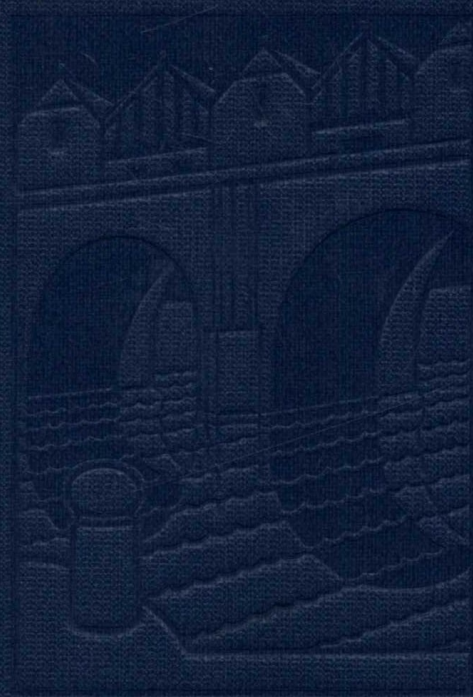


# MARTIN OF OLD LONDON



HERBERT  
STRANG

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FOR A SECOND OR TWO THERE WAS SILENCE AS THE MEN  
FACED EACH OTHER.

*(See Chapter 33)*

# MARTIN OF OLD LONDON

By  
HERBERT STRANG



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STORIES FOR BOYS  
by HERBERT STRANG

*Adventures of Dick Trevanion, The*  
*Adventures of Harry Rochester, The*  
*A Gentleman-at-arms*  
*Air Patrol, The*  
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*Sultan Jim*  
*Tom Burnaby*  
*Winning His Name*  
*With Drake on the Spanish Main*

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# Martin of Old London

## CHAPTER THE FIRST

### THE WAITING BOAT

One fine evening in the August of the year 1666, Martin Leake, aged fourteen and a few months, had strolled down to the riverside for a breath of air.

It had been a terribly hot day. The whole month had been fine and dry; the narrow streets of London were stuffy and smelly, and it was a relief to escape from them to the bank of the broad Thames, where the easterly wind carried in a sharp salt tang from the sea.

The river always had a charm for Martin. In those days it might have been called the main highway of London City, and he loved to watch the wherries laden with passengers, and the tall ships lying at anchor or floating up or down on the tide.

He sauntered on and on, every now and then exchanging a nod or smile or cheery word with some waterman he knew. But most of the watermen were busy on the river, and as the evening went on Martin met fewer and fewer people.

Presently he sat down to rest near the head of a flight of stairs that led down to the water. A broad stone post gave support for his back, and leaning against it he watched the sun sinking into a fiery sky, and the lights that began to twinkle on the ships moored in the stream.

It was very peaceful. The only sounds that reached his ears were the plash of oars in passing boats and the voices of the watermen and their passengers.

Turning to look in the other direction, he noticed for the first time a ship's boat straining at her painter, which was made fast to a ring at the foot of the



stairs. In the boat sat, or rather crouched, a solitary seaman—a man with a very dark face and long, coal-black hair. His head was bent forward on his crossed arms; it seemed that the light rise and fall of the boat on the tide had rocked him to sleep. He wore a sailor's long red cap and an orange-coloured jersey.

A waterman passing at the moment stopped and smiled as he glanced at the slumbering figure. Observing Martin, he said:

“They sleep like cats, these foreigners.”

“He's a foreigner, then?”

“For sure: out of the Portugal ship repairing at Deptford. Her mizzen-mast, they say, was shot away by a French privateer nigh the Goodwins. Very bold these Frenchies are of late, though I did hear as the Duke of York have give 'em a good drubbing.”

He said Good-night and passed on.

All was still again. The glow faded from the sky. Martin's eyes were attracted by a three-master that glided out of the dusk, dropping down with the tide. He watched her graceful shape threading her way among the smaller craft on the river, and wondered where she was bound for, what adventures she would meet with on her voyage.

She had almost disappeared when Martin was roused from his reverie by the sound of footsteps on the cobbled roadway behind him. Peeping round the edge of the post, he saw, in the gloom, a man come forward to the head of the stairs. There he paused and threw a look round in the manner of a person who is ill at ease.

Martin caught a glimpse of his face, and, with a start of surprise, shrank back into the shelter of the post. The man had not seen him. Next moment he stepped down the stairs, and in a low voice hailed the seaman slumbering in the boat.

There was no answer. The newcomer called again, more urgently. This time the sailor stirred, straightened himself, mumbled a reply, and hauling on the painter, drew the boat alongside the lower stairs. The man stepped into it, casting another suspicious glance around as he seated himself on the stern thwart.

A word was spoken that Martin did not catch. Then the seaman cast off, thrust his oars into the rowlocks, and with long, swinging strokes drove the boat into the darkness downstream.

“What's Mr. Slocum after?” said Martin to himself as he got up and started

for home.

## CHAPTER THE SECOND

### MARTIN AT HOME

And who was Mr. Slocum?

Martin was the only son of a master mariner who, retiring after many years at sea, had settled in a little house near the Tower. He had suffered many misfortunes. Ship after ship in which he had invested his savings was lost, and the last of them, the *Merry Maid*, sailing from Bristol in the year '62, had never been heard of again.

"Have you seen or heard aught of the *Merry Maid*?" was the question the old captain had put to all seafaring men coming into the river.

The answer was always the same. Martin often wondered what had become of the vessel. Many a time he wished that he could go sailing over the seas to try to find some trace of her. But when his father and mother both died of the Plague, he felt bound to stay on shore and help to look after his little sister Lucy.

They were left almost destitute, having nothing except the small sum that was realised by the sale of Captain Leake's furniture. This was in the hands of a lawyer, and as it would bring in only a few shillings a week, it was clear that Martin would have to earn something.

He was taken from St. Paul's school, and the lawyer found him a job in the shop of Mr. Greatorex, a wealthy goldsmith in Cheapside, who had known his father, and indeed had had an interest in the *Merry Maid*.

"I'll give the lad a trial," Mr. Greatorex had said when the lawyer approached him. "He'll not get on very far unless he is apprenticed, of course; but I'm not inclined to take him as an apprentice without a premium; at any rate, until I find out the kind of lad he is. I've lost hundreds of pounds in that unlucky vessel. Let him come and do odd jobs for a while. Mr. Slocum will tell me how he gets on."

Martin had never seen Mr. Greatorex himself. Unlike most of the city merchants of that day, who lived over their shops, the goldsmith had built himself a house in the country, and left his business almost entirely to Mr. Slocum, his manager.

There were three apprentices who lived in the house, two of them sleeping under the shop counter. They rather despised the new boy. Martin had to come

early in the morning to take down the shutters and sweep out the shop. All day he was running errands between the shop and the workrooms in Foster Lane, or carrying parcels to customers, or fetching things for Mr. Slocum and the housekeeper.

At the close of business he had to put up the shutters, and was often very tired by the time he reached home. At first one or two of the apprentices were inclined to bully him, but he showed himself to have plenty of spirit and a neat way with his fists, and his tormentors soon learnt to leave him alone. But his life was a hard one. Mr. Slocum was ill-tempered, and nothing but Martin's care for his sister kept him from running away to sea.

All the way home Martin puzzled about Mr. Slocum's journey down the river in the foreign boat. The apprentices talked among themselves about their master, and Martin knew that he often went out at night, not returning until very late. He was late also in the morning, except when Mr. Greatorex was expected to ride in from the country. And his temper seemed to grow worse every day. He barked at the apprentices like an angry dog, and if they or Martin committed the slightest fault, they had learnt to expect a thrashing.

The house where Martin lived was a large old building that stood by itself some distance from the riverside. It had once been the mansion of a nobleman, but of late years it had been let out in tenements.

The basement was occupied by an old seaman named Dick Gollop and his wife. Gollop had served under Captain Leake in many a voyage, and retired at the same time, obtaining employment as a constable. His thick round figure and bandy legs were well known along the waterside, and he was so good-tempered that the small boys of the neighbourhood liked to go with him on his rounds, and beg him to tell them a story.

When Martin and his sister were left homeless it was arranged that they should live with the Gollops, the lawyer paying a small sum weekly for their board and lodging. Martin slept in a small parlour at the back, and Lucy in a slip room. They had their meals with the constable and his wife, whose tongue was sometimes rather sharp, but whose heart was kind.

"You're late to-night, young master," said Susan Gollop as Martin entered the kitchen. Supper was on the table, and Lucy had already begun her meal. Gollop was not present.

"Look what I've got," said the little girl, holding up a cake of hardbake.

"Ay, the Mounseer gentleman will spoil you, that he will," said Susan. "I never liked foreigners, but the Mounseer has a kind heart, and he has took to

you most uncommon.”

The Mounseer was an old French gentleman who had fled from persecution in France a few years before, and now occupied the first floor of the Gollops’ house. He had struck up a friendship with Lucy, and regularly every day escorted her to and from the dame’s school she attended about a mile away. Mrs. Gollop was glad to earn a little every week for looking after his room and his clothes; but he bought his own food and did himself what little cooking he needed.

“And what do you think?” Susan went on. “The second floor is let at last.”

“I’m glad of that,” said Martin. “You’ll get more money now.”

“I wish I might,” said the old woman. “But the new gentleman will do for himself. He’s a nice, fair-spoken gentleman, I will say that, Seymour by name, and I wonder at him making his own bed and dusting and all that. But there, I suppose he knows his own business; it’s not for me to say; only I would have liked to make a shilling or two extra doing for him as I did for the lodger what’s gone.”

At this moment heavy footsteps were heard clumping down the stone stairs.

“Here’s my old man,” said Susan, going to the door.

“A fine night, my hearties,” said the constable as he came in. “And plaguey hot. Never did I know a summer as dry as this. Give me a drink, Sue.”

He hung his three-cornered hat on a peg, threw his staff into a corner, stripped off his long coat, and rolled up his shirt sleeves. His broad red face beamed as he sat down to his simple supper of bread and cheese and beer.

“Well, young master, what’s your own news to-day?” he said to Martin. “Have you been conveying gold and silver about the city? When I think of the watches and the goblets and the golden rings you carry on you, I wonder to myself whether, being a constable, I oughtn’t to go with you.”

“I haven’t done much of that to-day,” said Martin. “I had to fetch some tobacco for Mr. Slocum—ah, I must tell you! I was down by the river just now, and I saw Mr. Slocum get into a boat with a foreign sailor, from a Portugal ship, I was told.”

“Well, that’s not a wonderful bit of news to tell the Lord Mayor about. These warm nights many folks like a row on the river. It freshens ’em up and helps ’em to sleep. I reckon all the watermen were busy, and Mr. Slocum took the first boat that was handy.”

“I don’t think so. The boat seemed to be waiting for him.”

“Maybe he had business with the master of the Portugal ship—a matter of earrings for the crew, belike.”

“But he came down in a sneaking sort of way, as if he didn’t want to be seen.”

“Steady, my lad; don’t you go for to be too sharp, getting fancies into your head. It’s none of your business, what Mr. Slocum does; and if he didn’t wish to be seen, he won’t thank you for talking about it. So take my advice and keep your mouth shut.”

## CHAPTER THE THIRD

### THE ASSAULT

Next day, when Martin was preparing to put up the shutters of the shop in Cheapside, Mr. Slocum called him.

“Here, you Leake, you’re not to go home yet. There’s a parcel to be taken to an address in Middle Temple Lane. It must go without fail this evening, and you’ll have to wait for it.”

“Very well, sir,” said Martin.

“And on your way you can leave a letter in Whitefriars. That will save a special journey. Don’t loiter, mind. You’ll take a receipt for the parcel, and give it to me to-morrow.”

Martin was a little annoyed at being kept late, as he had promised to take Lucy on the river. But there was no help for it. He closed the shop, then went to the workrooms in Foster Lane, where the parcel would be made up.

Only one workman was there at his bench, giving the final polish to a goblet of silver-gilt. He appeared to Martin to dawdle over his job, and it was nearly dark before the parcel was ready.

Martin set off with it, going through St. Paul’s Churchyard and down Ludgate Hill. Then he turned to the left, towards the maze of lanes and alleys that constituted the district of Whitefriars. It was at a house in one of these lanes that he had to deliver the letter.

He walked quickly, for it was an unsavoury neighbourhood. Many of the houses were old and tumble-down; many of the people who lived in them were bad characters; and Martin, knowing that the parcel he carried was valuable, wished that he could have taken it by the more direct and open route along Fleet Street.

It was already so dark that he had some difficulty in finding the house at which the letter was to be delivered. In those days houses were not numbered; some were distinguished by signs that hung over the doorways, others had no distinguishing marks at all.

