and fro, slipping, falling, scrambling again to their feet, clinging again to ropes and filling the air with shouts of desperation, awful curses, and frantic prayers. The captain, more than any of the rest seemed to have lost all presence of mind: Fright had driven away intoxication; and amidst the terrible din I could hear him offering the most extravagant rewards to his men if they would save the ship and his life. Alas! no human power was available for this now.

One only of the seamen seemed to retain any degree of self-possession this was Ned, who sprang to the helm, which had been abandoned, calling on the others for assistance but none except myself, heeded him. Our united efforts were futile. Perhaps, if the danger had been earlier perceived, it might have been avoided, but I am not sailor enough to judge, as it was, we might as well have attempted to lift a mountain as to turn the vessel from its destructive course. On, on it bounded, then came a crash which seemed to shake and loosen every timber, and a shock which cast us with violence to the deck, and when I rose half stunned to my feet, the work of destruction had already commenced.

Yet in this moment of awful dread, and

when eternity seemed to be already opening to all on board, there was space and time left for consideration and prayer. I had left the helm and with Ned—for even his protection, or rather his presence, at that time seemed to give me some encouragement; (he, as I have said, was the only one who had not given way to despair)—wit Ned, then, I had rushed forward and was clinging to the foremast, when the captain staggered towards us. By this time the snow had so far abated, and objects were so far visible, that I could see that his (the captain's) countenance was ghastly pale.

'Ned, Ned!' he cried, despairingly, when he had recognized his only associate, and I fear his accomplice in many hidden crimes—'Ned, I can't die yet! I arn't fit to die, you know I arn't.'

'I reckon not, Captain,' said Ned, hoarsely. 'If you are, 'tis more than the rest of us is; and you must have had a mighty sudden change.'

'I tell you I arn't, Ned,' groaned the captain; 'I haven't repented, I always said I'd repent, I did; and I haven't got time now; you know I haven't, Ned.'

'You've got as much time as the rest of us,' replied the sailor, in a tone almost of contempt, as it seemed to me.

'I tell ye, I can't do it all in a minute, I can't, there's more to repent of than you know about. It isn't fair, it isn't, to cut me off like this!'—and then the unhappy wretch broke out into a strain of expression which curdled me with horror, and which I may not repeat. 'My father was a good man, he was,' he continued, clinging with desperation to a rope, and awaying to and fro with every roll of the fated vessel, 'yes, he was a good man, and he used to tell me I must pray, he did, and—and—'

'Why don't you pray, then, Captain?' demanded the other, with evident impatience.

'I can't, I really can't, Ned, the words won't come, they won't, I can't think of none on 'em, and I arn't fit to die, I arn't.'

'Please, Captain,' I said, getting as close to him as I could, 'say, Lord, save me or I perish, and if you say it with all your heart, the Lord Jesus Christ will hear you.'

'Ha! what's that?' shouted the unhappy man, 'I have heard those words before somewhere, I have. Did you hear 'em, Ned? But I can't say it; I tell you I haven't repented, I haven't; and tisn't of no use. Jesus Christ won't hear me; he won't save me; he knows I arn't fit to die; and it's a——it isn't right and fair it isn't, not to give me more time to repent