The address on Martin’s letter ran: “To Mr. Mumford, at his house over against the Golden Fleece Tavern.”

After making some inquiries, Martin discovered the house where Mr.



Mumford lived, and rapped on the door. A window opened, and a hoarse voice asked, "Who's there?"

"A letter from Mr. Slocum," Martin replied.

A few moments afterwards the door was opened, and a rough-looking man, holding a candle, gave a hard look at Martin as he took the letter.

"All right; no answer," he said, without breaking the seal.

Martin hurried away, wondering how the man knew there was no answer before he had read the letter.

He had got about half-way to his destination in Middle Temple Lane when two men rushed suddenly out of a narrow doorway and almost knocked him down. As he staggered, he felt a tug at the parcel he carried under his arm.

Tightening his grip upon it, he drew himself away, but next moment a sharp blow behind his knees threw him to the ground.

"It's under him; quick about it," said a hoarse voice very much like Mr. Mumford's.

Martin had fallen on the parcel. He realised now that the men were trying to steal it, and he grasped it with both arms, and called aloud for help.

One of the men instantly clapped his hand over Martin's mouth, while the other sought to wrench the parcel from his clinging arms. He kicked out with his feet, pressed with all his weight upon the parcel, and desperately resisted the man's attempt to turn him over on his back.

But his assailant was a man of brawn. The struggle was hopeless. As Martin was heaved violently over, his mouth was released for a moment from the clutching hand, and he let out a piercing cry. A heavy shoe kicked him; once more he was stifled; but his cry had been heard; there was an answering shout and the clatter of feet on the cobblestones down the street.

The ruffians made one more attempt to wrest the parcel away. Failing, they kicked him again, and made off just in time to escape the sturdy watermen who had rushed to the spot.

"Why, it's young Master Leake," said one of them, lifting him from the ground. "What's amiss?"

Bruised and breathless, Martin told his story.

"They didn't get my parcel," he concluded. "But it's ruined, crushed; look at it. It's no good my going on. I must take it back."

“And we’ll see you safe,” said the watermen.

Escorted by his rescuers, Martin returned to the shop in Cheapside, and gave the parcel into the hands of the housekeeper. Then, his aching body supported between his two friends, he walked slowly homeward.

## CHAPTER THE FOURTH

### MARTIN LOSES HIS JOB

The moment Martin entered the shop next day Mr. Slocum pounced on him.

"Here, you Leake, come here," he cried. "What do you mean by it? What have you got to say for yourself, eh? A pretty messenger you are! Look at this goblet; scratched, dented, absolutely ruined! Who's to pay for the damage? Tell me that."

"Truly I am sorry, sir," said Martin; "but it was not my fault. I was set upon and knocked down by two ruffians. But for some watermen who came up I should have lost the goblet altogether."

"Watermen, you say. Did they chase the footpads?"

"No, sir; the men ran away at once."

"You'd know them again, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid not. It was nearly dark, and they attacked me so suddenly that I hadn't time to get much of a look at them. But I did see that one of them had a big scar across his forehead, just above the eye."

"And where did this happen?"

"A little way beyond Mr. Mumford's, sir, just after I had given him your letter."

"And you mean to tell me you were stupid enough to carry a costly goblet into that nest of rogues?"

"You told me to, sir."

"I did not."

"Indeed, sir, you said I was to take Mr. Mumford's letter on my way, and that meant——"

"Don't contradict me! You were a careless young dog; went meandering along, I dare say, with your nose in the air and your eyes on the stars. You are not to be trusted. If anything of the sort happens again, you and I will say good-bye, Master Leake. Get your broom and sweep the floor."

Mr. Slocum went to his little room at the back, and Martin set about his

work, smarting under a sense of injustice. He had simply done as he was told, and it was unfair to be blamed for what could not have been foreseen. Who would have guessed that anyone would attack a boy carrying a small parcel?

To add to his annoyance, the 'prentices began to bait him.

"A likely story," said one. "You made it all up."

"Of course he did," said another. "Butter-fingers! Dropped the parcel; a horse gave it a kick, and he tells this cock-and-bull story to explain the damage."

Martin went on sweeping, saying nothing, though his ears began to burn.

"Look at him blushing," jeered the first. "His name ought to be Molly."

Martin threw down his broom and sprang at his tormentor, a big, hulking fellow half a head taller. They grappled; Martin wrenched himself out of the other's grip and rushed at him with clenched fists.

They fought almost without sound, fearing to draw Mr. Slocum from his den. The 'prentice was content at first to ward off the blows that Martin rained on him, and the scornful smile on his face only fed the smaller boy's rage.

So intent were they upon the fight that neither noticed the entry of a well-dressed elderly gentleman. He stood looking on with a smile until, scuffling and swaying, the boys lurched against him, the 'prentice treading on his toes.

At this moment Mr. Slocum came out of his room and, rushing down the shop, gave Martin a smart clout on the side of his head.

"I beg a thousand pardons, sir," he said to the customer. "This is a troublesome young rascal; I have already had to admonish him this morning, and——"

"Oh, it's nothing, Mr. Slocum!" said the gentleman, smiling. "Boys will be boys. I admire the youngster's pluck, and as for your admonishments, I fancy they are due rather to the other for fighting one so much smaller than himself. Besides, the lout trod on my toes, confound him!"

"I am shocked, sir, deeply pained," said Mr. Slocum, glaring at the two boys. "Get away to your work; I will deal with you presently."

Martin could not help watching the pleasant red-faced gentleman who had taken his part. He noticed how humble Mr. Slocum's attitude was to the customer, and how respectfully he spoke.

"I wonder who he is?" Martin thought, and the gentleman's features remained fixed in his memory.

When the customer had finished his business and departed, Mr. Slocum turned to Martin and, speaking in his usual harsh, overbearing way, said:

“You disgrace this establishment! Mind you this: if I catch you fighting here again I shall dismiss you on the spot!”

Martin made no protest, but he felt the injustice of his employer’s treatment, and wished more than ever that he was free to find a place as ship’s boy.

The very next day matters came to a head.

Early in the afternoon Martin was surprised to see enter the shop the old Frenchman who lived above the Gollops. At the moment he was polishing some silver plate in the back premises, along with two of the ’prentices. The third was behind the counter, and the Frenchman asked him, in his queer broken English, if he might see Mr. Slocum.



The boys lurched against him

The 'prentice went into Mr. Slocum's office, and, returning in a few moments, bade the visitor, not too politely, to follow him. The door of the office was closed behind him.

"What's old Froggy want now?" said one of the 'prentices.

Martin looked at the speaker in surprise. He had not himself seen Mounseer in the shop before, but evidently this was not his first visit.

"I'd like to know," replied his opponent of the previous day. "I wonder he dares to show himself in a respectable shop. His clothes aren't fit for a scarecrow."

Martin flushed. The Frenchman was his friend, a kindly, courteous, dignified gentleman, and he disliked to hear him criticised. It was true, Martin had to admit, now that his attention had been called to him, that his clothes were shabby; but they were well made, and of good quality. For the first time Martin asked himself whether the old man was very poor.

"I wonder where he lives," the first 'prentice went on. "He's never had anything sent home, has he?"

"Not that I know of," was the answer. "I dare say he lives in some filthy cellar and feeds on rats and mice. He's come a-begging, I should think; but he won't get much out of old Slocum."

Martin had been growing more and more indignant, and could remain silent no longer.

"Let me tell you the French gentleman is a friend of mine, and lives in my house," he blurted out.

"Oh, indeed! A friend of yours, is he? And you and he live in the same cellar, I suppose, and share the vermin? I'm not surprised."

"He doesn't live in a cellar. You'd better say no more about him; I won't stand it."

"I'll say what I like without asking you. He's a miserable old scarecrow of a foreigner, and we don't want people like him in London. He would make a good guy for the Fifth of November. I'd like to light some crackers under him and see him jump."

This was more than Martin could stand. Dropping the salver he was polishing, he rushed at the 'prentice with such impetuosity that the boy lost his balance and fell. Up again in an instant, he closed with Martin, and, forgetting everything else, the two began to fight in the narrow space behind the counter.

"Look out!" warned the 'prentice looking on.

But the warning came too late. They lurched against one of the glass-cases containing jewellery. There was a crash. Splinters of glass fell all about the floor, the door of Mr. Slocum's den flew open, and Mr. Slocum himself, pale



with anger, dashed out, followed by the old Frenchman.

“You again, you young villain!” roared the goldsmith.

He caught Martin by the ear, lugged him to the door, and shot him into the street with a parting kick.

“Don’t you dare to show your face here again,” he cried, “or I’ll thrash you black and blue.”

## CHAPTER THE FIFTH

### THE NOISE IN THE NIGHT

Martin picked himself up, rubbed the mud from his clothes, and without giving another look at Mr. Slocum or the shop, set off on the way home.

"I'm glad to be out of it," he thought; "but what shall I do now to earn some money?"

He had taken only a few steps when he heard his name called from behind. Turning, he saw Mounseer hurrying after him, and stood still until the Frenchman had caught him up.

"I see it," said the old gentleman. "I ask, what is the matter?"

"I am dismissed, sir; that is all," Martin replied, as they walked on.

"Dismissed! But yes; does the Englishman dismiss with violence? I do not understand."

"Mr. Slocum was angry. I was fighting one of the 'prentices."

"Ah, ah, fighting; what you call the box," said the Frenchman, smiling. "That is what the English like, I think. It is not then a reason to dismiss."

"I fought yesterday, and Mr. Slocum threatened to dismiss me if I did it again."

"Ah! That is another thing. To fight once, yes; but to fight a second time when the master forbids, that is disobedience, also it is folly. What was the subject of the quarrel? I may ask?"

"The fellow was saying things about——"

Martin pulled himself up. He could not hurt the old gentleman's feelings by repeating the ill-natured sneers at his appearance.

"You do not tell, eh? Well, I ask no more. You are young, Martin; as you grow older you will know that fighting is not for always; you must choose the proper time. Without doubt, Mr. Slocum is a hard man; but it is reasonable he think his place of business is not the right place, nor the hours of business the right time, for the practice of the box."

Martin ruefully agreed that his friend was right.

"But come, then," Mounseer went on, noticing his downcast look. "Do not

be down in dumps; that is what you say, eh? To fight is no disgrace, if the cause is good. To be dismissed, that is bad, certainly; but I think you will soon find other employment.”

The Frenchman’s confidence was not shared by Dick Gollop and his wife when Martin explained the reason of his early return. In applying for a new situation he would need a reference, and it would be hopeless to look for a recommendation from Mr. Slocum.

“What I say is, go straight to Mr. Greatorex,” said Susan. “That Slocum is a wicked tyrant, that’s what he is, and Mr. Greatorex ought to know about him.”

“Nonsense, Sue!” said her husband. “The boy disobeyed orders; that’s mutiny, and Mr. Greatorex wouldn’t override his manager. Martin won’t tell what he was fighting about, but says he isn’t ashamed of it. There’s a mystery somewhere, and I don’t like it. He must look for another job, and I hope he’ll get one.”

Late that night, when Dick Gollop was out on his round as constable, and Lucy had gone to bed, Susan was stitching a rent in one of Mounseer’s shirts.

“There! That’s done at last,” she said. “’Tis time Mounseer had a new shirt, I’m thinking. Deary me! I’m tired out after working all this broiling hot day, and I’m sure I don’t want to climb those stairs.”

“Let me take it up,” said Martin. “I’ll save your legs.”

“That’s kind of you. I promised the old gentleman he should have it to-night, or I wouldn’t trouble you.”

Martin took the shirt and left the room. The staircase was very dark, and he walked up slowly, feeling his way along the wall.

When he was about half-way up he heard a creaking on the landing above, opposite the Frenchman’s door. He halted, and, supposing that Mounseer himself had come out of his room to ask for his shirt, he was on the point of calling to him when he caught the sound of hurried but soft footfalls on the stairs higher up, and then of a door gently closed.

He went on again, reached Mounseer’s door, and knocked. At first there was no answer; but after knocking a second time he heard the sound of flint and steel in the room within, then a voice asking who was there, and at last a fumbling with the bolt.

“Ah! It is you, my young friend, with my shirt,” said the old gentleman, opening the door. “I had fallen asleep, and had to light my candle.”

"I thought I heard you on the stairs, sir," said Martin.

"Oh no! I have not left my room. It is late, and time for your bed. Good-night. A thousand thanks!"

Martin returned to the basement, bade good-night to Susan, and went to bed. But he found it impossible to sleep. He lay tossing on his bed, worrying about the future, listening to the church clocks striking the hours.

It was some time after midnight when the stillness was broken by what seemed to be a low whistle from the patch of waste ground outside and a little above Martin's window. The sound was not repeated, and Martin almost believed he was mistaken; but a few seconds later he was roused by another sound; a slight creaking, as if a window somewhere had been opened, then closed again.

On so hot a night anyone might open a window for air. It was the closing, after the whistle, that caused Martin to get up, go to his window and look out upon the waste ground. No one was in sight. There were no more sounds, and Martin went back to bed.

Just as he was at last dozing off to sleep he was roused by a slight sound in the house. In old buildings the stairs often creak without apparent cause, and Martin was not startled or disturbed. But a minute or two later he heard a louder sound, like wood breaking, and then shouts and the stamping of heavy feet.

Springing out of bed he rushed into the passage and up the stairs as quickly as he could in the dark. The noise appeared to be coming from the neighbourhood of Mounseer's room. When he reached the landing he was hurled back against the wall by the impact of a heavy figure that seemed to have come through the open door.

Before he could recover his footing he heard someone stumbling down the stairs. He darted to the banisters and was just able to see a dark form rush along the passage and through the front door, which he banged after him.

"What is it? What ever is it?" cried Susan from the door of her room. Lucy shrieked with alarm and fear.

"Don't worry," Martin called. "He has gone."

He went into the Frenchman's room, and by the faint starlight he saw a scene that surprised him. In the middle of the floor stood the old gentleman, rapier in hand, his coat wrapped round his left arm, as duellists were accustomed to wear their cloaks. A chair was overturned, and there was broken

wood near the door.

“It is you, my young friend,” said the Frenchman, dropping his point. “Be good enough to light my candle.”

While Martin did this, Mounseer stood on guard, watching the door.

“He will not come back, I think,” he said. “I was disturbed by a sound outside my door; I sleep lightly, like all who have followed campaigns, and I had time to rise and seize my rapier before the bolt was forced and that wretch broke in.”

“Who was he, sir?” asked Martin.

“That I know not,” was the reply. “But he will remember me,” he added with a chuckle. “I felt my point get home, and the wretch was only saved because, as I pressed him, I stumbled over my chair. . . . But, pardon, monsieur, I did not observe you.”

In the doorway stood a tall man in a dressing-gown, his close-cropped poll and blue shaven cheeks giving him a strange appearance in the candlelight. It was Mr. Seymour, the new lodger who had recently taken the top floor.

“I would not intrude, sir,” said the newcomer politely, “but I heard the noise, and came to give neighbourly assistance if it were needed. I see that it was not.”

Mounseer bowed without saying anything.

“I am vastly relieved, sir,” Mr. Seymour went on. “Such an attack might have been dangerous to one of your years. The city is infested with rogues, but one might expect to be safe with a constable in the house.”

“The constable is not in the house at night, sir,” said the Frenchman drily. “I thank you for your benevolent intention; the danger is past, and I would not keep you from your bed.”

His bow as he said this could only be taken as a courteous dismissal, and Mr. Seymour bowed himself out. Martin guessed from the expression of Mounseer’s face that he did not like his neighbour.

“Now, my friend Martin, please me by returning to your bed,” said the old gentleman. “I will barricade my door; they will not disturb me again.”

Martin heard the clocks strike two before he fell asleep. And it was only in his last waking moment that he remembered having heard creaking stairs earlier that night near Mounseer’s room.

## CHAPTER THE SIXTH

### MARTIN'S PASSENGER

Martin spent all the next day in a fruitless search for work. Either no one wanted a boy, or the few that had places open would not engage a boy who had been dismissed for fighting.

In the evening, tired and dejected, Martin was walking homeward along the waterside. Glancing towards the stairs where he had seen Mr. Slocum embark on the foreigner's boat, he noticed two small boys bending down over a boat that was moored to an iron ring. A third boy stood half-way up the stairs, evidently keeping watch.

While Martin was still some distance off, the two boys rose and ran up to their companion, smiling and pointing. Then all three climbed the remaining steps and darted away.

Martin could not help smiling at the mischievous little fellows. They had untied the painter, and set the boat adrift on the stream. It was now floating down on the swift-running tide.

By the time it came opposite Martin it was already a dozen yards from the shore. To his surprise he saw that it was not empty, as he had supposed. In the bottom lay a dark bearded man with a red cap and an orange jersey—the same man as Martin had seen at the same spot two or three days before. He was fast asleep, just as he had been then. Neither the action of the mischievous boys nor the motion of the stream had awakened him.

"Hi! hi!" shouted Martin, fearing that the man might come to grief if the boat struck against some larger vessel lower down.

But his cries did not awaken the sleeper, and Martin ran on to the stairs; there was usually a boat belonging to one of his watermen friends moored on the farther side; he would put off in her and catch up with the drifting boat before she came to harm. But there was no boat at hand.

"Well, never mind," said Martin to himself. "I can't help the sleepy-head. I dare say he'll be seen from some wherry or lighter. How strange that he should be here again!"

He sat down with his back against the stone post, and idly watched the boat as it rapidly drifted downstream. In a few minutes two men came from behind the head of the stairs, and grumbled at the absence of the watermen. Then one

appeared, rowing his wherry from the opposite shore. The men hailed him; he pulled in to the foot of the stairs, took on the impatient passengers, and rowed away again, towards the city.

The dusk was gathering, and Martin was about to rise and go home when he heard footsteps on the other side of him, and a voice say, angrily,

“The boat is not here!”

“I can’t wait,” said another voice, which Martin recognised at once as Mr. Slocum’s. Instinctively he drew farther back into the shadow of the post. “It would not be safe. You must hire a waterman.”

“There isn’t one to be seen,” said the first speaker. “There never is when you want one.”

“No doubt one will come in a minute or two,” said Mr. Slocum. “Good-night.”

The speaker had been hidden from Martin by the post. He heard Mr. Slocum hurry away; then the other man came in sight and walked down the steps. Under his arm he carried a small box.

“Old Slocum here again,” thought Martin. “It’s very strange.”

He was now so much interested that he decided to wait and see what happened. The man was tall and swarthy, with a big red nose, and a beard as black as the foreign seaman’s. As he sat on the stairs he muttered to himself.

After a while a heavily-laden wherry approached from upstream. It contained several passengers, laughing and singing noisily, and when they disembarked and mounted the stairs Martin saw that they carried baskets, and guessed that they were picknickers returning from a jaunt to Chelsea or Battersea. The waterman was Jack Boulter, a friend of his.

The waiting stranger called to Boulter, demanding to be taken to Deptford.

“Not me; not to-night,” said the waterman. “I’ve been out all day. I’m going home.”

“But you must take me, I say,” the stranger protested. He raised his voice, and Martin was surprised at a change in his accent. With Mr. Slocum he had spoken like an Englishman, but now his utterance was exactly that of a foreigner.

“What you say don’t matter,” returned Boulter, proceeding to tie up his boat. “I won’t stir out again for no man.”

The stranger began to plead and coax and threaten, but to all his excited



words Boulter turned a deaf ear. Some impulse prompted Martin to rise and walk down to the bottom of the stairs.

“I say, Boulter, let me take him to Deptford,” he said.

“It’s you, young master,” said Boulter. “Well, you’ve rowed my wherry time and again, and I don’t mind if you do, so long as you promise to tie her up when you get back.”

“Ah! You are kind. You are a friend,” said the foreigner. He produced a shilling, and was handing it to Martin when Boulter reached forward and took the coin.

“Thank’ee,” he said. “Young master will take ’ee quite safe, and I’ll get along to the Pig and Whistle.”

In another minute Martin was pulling the wherry out into mid-stream. The passenger sat in silence upon the stern thwart, still grasping his box.

There was now little traffic on the river. Here and there near the banks barges were moored, and the spars of larger vessels were outlined against the glooming sky. Glancing frequently over his shoulder Martin steered a course clear of obstructions, and in no long time came within sight of the Deptford shipyards.

Presently the passenger, who had not spoken a word, motioned Martin to land him at a jetty jutting out from a quay along the wall of a house overhanging the river. It had the appearance of an empty warehouse.

Martin was pulling round when the man changed his mind.

“No, not there,” he said. “Beyond; farther: at the stairs of Deptford.”

Martin sculled on, feeling that there was something mysterious about his passenger. He seemed anxious, or excited.

The wherry was almost opposite to the Deptford stairs when a cry broke from the passenger’s lips. Martin glanced round, and saw a boat approaching swiftly. It contained a single man, pulling hard against the tide.

Martin’s passenger stood up, and shouted angrily a few words in a foreign tongue, which Martin could not understand. The man ceased rowing, and turned his head, and Martin recognised him as the foreign seaman whom he had seen a little while before asleep in the drifting craft. Next moment he swung his boat round and rowed rapidly towards the entrance of the repairing yard.

A few minutes later Martin landed his passenger at the foot of the stairs.

The man seemed to be in too great a hurry even to thank him. He sped up the stairs and disappeared.

“I’ll have a little rest before I go back,” thought Martin.

He tied up the boat and strolled along by the edge of the repairing dock. Only one vessel lay there, a three-master brig without her mainmast, and it flashed into Martin’s memory that the waterman had told him of a Portugal ship that had come in for repairs.

“Is that a Portugal vessel?” he asked a man who was lounging near by.

“Ay, Portugal she is,” was the reply. “Dismasted by a Frenchman in the Channel. She’s not so foreign-looking as some Portugal ships I’ve seen, but her crew—why, bless your life, they’re as pretty a set of cut-throats as you’ve ever set eyes on.”

## CHAPTER THE SEVENTH

### A BLOW IN THE DARK

Martin found himself to be taking a rather unusual interest in this Portugal ship. It was impossible in the dusk to see her lines clearly; indeed, she was lying so low in the dock that even in the daylight one could not have obtained a good view of her. And the shipwrights' work being over for the day, there was nothing going on upon her deck.

What interested Martin was not so much the vessel herself as the persons with whom she seemed to be connected. There was the foreign seaman whom he had twice seen waiting at the foot of the stairs. There was Mr. Slocum, who had embarked on that seaman's boat. And now there was this third man, who had come with Mr. Slocum to the stairs, who spoke like an Englishman and also like a foreigner, and who was evidently very well known to the sleepy-headed seaman.

"There's some mystery about all this," Martin said to himself. "Mr. Slocum said it wasn't safe for him to wait about at the stairs. Why? What reason can he have for coming or sending to this Portugal ship at all? Has she jewels or plate among her cargo, and he's buying them? But why should he do it secretly?"

It was quite clear that he would not get answers to his questions by staring at the vessel. Two or three swarthy men in outlandish costumes were now moving about the deck: he heard their strange voices, so unlike the sing-song of English sailors. The lighting of a lamp reminded him that black night would soon lie upon the river.

"It's time to be off," he thought, and, turning about, he walked back without hurry to his boat, cast her off, and began to pull out into mid-stream.

The tide was now slack, just on the turn, and he was glad that he would not have to row against the current.

He had taken no more than half a dozen strokes when the silence was broken by loud shouts from the direction of the repairing yard. Turning his head, he saw a small figure in the act of diving into the river from a little jetty at the angle of the yard, and behind him a number of much taller forms rushing along as if in pursuit.

It was so nearly dark that all these figures were only just visible. But in a

moment Martin was able to see a black head and two splashing arms on the surface of the water. The swimmer was making straight across towards the opposite bank.

He was seen also by the men on the jetty. With cries of excitement they dashed back to the shore, and ran towards a boat that was drawn up on the mud.

Martin had ceased rowing; his interest in the Portugal ship was whetted anew, for surely those excitable men were foreigners from that vessel. Who was the fugitive?

As he rested on his oars he noticed that the swimmer had suddenly changed his course, and was coming with swift over-hand strokes straight for the boat. Meanwhile, the pursuers had hauled their boat off the mud, got afloat, and were now pulling hard in the same direction.

Martin felt a throb of excitement as he watched the chase. By this time he realised that the fugitive was swimming to him for help, and he checked the motion of his boat, which had been drifting slowly on the turning tide, and edged it towards the swimmer.

Next moment a hand shot out of the water and grasped the gunwale. The second hand followed. Then a husky, spluttering voice whispered:

“Take me in, quick! They will catch me.”

Martin was thrilled when he saw that the speaker was a boy, a little younger than himself, as he guessed. Without reasoning, acting on a natural impulse, he shipped his oars, and trimming the boat as well as he could by lying across it, managed with some difficulty to help the little fellow to clamber in.

“Quick! They will catch me,” gasped the boy again as he sank exhausted into the bottom of the boat.

In a moment Martin had the oars in the rowlocks and began to pull with all his strength. He caught sight of the pursuing boat forging out of the darkness, and the shouts of the men aboard her told him that they had seen what had happened to the boy.

Spurred on by the angry menace of their voices, he bent to his oars with a will. He had seen a look of terror in the boy’s eyes as he climbed into the boat, and afterwards he remembered, what he had not consciously observed at the time, that the boy’s skin was dark, though his features were not those of a Negro.

But Martin did not look at the boy as he lay in the boat. His whole attention was concentrated on the pursuers. His heart sank; they were gaining on him. How could it be otherwise? The Thames wherry of those days was a heavy lumbering craft, and a half-grown boy could not hope to outrow the two men who were urging their boat along with strong, sweeping strokes.

He heard encouraging cries from the third man who sat in the stern, and as the pursuing boat gained on him yard by yard, he saw with a strange thrill, in spite of the darkness, that this man was the mysterious bearded passenger whom he had rowed down the river an hour before.

Without knowing why, this recognition urged him to still greater exertions. But the strain was telling upon his muscles; already they were aching almost to numbness. Yet he rowed on and on, doggedly, not dropping his sculls until the other boat sheered up alongside, and one of the men, swinging round the butt of his oar, dealt Martin a blow that sent him backward off his thwart. His head struck the thwart behind, and he lay doubled up between the two, stunned.

How long he remained thus he never knew. When he came to himself, conscious of a stiff back and an aching head, and raised himself, he found that he was alone in the boat, which was drifting towards the mud flats on the Surrey shore.

He looked around; the other boat, the fugitive boy, the pursuers, all had disappeared.

“Where am I?” he thought.

There were few lights on the banks; in the darkness he could not recognise his whereabouts. Seizing his sculls, he rowed slowly, painfully, across the stream towards the northern shore. Presently, in the distance, he caught sight of dim lights stretching across the river, and knew that they shone from the houses on London Bridge.

With a sigh he swung the boat about, and pulled still more slowly against the running tide, keeping close to the shore. It seemed hours before he came to the well-known stairs. He tied up the boat and then deliberated.

“Shall I go and tell Boulter what’s happened? He’ll be at the Pig and Whistle: I’d better go home.”

Dragging himself along, more distressed at his failure to save the boy than at his own injuries, he reached his house, groped stumblingly down the dark stairs, and found Susan Gollop placidly knitting.

“Why, sakes alive, what’s come to you?” she cried, as the candlelight fell

upon his pale face.

“I’ve hurt my head,” he replied, dropping into a chair.

“There! If my thumbs didn’t prick!” she exclaimed. “I knew something had happened to you, you’re so late. I said to Gollop: ‘That boy’s got into mischief, and you can’t deny it.’ Now just you sit still and let me look at the place and tell me all about it.”

The good woman lifted his hair gently.

“Gracious me! A lump as big as a duck’s egg,” she cried. “You’ve been fighting again, I’ll be bound, though I’d have thought——”

“Don’t be a goose, Susan,” Martin interrupted. “If I’d fought, the bump would have been in front. I was hit a foul blow, and I’ll tell you.”

Susan Gollop was more tender in action than in speech. She bathed the wounded head and bound it up with a strip of linen, while Martin recounted the events of the evening.

“Dear, dear! Well, I’m sure! Poor little boy! Oh, the wretch!” she exclaimed at points of the story.

“Well, I never did hear the like,” she said at the end. “That Slocum: it’s my belief he’s doing something he’s ashamed of, or ought to be, drat him! It’s a mercy you don’t work for him any more. And the other man; would you know him again? For you must tell Gollop all about it, and he’ll take the wretch up and see what the magistrates have to say to him.”

“Yes, I’d know him again,” Martin replied. “I couldn’t forget his big red nose and his beard as black as your saucepan.”

“That’s strange,” said the woman thoughtfully.

“What’s strange?”

“Why, if I didn’t see just such a one this very day! Ay, and in this very street. He passed me as I came back from shopping! ‘That’s a red coal in a black grate,’ thinks I, and indeed he was a fearsome-looking creature.”

“I wonder what he was doing about here?”

“Ah! Who knows? But don’t bother your head about him any more. Get you to your bed, and I hope the bump’ll be flatter by the morning.”

## CHAPTER THE EIGHTH

### THE FACE AT THE WINDOW

At breakfast next morning Martin expected to have to tell his story over again to Dick Gollop, who had been out on duty half the night. But the moment he entered the room, with his head still bandaged, the constable took the wind out of his sails.

"Ahoy, shipmate!" he said, "how's the weather? By what I hear you've run through a bit of a squall."

"You know, then?" said Martin.

"Know! Of course I know. When my watch was over, somewhere about four bells, and I came below dead-beat and turned in, d'you think I could get any sleep? Not a wink, believe me. There was my old woman wide-awake, and bursting with the news.

"'Gollop,' says she, 'there's rogues and rascals in the world.' That being no news at all, I just gave a grunt and began to snore. 'Listen to me,' says she, 'and don't pretend.' What you can't help, put up with. So I listened, always ready to oblige, and out it came, like a flood over a weir.

"I own I dozed one or twice afore she was well under way, but I was fair shook up when she'd got her canvas full spread. You take my meaning? I've fought with a cutlass, and I've knocked down a swabber with a marline-spike, but never in my born days have I hit a man with an oar; there's something uncommon about that, and as a constable I took note of it.

"Foreign ways, to be sure. Them fellows in the boat must have been some of the crew of that Portugal ship."

"Not the big-nosed man with the black beard," said Martin. "I'm sure he was an Englishman."

"Maybe, but I ask you, what was he doing along with those foreigners? And what's his ploy with Slocum?"

"Ay, and why come along this very street?" Susan put in.

"There you go!" said Dick. "I've seen many a big nose, also red, *and* black beards, likewise many tabby cats. You can't tell one from t'other unless you've studied 'em. I see a tabby in one place; you see one in another; that don't make 'em the same."

“What’s cats got to do with it?” protested Susan.

“Nothing,” said Dick. “All I say is, if I took up a man just because he’d a big red nose and a black beard the magistrates would call me a fool, and belike I’d have to pay damages, and then where’d you be?”

“Then why talk about cats?” said Susan. “And tabbies! Now if you’d said black cats——”

“Drat the cats!” cried the constable. “You’ll go on about ’em till you’re tired, I suppose. Martin, what I say is, keep your weather-eye open, and if so be as you spy that black-haired fellow again, keep him in sight, my lad, and inform an officer of the law.”

A tapping was heard on the banisters at the head of the stairs.

“There’s Mounseer, Lucy,” said Susan, “waiting to take you to school.”

The little girl sprang up; she liked her morning walk with the old Frenchman. She ran up the stairs, but returned in a few moments.

“Mounseer says will you please lend him a hammer and chisel,” she said.

“Willing, and anything else,” said Gollop. “But ask him if I can do the hammering for him. I’ve been reckoned a handy man in my time; you have to turn your hand to any odd job at sea.”

The girl gave the message and returned.

“Mounseer says it’s a trifle, and he won’t trouble you!”

“Very well then; take him the things, and welcome.”

The Frenchman laid the tools on a chair in his room, then locked the door and started with Lucy for the half-mile walk to her school.

Soon afterwards Gollop and Martin went out together, the former to take his morning draught with his cronies, the latter to make another effort to find work.

In his pocket he carried some bread and cheese, so that he need not come home for the mid-day meal.

All through the hot summer day he wandered about, seeking employment. In the evening he returned and reported that he had again met with no success.

“Never mind,” said Susan. “Things will take a turn. Now, just run upstairs and ask Mounseer for that hammer. I want it to knock some nails in Lucy’s cupboard, so as she can hang up her things tidy. Tell him he shall have it back if he hasn’t done with it, but he’s been banging nearly all day, so I dare say he



has.”

On reaching the Frenchman’s door Martin saw that a staple had been fitted to one of the side joists, evidently to receive a padlock. From within the room came the sound of knocking. He tapped on the door; the sound ceased and Mounseer asked:

“Who is there?”

“It’s me, sir,” said Martin.

“Ah, you, my young friend. Wait but one little moment.”

The bolts were drawn inside, the door was opened, and there stood Mounseer in his shirt-sleeves, chisel in hand. Martin gave his message.

“But yes; assuredly: I ask pardon for keeping it so long. But you see, one must be careful. My lock was broken by that villain; therefore I must make other defences.”

Martin noticed that an iron socket for a bar was fitted to the inside of the door, and the bar itself, a stout baulk of wood, was leaning against the wall.

“Pouf! It is hot,” the Frenchman went on, “though I take off my coat and open the window. A little rest will be agreeable. But I ask for the hammer again, until I finish; I wish to finish this night.”

Promising to bring the hammer back in a few minutes Martin went down to the basement. But it was more than half an hour later, and dusk was already falling, before he was able to return: Susan’s job had taken longer than he had expected.

This time there was no answer to his tap on Mounseer’s door, nor any sound from within. He waited awhile, then tapped again. A sleepy voice asked who was there, and when Martin was at last admitted, the old gentleman apologised for the delay.

“It is the terrible heat,” he said, spreading out his hands. “I fall asleep; I am old, and the labour fatigues me. How I would like to be young, like you! Labour is light for the young.”

“But I can’t get any work, sir,” said Martin.

“Courage, my young friend. It will come. Seat yourself, and tell me where you go to-day; I am very much interested.”

Sitting on a chair facing the open window, Martin began to relate his wanderings of the day, while the Frenchman took the hammer and chisel and worked away at the bar of wood by the light of a candle.

While Martin was speaking he fancied he saw something move just outside the window. Though somewhat startled, he had the presence of mind to go on with his story, and a few moments afterwards was astonished to see a hat appear above the edge of the window-sill, at a corner.

It rose slowly; the dim light of the candle at the farther end of the room showed him a man's face—a face seamed with a scar across the temple. So great was his surprise at recognising one of the men who had tried to steal his parcel that he jumped up with a sudden cry.

Instantly the face disappeared, and by the time Martin and the Frenchman reached the window the man was half-way down the gutter-pipe up which he had climbed.

With amazing quickness Mounseer seized a three-legged stool and hurled it down. It missed the man by an inch or two, and fell with a crash upon the ground. In another second the man dropped beside it and bolted across the open space into the darkness.

“What is the matter?” asked a voice from above.

Looking up, Martin saw Mr. Seymour, the occupant of the upper floor, leaning over his window-sill.

“A matter of no consequence,” said the Frenchman, drawing Martin back into the room. “I must close the shutters,” he went on, “though it will be very hot. But I do not like the curious people.”

“That face belonged to one of the men who tried to rob me,” said Martin. “It is strange he should have come to the house where I live, for I’ve nothing worth stealing here. I’ll describe him to Gollop, and he’ll circulate the description, and someone will arrest the fellow.”

“Not for me, my friend,” said the Frenchman. “I, a stranger, would not give trouble. And indeed my best protection is not in the Law, but in a few stout bolts and my lifelong friend yonder.”

He pointed to his rapier, hanging on the wall.

It was clear to Martin that the Frenchman wished to be alone, so he said Good-night and went downstairs. On the way he was struck by a curious circumstance. According to Susan Gollop, Mounseer had been hammering all day; why then was there so little sign of it? All that he had done would have been the work of only an hour or two. But perhaps the old gentleman was not expert with tools.

## CHAPTER THE NINTH

### AN ADVENTURE IN PUDDING LANE

Next morning, when the time came for Lucy to start for school, the Frenchman said that he felt a little indisposed, and would not venture out in the heat.

“I’ll take her,” said Martin. “But I can’t promise to bring her back, because I’m going in search of work again, and I don’t know where I’ll be when school is over.”

“Don’t you worry, my lad,” said Susan. “Dick will be home then, and he can fetch the child for once. And I hope you’ll get a job to-day, for it makes a difference not having your few shillings at the weekend.”

When he had left his sister at the door of the dame’s school, Martin stood for a minute or two undecided as to the way he would go in his hunt for work.

He was feeling rather disheartened. It was the first time Susan Gollop had said a word to hint that he was a burden to her, and in his pride he was determined that she should never have another occasion for any remark of the sort.

Up to the present his applications for a job had been made at the larger places of business—establishments that would rank equal with Mr. Greateorex’s shop in Cheapside. But it was no time to pick and choose; he would take the meanest job that offered itself, no matter what it was.

It occurred to him that he might have better success if he crossed the river and made inquiries at the Hop Market in Southwark. In the course of his walk towards London Bridge he was crossing Pudding Lane, a narrow street near Billingsgate, when he was almost thrown down by the sudden impact of a strange figure that darted out of a baker’s shop at the corner.

“Steady!” he cried, putting up his hands to protect himself.

The figure recoiled, then without a word of excuse or explanation dashed down the lane. Martin laughed; he had never seen a more comical object than this boy, a little bigger than himself, who was covered with flour, and whose head was almost concealed in a large mass of dough.

His amusement was increased when he saw a second figure issue from the shop—the figure of a short, stout man, he too cased in dough and flour from

head to foot. The baker set off at a toddling scamper after the boy, their course marked on the cobblestones with a white trail.

In a few moments the pursuer recognised that his chase was hopeless. The boy, indeed, had turned the corner and was out of sight by the time his master had run half a dozen paces.

“The young villain!” cried the man, stopping short and shaking his fist in the direction of the vanished fugitive.

He turned back towards the shop, picking at the dough that clung to his hair and beard, spluttering and muttering curses the while. As he was passing Martin a mass of the loosened dough fell over his eyes, and for a moment he tottered like a blind man.

Martin sprang to his side, held him steady, and helped him to rid himself of some of the dough, which hung in long clammy strips about his face, like the curls of a full-bottomed wig.

“Ugh! Ugh!” gasped the baker. “The insolent young ruffian! Thank you! Thank you! My hair is short, or—— The young viper! ’Tis a mercy none of the neighbours have seen my plight. Quick, boy; lead me. I can scarcely see my own shop door!”

Martin took him by the arm and led him the few paces to his shop. On the sign hanging above the door were the words: “Faryner, Baker to His Majesty the King.”

Within the shop Martin stayed to give further assistance to the angry baker, who intermingled abuse of the runaway boy with explanations, half to himself, and half to Martin.

“The whelp!” he exclaimed. “He comes late, and when I tax him, is saucy, scandalously saucy. ’Twould try the patience of a saint, and I’m no saint. Must silence his chattering tongue. Up with a pan of dough; dab it on the rascal’s head.

“The impudence of the knave! What does he do but snatch up another pan and empty it over me—me, a master baker, baker to the King, contractor to the Admiralty, purveyor to half the nobility and gentry. Ay, and flings a bag of flour at me. What do you think of that? What is the world coming to?”

Martin did not venture to say what he thought.

“Well, he’ll never darken my doors again, that’s certain. And that reminds me. There’s his basket—the loaves ought to have been delivered an hour ago. I was already one boy short, and the rascal knew it, and yet he came late. I shall

lose some of my best customers.”

The greater part of the sticky mass had now been plucked from the baker's head. He looked ruefully at the basket of loaves in a corner of the shop, scratched his head, became conscious that there were still some fragments of dough adhering to his short-clipped hair, and burst out again into violent denunciation of his errand boy.

On the impulse of the moment Martin spoke up.

“I'll take the basket. I'm out of a job.”

“Ah!” exclaimed the baker, looking at him keenly as if he was only just aware of him. “Who are you?”

“My name's Martin Leake.”

“Are you honest?”

“Won't you try me?”

“That's not a bad answer. You've done me a service and I like the look of you. I'll try you. Here's a list of the customers these loaves are to be delivered to. Set off at once. Nay, wait! I don't like changes. If I try you, and you satisfy me, I shall expect you to stick to the job. Five shillings a week and a loaf a day. That's my wages.”

“I'll be glad to earn that to begin with,” said Martin.

“Then that's a bargain. Don't loiter.”

Martin took the basket on his arm, and as he went out he heard the baker mutter:

“How shall I get rid of the rest of this plaguey dough? The young ruffian!”

Scanning the list of customers given him, Martin was interested to find at the bottom the name of Mr. Slocum, at the goldsmith's shop in Cheapside. The idea of meeting his old master was not at all pleasant, but he reflected that if he went to the back entrance, from a yard leading out of Bow Lane, he would probably avoid such a meeting, and see only the housekeeper or the cook, who had both been on friendly terms with him.

“I'm glad it's the last on the list,” he thought. “But I wish I hadn't to go there at all. What strange fate is always bringing me into contact with old Slocum? I don't like it. There's something mysterious about it.”

And it was with a strange feeling of misgiving that he trudged on with his heavy load of bread.

## CHAPTER THE TENTH

### A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR

Martin's first hour's experience as baker's boy was by no means pleasant. Mr. Faryner's customers had been kept waiting for their morning rolls and loaves, and at nearly every house where Martin called he was received with dark looks and cutting words.

He took it all in good part, explained that he was a new boy, and promised to be earlier on the morrow. As the basket became lighter he grew more cheerful, and by the time he reached Bow Lane he had almost forgotten the forebodings with which he had started.

Turning into the yard by which he would reach the back entrance to Mr. Slocum's house he suddenly collided with a boy coming in the opposite direction. He was turning round; the basket was jerked off his arm, and the two loaves it contained rolled out on the cobblestones.

"Now, clumsy, why don't you look where you are going?" said a well-remembered voice.

Martin had already recognised his old opponent, the apprentice through whom he had been dismissed. He was himself recognised before he could say a word in reply, and for a moment or two the boys stared at each other. Then the apprentice laughed.

"Dash my eyes!" he said. "Do I see Martin Leake?"

Without waiting for an answer he swooped on the loaves, picked them up, rubbed the dust off on his breeches, and rushed back into the open doorway of the house.

"Sally, here's Martin Leake turned baker's boy," Martin heard him shout.

In a few seconds he came out again followed by the cook with the loaves in her hands. Martin had picked up his basket, and was standing just outside the door.

"Well I never!" exclaimed the cook, who had always been well disposed towards Martin. "So you are working for Faryner, are you? I was wondering what had come to the boy. Mr. Slocum is in a towering rage because he's been kept waiting for his breakfast. I'll just send up the bread, then I'll come back, Master Hopton; mind you that."

She retreated into the house, and the boys were left at the door. They stood looking at each other awkwardly. Martin bore Hopton no malice; on the other hand he could not feel friendly towards him, and had not the cook asked him to remain he would have walked away.

“Slocum’s a terror,” said the apprentice suddenly.

Martin did not reply.

“Sent me out to buy a loaf,” Hopton went on. “You saved me a journey.”

This did not appear to call for an answer. There was silence again for a few moments.

“I say, I’m sorry I got you turned out,” said Hopton, awkwardly.

“You needn’t be,” said Martin, surprised. “I wouldn’t come back again for anything.”

“I don’t blame you. I’m sick of Slocum and his tempers. Does Faryner pay you well?”

“Now what’s that to do with you, Master Hopton?” said the cook, returning. “Just you run back to the shop, or you’ll get into trouble.”

“All right, Sally,” said the apprentice, grinning. He gave Martin a friendly wink as he turned into the house.

“So you have made up your quarrels,” said the cook.

“I’m not sure that we have,” replied Martin, with a smile. “But he’s very friendly. I wonder why?”

“He wishes he were you, I daresay, instead of being bound to Mr. Slocum for seven years. To Mr. Slocum, says I, though ’tis really to Mr. Greatorrex. Ah! I wish the old master had never left the City. What things are coming to I don’t know. Mr. Slocum’s cursing and cuffing those apprentices from morning till night, and you’re lucky to be out of it.”

“What’s the matter with him?”

“Goodness alone knows! It’s my belief he has something on his mind, but — There he is, bawling for me. Don’t let him see you. Coming, sir, coming!”

Martin hurried away, feeling more than ever glad that he was no longer in Mr. Slocum’s service, and wondering whether his old employer’s ill temper was connected in any way with his mysterious doings on the riverside.

Another round, in a different part of the city, occupied part of the

afternoon, and Martin had to clean out the shop before he left for home. Again it had been a very hot day, and he was more tired than he had ever been before; so tired, indeed, that he was not inclined to talk about his new job.

“ ’Tis a come-down, to be sure, for a master mariner’s son,” said Dick Gollop; “but what you can’t help, make the best of.”

“Now don’t you go for to dishearten the lad, with your come-downs,” said Susan. “ ’Tis honest and useful, and we shan’t have to buy so much bread.”

Weary though he was, Martin that night found it impossible to sleep. His room was small and felt like an oven, though he had opened the window and the door, and thrown off all the bedclothes.

The senses of a sleepless person are extraordinarily acute, and as the hours dragged on Martin became annoyed at the regular snores of Susan Gollop in the room beyond. Dick happened to be out on night duty again. For a long time the only other sounds Martin heard were the footsteps of Mr. Seymour as he went along the passage above and up the stairs to his room.

“He’s very late home,” thought Martin.

He heard the lodger shut his door; then all was silent again until a new sound, outside his window, caught his ear. It was a slight thud, such as would be made by a small object falling on the ground, and he might hardly have noticed it had not recent events made him heedful and suspicious.

Rising from his bed he tiptoed on bare feet to the window and looked out, taking care to keep out of sight himself. It was a starry night, and he saw a dark patch against the sky—the form of a man standing on the square of waste ground above the basement level.

His thoughts flew to the man who had climbed the gutter pipe to the old Frenchman’s room, and his heart began to beat more quickly. Then he heard whispering voices. The man was evidently talking to someone on one of the upper floors. Only a few words were spoken, then the man walked quickly away.

Martin was relieved; it seemed that there was to be no further attack on the Frenchman’s room. But he was also puzzled. Who was the man? Why should anyone come in the dead of night to the back of the house and talk to one of the inmates? And to whom had he spoken? It must be either Mounseer or Mr. Seymour.

Still listening and watching, Martin suddenly heard the stairs creak. More than ever puzzled, and a little alarmed, he stole out into the passage. There



were now footsteps in the hall above. He crept up the basement stairs on hands and knees, and noticed a dim flickering light upon the wall.

At the top of the staircase he bent low and peeped round. A smoky candle was guttering on the hall floor. The front door was partly open, and Martin saw the back of a man in nightcap and dressing-gown, talking to someone outside.

“Mr. Seymour!” said Martin to himself. “It’s too tall for Mounseer.”

“The sloop is in the river,” said a husky voice. “It’s too risky. You had better take it.”

“If I must, I must!” replied Mr. Seymour, in a low tone.

He opened the door a little farther. Martin felt strangely excited. A mysterious visitor to Mr. Seymour; a sloop in the river; some risky enterprise; something that Mr. Seymour was to take; all these circumstances sharpened his curiosity and caused him to strain eyes and ears.

The two men between them carried a heavy object into the hall. Martin could not see what it was, nor could he see the features of the visitor. Mr. Seymour was between them and the light.

“Remember you’ll have to account to me,” said the stranger in the same low, husky tone.

“If you don’t trust me,” replied Mr. Seymour impatiently, “take it away!”

“Trust you—oh, yes!” was the answer, with a slight gurgle of laughter. “But I thought I might as well remind you. That’s all. Good-night!”

He turned his back and went out into the darkness, Mr. Seymour gently closing the door behind him. And then Martin saw that the object on the floor was a square box, brass-bound at the corners.

Mr. Seymour shot the bolt without noise, shouldered the box, which appeared to be of considerable weight, then looked at the candle.

“Confound it!” he muttered, frowning.

Martin guessed that he was annoyed because, laden with the box, he could not stoop to lift the candle.

Slowly, taking every step cautiously, he carried the box up the first staircase, across the landing, and then up the staircase to his own room. In a minute he returned, picked up the candle, and ascended once more.

Martin’s heart was thumping as he crept down to his room again, and it was almost morning before he at last fell asleep.

## CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH

### MR. SLOCUM AGAIN

Having to be early at his new job, Martin was hurried in the morning. When he left after a quick breakfast, Dick Gollop was still a-bed; he had only returned from his night duty about five o'clock. So Martin had no opportunity of telling the constable of the strange incident he had witnessed in the night, and he refrained from mentioning it to the others for fear of alarming them.

He was still greatly puzzled, and his mind was full of the matter as he walked to Mr. Faryner's shop in Pudding Lane. There was no reason why Mr. Seymour should not have a box delivered to him. But why had the messenger come secretly by night? What was the danger? And what was the meaning of the mysterious reference to the sloop in the river?

These questions were driven from his thoughts for a time by his work. Mr. Faryner praised him for coming punctually, gave him a few odd jobs to do, and then sent him out on the morning round.

In due course he arrived at the goldsmith's house, and once more made his way to the back entrance. Leaving his basket just inside the door, he took the four loaves intended for Mr. Slocum's household up the stairs to the kitchen on the first floor.

Passing the hall landing, he noticed that the door of a small room which was usually kept locked now stood ajar. The fact did not arouse any particular curiosity, and he went on to the kitchen and handed the bread to the friendly cook.

"I'm glad you are early," she said, "though it wouldn't have mattered so much this morning. The master isn't up yet. He was out late last night, and I warrant will be in a rare tantrum when he wakes. And how do you like your new work?"

"Better when I've finished than when I begin," replied Martin, smiling. "The basket is very heavy at the start, and it makes me very tired this hot weather."

"Never mind; it's something to be working for the King's baker, and I hope you'll get on. There now! What did I say!"

Mr. Slocum had just called "Sally!" from below stairs, and his voice certainly sounded far from good-tempered.

“Coming, sir,” the cook answered, and hurried to the head of the staircase.

“I want you to go at once to the dairyman’s in Milk Street and complain of the mouldy cheese he sent me. Tell him it’s not fit for pigs, and if he can’t serve me better I’ll deal elsewhere.”

“Very good, sir,” said Sally. “I’ll just fetch my shawl.”

“Nonsense, woman; you don’t need your shawl a hot day like this. Get away at once, and be sure you don’t mince matters.”

Martin heard Mr. Slocum’s loud angry tones distinctly. The cook hurried downstairs, her master talking at her all the time. As soon as she had left the house Mr. Slocum dashed up the stairs, and Martin realised that his retreat was cut off. He had no fear of his old employer, but was not at all eager to meet him.

By the time Mr. Slocum reached the kitchen door, Martin had stepped back into the shelter afforded by the jutting corner of a large cupboard. Mr. Slocum came in hurriedly, turned the key in the door, and went straight across the room to another door that led into a passage and thence into his private room.

Martin waited, undecided whether to go at once or to remain until he was sure the coast was clear. Just as he was on the point of moving he heard Mr. Slocum returning, and thought it better to stay where he was.

The goldsmith’s movements were much slower now, and when he came into view Martin had a shock of surprise. The man was carrying a box, brass-bound at the corners, exactly like the box which had been delivered to Mr. Seymour the previous night. He passed across the kitchen, unlocked the door, and began to descend the stairs.

Martin felt trapped. He was lucky in having escaped notice so far; he could hardly hope not to be observed if Mr. Slocum returned. And hearing Mr. Slocum enter the room on the half-landing he hurried after him on tip-toe, hoping to slip by unseen.

Just as he reached the half-landing Mr. Slocum, empty-handed, came out of the little room, shutting the door behind him. Martin bent, and tried to dash by; but Mr. Slocum heard him, turned quickly, shot out his hand and caught him by the tail of his coat.

“Who on earth are you?” cried the goldsmith. “No use wriggling; I have you fast.” And then, as he caught sight of Martin’s face: “You! You scoundrel! Where have you come from? What business have you here? Didn’t I tell you never to show your face again?”

"I am working for Mr. Faryner, and have just brought your bread," Martin replied.

"Then what are you hanging about for? Why are you hiding in my house?"

"The cook was called away before she had time to pay me."

"And you are skulking here, stealing for all I know. I'll send for a constable, and give you in charge on suspicion of loitering with the intention of committing a felony."

"You may do that if you please, Mr. Slocum," said Martin with spirit. "But you have nothing against me, and you will look rather silly."

At this Mr. Slocum lifted his left hand to clout Martin, who took advantage of a slight relaxing of the grip of the other hand to wrench himself away and leap down the stairs. He picked up his basket and fled out into the yard, leaving Mr. Slocum shouting threats and curses behind him.

The sequel to this unlucky meeting was seen later in the day. On returning from his afternoon round Martin found that Mr. Slocum had sent a message to the baker, saying that if the new errand boy was sent again to the house he would transfer his custom.

"You were impudent, I suppose," said Mr. Faryner, "and you won't suit me, and that's a pity, for I'd taken a fancy to you. It's a lesson to me to make inquiries before I hire a boy."

Martin thought it was high time to give his employer a little information. He related the morning's incident, not mentioning the box; some instinct prompted him to keep that to himself.

"There was nothing much to be angry about," said the baker. "Have you told me everything?"

"I haven't told you that I was once in Mr. Slocum's employment, and he dismissed me for——"

"Impudence? Confess now."

"No, sir; for fighting one of the apprentices."

"Bless me, I've done that myself," said Mr. Faryner, with a laugh. "But come now, I can't afford to lose a good customer. I daren't send you on that round again. Let me see."

He stuck his hands into his belt and looked questioningly at Martin.

"Can you row a boat?" he asked.

“I’ve done it often,” said Martin. “My father was a sea-captain, and I’ve helped my friends among the watermen more than once.”

“Capital! Then I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll put another boy on your round, and I’ll give you the river. You’ll take supplies to the ships in the Pool. What do you say to that?”

“I’ll say thank you, sir; I shall like it very much.”

“Very well, then. You see, I’ve taken a fancy to you.”

## CHAPTER THE TWELFTH

### THE BRASS-BOUND BOX

When Martin reached home that evening he told his friends of the approaching change in his work that was due to Mr. Slocum. Susan Gollop's red cheeks grew redder as she listened to him.

"That Slocum is a monster!" she cried indignantly. "I'd like to give him a piece of my mind, that I would!"

"Now don't you go putting your oar in, my woman," said the constable. "I don't like the man, but he was within his rights in turning out of the house the boy he dismissed for misbehaviour——"

"Misbehaviour, indeed!" Susan interrupted. "What's his own behaviour like? Tell me that. Mr. Greatorex ought to know what a temper the man has got, and if he didn't live so far away I'd tell him myself. Martin shall write it down for me, being no scholar myself, and we'll send Mr. Greatorex a letter."

"Avast there!" said Dick. "Look at it sensible, Sue. Mr. Greatorex is the owner of the ship, so to put it, and he's made Slocum captain. 'Tain't for us to question his right so to do. And d'you think he's going to bother his head about the ship's boy?"

"What ship's boy?"

"Why, Martin, of course. In a manner of speaking he was the ship's boy aboard that craft."

"Stuff and nonsense!" exclaimed Susan. "You and your ship's boy—and Martin the son of a captain *and* owner! Gollop, I wonder at your ignorance."

"Well, my dear, what you can't help, make the best of. Let things alone, that's what I say, and maybe Martin'll never meet Slocum again, and so it won't matter."

Martin was not long in deciding that Mr. Slocum had really done him a good turn. He liked his new job—to deliver bread to the ships in the Pool. Their officers, coming into harbour after long voyages, were glad to get a change from the hard, mouldy, and often worm-bitten biscuit which they had to put up with at sea. Mr. Faryner's excellent loaves found a ready sale among them.

At least once, sometimes twice, a day Martin rowed out from the steps

below London Bridge to the vessels that lay against the wharves or at anchor in the river. Sometimes he would send up his bread in a basket lowered over the side; sometimes, after tying his painter to the anchor chains, he would himself swarm up a rope ladder to the deck. Now and then he had to scramble across the lighters surrounding a vessel that was taking in or discharging cargo.

He found all this thoroughly interesting and enjoyable. It was much easier to carry his basket in a boat than to carry it on his arm. He liked to meet and chat with the jolly sailor-men and to see the insides of the ships whose outsides he knew so well. If he could not go to sea himself, he felt that the next best thing was to have something to do with those who did, even if it were only supplying them with bread.

And he was well satisfied with his change of masters. Mr. Faryner, he found, was just as quick-tempered as Mr. Slocum, but he was not mean or spiteful or unjust.

One Saturday when Martin had made a slight mistake in accounting for the money he had received from customers, the baker flew into a rage.

“You’re either a ninny or a rascal!” he cried. “And I don’t know which is worse. Can’t you add two and two? You’re no good to me. Boys are the plague of my life, none of them any good. If they’re not saucy they’re stupid, and if they’re not stupid they’re——. Here, get out of my sight, and don’t stare at me as if I were a fat pig at a fair!”

Martin was careful to keep out of the angry man’s way, and wondered whether, when he received his week’s wages, he would be told to find another job. To his surprise Mr. Faryner seemed to have forgotten the matter that had upset him.

“Here you are, my lad,” he said, as he handed Martin his five shillings. “And you had better take two loaves home to-night instead of one; there are some over, and they’ll be too stale to sell by Monday.”

Like many another quick-tempered man’s, Mr. Faryner’s bark was worse than his bite.

When Martin got home that evening he found Susan Gollop in a great state of excitement.

“I don’t know what’s coming to us all,” she said. “Only think of it! When Mounseer came back from his walk this afternoon he found his room all upside-down and higgledy-piggledy, and me in the house all the time, and never heard a sound!”

“What happened?” asked Martin, remembering the former attempts on the Frenchman’s room.

“Why, someone got in, front or back, I don’t know how, and picked his padlock, and rummaged the room, forced open his cupboard, slit up his mattress, and even ripped the lining of his coat on the peg.”

“But why? What were they seeking?” Martin asked in his amazement. “He seems to have nothing valuable except his sword.”

“Ah! That’s what puzzles me. And what’s more, Mounseer didn’t seem very upset when he came in and found everything topsy-turvy. He just looked round the room, and then he smiled—fancy that; smiled!—as if it was just a muddle made by children.

“‘You take it easy, sir,’ says I, and he gave his shoulders a shrug—you know his way—and said, ‘Be so good, madam’—he called me madam—‘to help me arrange.’ And when we were in the middle of putting things straight, who should come in but Mr. Seymour.

“‘Dear me!’ says he, all astonished like, ‘what in the world is the matter?’ And just as I was opening my mouth, Mounseer took me up short. ‘Nothing in the world, sir,’ says he, ‘I thank you!’ And he goes straight to the door and shuts it in Mr. Seymour’s face.

“I was fair took aback; where were his French manners? Always so polite to me, calling me madam and all, and yet almost rude to Mr. Seymour!

“Mounseer must have took a dislike to him, that’s all I can say, and very queer it is, for Mr. Seymour is a nice, pleasant-spoken gentleman, with always a ‘Good-day, Mrs. Gollop!’ or ‘Very warm, Mrs. Gollop!’ whenever I meet him on the stairs.”

Martin said nothing to this, though recent incidents had made him uncomfortable, and inclined to share in Mounseer’s evident distrust of the mysterious lodger on the top floor. His doubts were deepened by something that happened that very night.

He was disturbed from a sound sleep by slight noises from the waste land at the rear of the house. They were louder than they had been on the previous occasion, and he guessed that the man below had had more difficulty in attracting Mr. Seymour’s attention.

But things happened as before. There was a short, murmured exchange of words between the two men; the speaker below went away, Mr. Seymour came with scarcely a sound down the stairs. Martin reached his post near the top of



the basement staircase in time to hear the same husky voice outside the front door say: "The sloop is back in the river."

Again Mr. Seymour opened the door wide, and the other man brought in a brass-bound box.

"It's heavier this time," said Mr. Seymour. "You must give me a hand with it upstairs."

"It's not safe. You've got slippers; my sea-boots make too much noise."

"Take them off, and walk in your stockings!" said Mr. Seymour, impatiently.

The other man growled, but came forward, set the box on the floor, and sat on it while he removed his boots. His features were still concealed from Martin by Mr. Seymour's figure between him and the candle half-way down the hall. He stood up.

"Heave ho," he muttered.

And then Martin started, and instinctively shrank back a little. When he looked out again the two men, carrying the box between them, were full in the light of the guttering candle, and in the larger of them he recognised the black-bearded stranger whom he had first seen at the river stairs in the company of Mr. Slocum, and whom he had rowed down to Deptford in Jack Boulter's wherry.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH

### BLACKBEARD VISITS THE BAKER

The astonishing discovery that Mr. Seymour and Blackbeard, as he called the stranger to himself, had dealings in common kept Martin awake for a good many hours.

He acknowledged that there was no reason why they should not have business relations, but there seemed to be something underhand in these stealthy visits by night.

When he got up in the morning he went straight into Dick Gollop's room, and roused him.

"What do you want?" asked the constable, sleepily. "It's not my watch yet."

"Wake up and listen!" replied Martin.

"Been fighting again, eh?"

"No. Do wake up; it's something you ought to know."

"Well, spin your yarn, and don't be long about it, or my eyes'll shut, and then my ears won't be no manner of good."

Martin wasted no words in recounting the story of Blackbeard's two midnight visits and the conveying up to Mr. Seymour's room of the two brass-bound boxes. Gollop began to snore in the middle of it, but was roused again by a vigorous shake.

"And you spoil a man's sleep for that!" the constable grumbled. "I wouldn't have thought it of you!"

"But surely——"

"Now, look here, my lad!" said Gollop, raising himself on one elbow, "don't you go for to teach me anything about the law."

"I wasn't going——"

"Stow your gab and hark to me! Ain't I a constable, and therefore a man of law? Well, then, I tell you there's nothing in the law to prevent a man, two men, forty men, bringing a box, two boxes, forty boxes, into a house at any watch o' the night, dog-watch included."

“But——”

“Don’t interrupt. If so be I was to run athwart the course of a man conveying a box in the middle watches it ’ud be my bounden duty to hail him and ask where he was bound for—if ’twas in the street, mind you, and I was on my rounds. But when a man has got across his own threshold—set his foot on his own deck in a manner of speaking—then I question him at my peril.”

“Couldn’t you search the house?”

“Not being an inward-bound ship, nor me a customs officer, I couldn’t, not without a warrant.”

“Why not get a warrant?” asked Martin.

“Why not? Because there’s no reason to think there’s anything contraband in them boxes; and, what’s more, because I’m dead sleepy. So just you set a course for your baker’s shop, my lad; what you can’t help, make the best of.”

Martin was by no means satisfied that the constable’s exposition of the law was sound, but it was clearly impossible to do anything more with him until he had finished his sleep.

That morning, Martin, in the course of his duty, boarded a vessel moored near Wapping which he had already visited several times, and where he had established friendly relations with the cook.

“Two quarterns to-day, and mind they’re not stale,” said the cook.

“We never have any stale; our bread sells like hot cakes,” said Martin.

“Well, there’s a new customer for you astern there.”

The cook pointed to a vessel at anchor a few cables’ lengths down the river.

“Why, isn’t that the Portugal ship that was repairing at Deptford?” Martin asked.

“Ay, that’s her. She came up out of the yard on the tide yesterday.”

“I saw her in the yard not long ago. She’s had her mainmast shot away by the French, they said.”

“True, that was the yarn. She’s a queer sort of vessel, by all accounts. The crew are all black-haired men, but that you’d expect, being Portugals or Levantines, or summat outlandish. What’s queer is that they’re never allowed leave on shore. Even in Deptford, when the ship was being overhauled, they had to sling their hammocks in an old warehouse on the riverside. They was

marched about like a lot of prisoners—conveyed there and back by the officers—and a dark-looking lot they are too.

“The captain’s a white man—white, says I, meaning he’s not a nigger, for his face is the colour of beer, and his hair as black as coal, and his beard like a horse’s mane. And it’s well his crew are foreigners, for true-born Englishmen wouldn’t stand that sort of treatment; there’d be mutiny aboard, trust me. But there’s no proper spirit in those Portugals; I don’t call ’em men.”

“They’re men enough to eat English bread, I expect,” said Martin.

“See that you get English money. I wouldn’t trust ’em far,” declared the cook.

Martin laughed as he went down the side. He had already got one or two new customers for his master, and he was so much interested in this Portugal vessel that he felt rather excited at the prospect of boarding her.

But as he rowed towards her he began to have qualms. It was members of her crew that had chased him that night when he had rowed Boulter’s wherry down to Deptford and picked up the fugitive boy. He remembered their wild looks and savage cries; above all, he remembered the face of the man who had urged them on—the man who had been his passenger—Blackbeard himself. What if he were recognised when he ran alongside the vessel?

This idea daunted him, and swinging the boat round, he headed up the river. But before he was half-way back to London Bridge he wished he had taken the risk. After all, what had he to fear? Blackbeard might not be aboard the ship; the crew had seen him only indistinctly in the dusk, and they had been more intent on the boy he had taken into the boat than on himself.

Further, suppose Blackbeard did recognise him, what then? He would know him only as the rower of the wherry, who had allowed a boy swimming in the river to climb into his boat for safety. There was nothing in that; anyone else might have done the same. Blackbeard could not know that he lived in the same house as Mr. Seymour, and was aware of his mysterious visits to that gentleman.

But though he repented his timidity, he felt that he had come too far to return now. As it turned out, he was glad of his decision, for in the evening, just before closing time at the shop, when he was sweeping up the flour and breadcrumbs that littered the floor, and had his back to the door, he was startled to hear behind him the husky voice of the man he had been thinking about.

“Pardon, sir,” said the voice; and Martin noticed that it had a foreign

accent, not at all like that in which Blackbeard had spoken to Mr. Seymour.

He glanced over his shoulder, thinking he might be mistaken; but no, he could not mistake that swarthy face and strangely-trimmed beard.

“Pardon, sir, are you the baker as send bread to the ships on the river?”

“I am, to be sure,” said Mr. Faryner.

“Then I beg you send three breads regular all the days to the *Santa Maria* what lie by Wapping.”

“Are you the captain?”

“I am so.”

“Very well, I will send the bread, and you will pay on the spot?”

“Without doubt, yes, I will pay. Good-night.”

## CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH

### ON BOARD THE *SANTA MARIA*

Before Martin started on his river journey next morning, Mr. Faryner impressed upon him that he must not leave bread upon the *Santa Maria* without payment.

“I’ve been done before now,” said the baker. “I’ve given credit to foreign captains and they’ve sailed away without settling. Once bit, twice shy.”

Martin visited his regular customers as usual, then rowed on to the Portugal vessel, which lay some distance from the other ships, and was the last for that morning’s delivery.

His fears of the previous evening had left him, but he was conscious of a rather quickening pulse as he brought his boat under the side. Dark-browed men, leaning on the bulwarks, peered curiously at him, and he could not help wondering whether one or another of them might recognise his features.

A rope ladder hung from the waist. Catching hold of this, he looked up and called:

“Bread for the *Santa Maria*.”

To his surprise none of the men answered. They continued to stare at him but did not change their positions. Even if they did not understand English, he thought they might guess his errand from the sight of the loaves in his basket.

“Bread,” he called again, “ordered by the captain.”

Then someone repeated the word *capitano*, and Martin inferred from the way they talked among themselves that the captain was not on board. Emboldened by this discovery, Martin pointed to the loaves, and made signs that they were intended for the ship.

“Ha, Sebastian,” cried one of the men.

A few moments later a very fat man came from behind and pushed his way through to the side. His swarthy cheeks hung like dewlaps over his thick neck, his shirt was open, revealing a massive chest almost as dark as his face.

“What want?” he said.

“The captain ordered these loaves from the King’s baker,” Martin replied.

“Up, up,” said the man, whose English appeared to be limited to monosyllables.

Martin began to do as he had been instructed: to place the loaves in a small sack, sling this on his back, and swarm up the ladder. But when Sebastian, whom he supposed to be the cook, saw his intention, he cried “No, no,” waved him back, and let down a rope, indicating that Martin was to tie the sack to that.

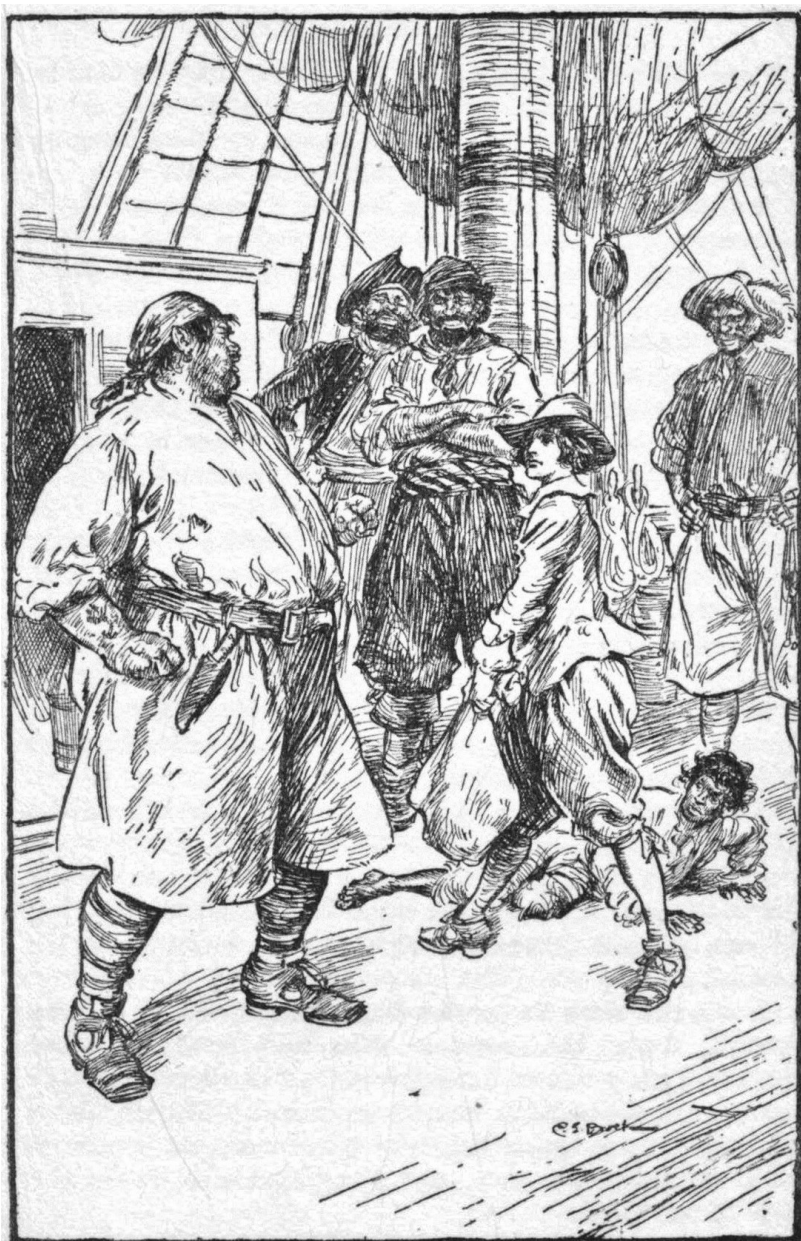
There seemed to be nothing else to be done, though Martin was disappointed: he had hoped for an opportunity of seeing something of this mysterious vessel. The sack was drawn up; the man took it in his huge dirty hands, and was turning away when Martin detained him by calling out the word “money,” at the same time jingling the bag that contained his morning’s takings.

“No money; captain not here,” said the man. “Come again other time.”

“I can’t do that,” said Martin. “My master’s orders were not to go without the money.”

“Basta!” exclaimed the cook; then he turned on his heel and disappeared.

Without an instant’s hesitation, Martin hitched his painter to the rope ladder, and, swarming up, sprang on to the deck. The seamen made way for him, and looked on impassively as he darted across the deck.



**Martin threw himself between the bully and his victim**

The cook was on the point of entering the galley, carrying the sack slung loosely across his shoulders. He turned as he heard quick footsteps, but was too late to prevent Martin from snatching the sack away.



The man snarled an ejaculation in his own tongue, and lurched heavily forward with arms outstretched as if to recapture the sack. But Martin skipped back, held the sack behind him, and said firmly:

“I must have two shillings, or I cannot leave the bread.”

Before the cook could reply, one of the crew made a remark which drew a roar of laughter from his mates, and brought a fierce scowl upon Sebastian’s face, and a torrent of angry words from his lips. Martin noticed how his multiple chin shook as he denounced the men who were chaffing him.

He came on, threateningly, and Martin edged back, intending to toss the sack into the boat and at least save his bread. But at this moment there appeared round the side of the galley a slight, thin, dusky-faced boy, in whom Martin at once recognised the child he had vainly tried to save from his pursuers a few nights before. The boy’s manner suggested that curiosity had drawn him to see what was going on.

His appearance served to divert the cook’s wrath. Turning aside, Sebastian dealt the boy a heavy blow that struck him sprawling upon the deck, and lifted his foot to kick him as he lay. With a sudden spring Martin thrust himself between the bully and his victim.

For a moment there was dead silence; then a jesting remark from the seaman who had spoken before evoked loud guffaws from the rest of the crew. Purple with rage, Sebastian aimed a kick at Martin, who evaded it by a quick sidelong movement, at the same time swinging his sack and banging the man on the side of the head.

The sudden blow upset his balance. He toppled sideways, and with a resounding thump measured his huge bulk on the deck. The boy, meanwhile, had picked himself up and darted into the galley.

At this moment a man, somewhat better dressed than the others, came up through the open hatchway and uttered a few words in a commanding tone of voice. Martin guessed that he was demanding the meaning of the uproar. A babel of explanations broke from the crew. The newcomer silenced them with a stern gesture, his uneasy manner suggesting he was anxious to put a stop to the scene and avoid further trouble.

With a contemptuous look at Sebastian, who had now risen to his feet, he ordered him away, and opening a wallet that was slung at his belt, made signs that Martin was to take from it the money due to him. Martin picked out two shillings, emptied the sack on the deck, then clambered down the side into his boat and rowed away.

Remembering the vindictive scowl on the cook's face as he slunk off, he wondered whether his impetuous action might not have done the boy more harm than good. He felt a great pity for the wretched-looking little fellow, with his thin cheeks and wistful, melancholy eyes.

"I wasn't much good to him before," he thought, "and only got myself a sore head. I suppose he is cook's mate to that fat bully, and leads a dog's life on board this strange ship. No doubt they'll tell Blackbeard all about it when he comes on board, and I shouldn't wonder if he complains to Mr. Faryner, and I shall get into hot water again. Well, I couldn't do anything else, and as Dick Gollop says, what you can't help, make the best of."

## CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH

### COFFEE FOR TWO

Martin debated with himself whether to tell Mr. Faryner what had happened on board the *Santa Maria*.

"If I mention the squabble he may think I'm a quarrelsome fellow," he said to himself ruefully. "He'll say I get into trouble everywhere, on land and on water too, and tell me to go. And I did want to go aboard again: there's something queer about that ship, and I'd like to know more about her."

It happened when he got back to the shop that the baker was so much concerned with another matter that he gave Martin no opportunity of telling his story.

"I've got another job for you, my lad," he said. "You know Mr. Pasqua's coffee-house in Newman's Court?"

"No, sir; and I don't know where Newman's Court is," Martin replied.

"It's off Cornhill; you know that. Well, Mr. Pasqua came himself this morning and ordered a quantity of rolls and cakes to be sent to his coffee-house. It's a feather in my cap, my lad. He used to deal with Grimes of Gracious Street, but he's dissatisfied. I never did think much of Grimes. Mr. Pasqua will be a very good customer if I please him, and I promised that the things should be sent by one o'clock, and you're back just in time."

"Must I go before dinner, sir?" asked Martin, who had been out in the heat since early morning.

"Before dinner? Of course you must. What does your dinner matter when there's a new customer to be served? The basket will be ready in five minutes; you can have your dinner presently. And let me tell you, you must be very polite to Mr. Pasqua if you see him. He has been a servant, and there's no one more likely to take offence at want of politeness in a servant than a man who has been a servant himself. And he's a foreigner too."

"A Frenchman, sir?"

"No, a Sicilian. I wonder you haven't heard of him. He was the servant of an English merchant who lived in the East, and came back with his master a few years ago to make coffee for him in the Eastern way. Mr. Edwards, the merchant, had learnt the use of coffee-beans, and he was so plagued and

pestered by his friends and visitors wanting to taste the new drink that he set his servant up in a coffee-house, and the man is now a good deal richer than I am. Here's the last batch."

A man came from the bakery bearing a tray laden with crisp brown rolls and rice-cakes. These were placed in the basket and Martin set off.

Following the fashion set by Mr. Pasqua, others had opened coffee-houses in different parts of the city; but they were frequented only by merchants and gentlemen, and Martin had never been inside one. It was therefore with considerable interest that he entered the coffee-house in Newman's Court.

It was a large square room with a counter at one end, on which stood glistening urns, porcelain cups, and silver sugar-basins. Behind it was a young woman with golden hair piled high upon her head. A kettle hung from a hook over a wood-fire.

Here and there about the room were small tables surrounded by wooden chairs. At one side the room was partitioned off into compartments, some with doors, within which the merchants could sip their coffee and talk over their business in privacy.

Two boys were serving customers at the tables, and a small, dark, foreign-looking man was moving about, exchanging a word here and a word there.

When Martin entered with his laden basket, the foreigner, Mr. Pasqua himself, came up to him, and speaking in very good English, said:

"You are from Faryner's, boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are in very good time. It is not yet one o'clock, and I am pleased. Grimes's boy was late, over and over again, and I was in danger of losing my customers, the gentlemen who honour me. Tell Mr. Faryner that he has begun well. And now let me see what you have brought."

He took a cake and a roll from the basket, and bit each of them in turn.

"Very good," he said, as he munched, smacking his lips and blinking his eyelids. Martin was amused at the little man's serious air.

Calling one of his boys, he bade him take the basket to the signorina. This was evidently the young woman behind the counter, but as she spoke in a very decided London accent Martin felt sure she was not a foreigner and wondered why she was so called. It was a harmless affectation of Mr. Pasqua's, like that which, in those days of Charles II, gave Italian names to English musicians and

mountebanks.

While the basket was being emptied, Mr. Pasqua said to Martin:

“You look tired, boy. Would you like a cup of coffee?”

“I have never tasted it, sir,” Martin answered.

“Then this shall be a great day in your life. A cup of coffee, signorina.”

A small cup was brought to Martin. Sipping it, he made a wry face.

“Ah! You find it bitter,” said Mr. Pasqua. “But stir it with the spoon, then taste again.”

At the bottom of the cup was thick brown sugar. Martin stirred and tasted.

“That is good, eh?” said the man, smiling. “It will refresh you. And you shall have another cup when you come the next time.”

At this moment a bell rang in one of the closed compartments. Mr. Pasqua himself hurried to answer the summons. As the door opened, Martin was startled, and hastily turned his head. Seated at the little table were two men, Mr. Slocum and Mr. Seymour.

He was careful not to look towards them again, and was glad when the empty basket was brought to him and he was able to get out into the street.

His first feeling was relief that he had not been seen by Mr. Slocum. He thoroughly distrusted his former employer, and was ready to believe that he would not hesitate to make mischief with Mr. Pasqua.

“Why am I always coming across that man?” he thought.

Then as he walked back towards Pudding Lane, he grew uneasy and suspicious. It was a shock to him that Mr. Slocum and Mr. Seymour were acquainted. He had seen each of them at different times with Blackbeard, and the fact that all three were acquainted brought a crowd of recollections to his mind.

He remembered that he had seen Mr. Slocum carrying a brass-bound box exactly like those which Blackbeard had brought to Mr. Seymour. He recalled how angry Mr. Slocum had been on that occasion, without any obvious reasonable cause.

Blackbeard’s visits to Mr. Seymour had been secret. Was Mr. Slocum’s anger due to the fact that he also had something to conceal? What was the connection between the three men? Had it anything to do with the boxes? What did they contain? Were they part of the cargo of the *Santa Maria*?—

perhaps held smuggled goods?

Puzzling about these questions, Martin suddenly thought of another—one that startled him. What was the nature of the business between Mr. Slocum and the old Frenchman?

The question came as a surprise to Martin himself. At first he did not understand what had given rise to it, but he found himself fitting together incidents that had previously seemed unrelated, and the more he thought of them the more disturbed he grew.

Hitherto no one had been able to account for the strange attacks on the Frenchman's room. But Martin now remembered that the face he had seen one night at the window was the face of the man who had waylaid him going an errand for Mr. Slocum. He remembered also Mounseer's dislike of Mr. Seymour—and Mr. Seymour knew Mr. Slocum. It was odd that, somehow or other, Mr. Slocum came into everything.

What was the mystery behind it all? To all appearance the Frenchman possessed nothing that was worth stealing; yet what other motive than robbery could anyone have had for breaking into his room? Mounseer knew Mr. Slocum. Mr. Slocum knew Mr. Seymour, and that gentleman, in spite of his politeness and his neighbourly intentions, was evidently suspected and detested by the Frenchman.

Martin began to feel very much worried, and had the extraordinary conviction that the clue to the whole mystery lay with Mr. Slocum.

"I dare say it's very silly," he thought; "it's simply because I dislike the man. Yet I can't help it. The question is, what is Mr. Slocum at?"

This question was dinning in Martin's head as he walked back along the street. So intent was he on his own thoughts that he stepped rather heedlessly, and was brought up by the sudden collision with a man proceeding in the opposite direction. The man let out a savage oath, and Martin, uttering an apology, edged away, only then recognising that the angry footfarer was Blackbeard.

Fortunately, he thought, he had not himself been recognised, and, allowing a short interval to elapse, he had the curiosity to follow the man. It was with no surprise that he saw him enter Mr. Pasqua's coffee-house. Beyond doubt he was going to meet the two men whom Martin had already seen there.

More curious than ever, Martin wished that he could find some means of discovering what the three conspirators, as he now considered them, were about to discuss. He thought of going in and buying a cup of coffee on the

chance that he might learn something, but after a moment's reflection gave up the idea; there would be too much danger of his being caught.

## CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH

### WHAT MARTIN FOUND

The tide was running strong up the river when Martin started on his round next morning. There was promise that the day would be hotter than ever, but the wind, blowing briskly from the east, tempered the heat, though at the same time it rendered doubly hard the task of rowing the heavy wherry.

Martin was just pulling away from a brig at which he had delivered some loaves, when a boat, sculled by a single seaman, passed him in the opposite direction. He recognised it at once as the boat belonging to the *Santa Maria*, and the oarsman as the man who found it so difficult to keep awake.

Previously he had seen him only in the evening, and he could not help feeling curious as to what his errand was.

After visiting in turn the ships on his list, and scratching off the name of one that had left her moorings, he came at length to the last, the *Santa Maria*.

"She won't be here long," he thought, noticing that a lighter lay on each side of her.

From the one on the starboard side cargo was being hoisted on board by means of a clumsy kind of derrick. He made his boat fast to the other, put the loaves into his sack, threw the empty basket into the stern, and, with the sack slung over his shoulder, swarmed up by a rope that hung from a second derrick, placed ready for use when the second lighter should be discharged.

All hands were busy with the cargo. Some of the crew grinned when they recognised him, and as he looked inquiringly round they pointed to the cook's galley. Wondering what his reception would be, he went on, and found the fat man frying some fish on his brazier, the timid-looking boy standing by with a flask of oil.

The cook glanced at Martin with a surly scowl, and paid him no further attention until he had turned out the fried fish on to a plate standing on a tray. Then he took one of the fresh, crisp rolls that Martin had brought, set this also on the tray, and ordered the boy to carry breakfast to the captain.

The boy had only just gone, and Sebastian was counting the contents of Martin's sack, when the captain, Blackbeard himself, came along, as if attracted by the smell of the frizzling fish. Catching sight of Martin he stopped, looked hard at him for a moment or two, then, in his husky voice with its



foreign intonation, asked:

“What you do here?”

“I have brought the bread from Mr. Faryner,” Martin replied.

“Ah!” There was a slight pause. “I see you before?” he said.

It was clear that he had not at once recognised Martin as the boy who in the evening dusk had rowed him down the river. Anxious to avoid identification, Martin answered:

“I was in Mr. Faryner’s shop when you came to give your order.”

“Ah! So! I see you there—yes—perhaps. I think so.”

But there was a puzzled look on his face as he followed the boy with the tray, and Martin was on thorns lest clearer recollection should come to him.

Having counted the loaves and rolls, the cook, who had not addressed a word to Martin, went away to fetch the money for them. Martin would not have been surprised if he had been summoned to the captain’s cabin; but Sebastian on his return simply handed him the coins, and he was free to go.

Without loss of time he swarmed down on to the lighter, threw his sack upon the upturned basket in the stern of the boat rocking alongside, hauled on the painter until the boat was near enough for him to step in, then cast loose, drifting on the tide while he got out his oars. Then he pulled the boat round, but rested on the oars as he looked back at the *Santa Maria*.

“Perhaps I ought to have asked when she is sailing,” he thought. “But I suppose Blackbeard will give notice. I wonder what her cargo is and where she is bound for? Perhaps Mr. Seymour and Mr. Slocum are engaged in some venture overseas, and there is nothing really to be suspicious about.”

He was still in a sort of daydream, moving the oars only enough to keep the boat’s head straight, when a shout ahead roused him. Glancing over his shoulder, he saw a ferryboat crossing his bows. A collision seemed inevitable, but he eased his left oar and put all his strength into his right, and scraped by with an inch or two to spare, the ferryman pouring out a torrent of abuse such as only the Thames waterman of those days could command.

The boat rocked under the sudden change of course and the wash of the ferryboat. Martin pulled her round again, and noticed that the basket had shifted slightly. It was now partly resting on its side against the stern thwart. And then he caught sight of something dark between the rim of the basket and the floor of the boat—something that surprised him so much that for a few

moments he ceased rowing and could only stare.

It was a small dark-skinned foot, the toes and instep just protruding from the basket.

“Who’s there?” he called.

The foot was suddenly withdrawn, the basket moved, settling down so as to cover completely the person underneath.

“I’ve seen you; you’d better show yourself,” said Martin. An idea struck him, and he added: “Just show your face.”

The basket moved again, and now Martin saw without surprise the dark, pathetic face of the cook’s boy of the *Santa Maria*.

“Don’t come out. I’ll row on,” he said.

He looked back towards the *Santa Maria*, now some two hundred yards astern. The crew were still hoisting and stowing the cargo; there was no sign of excitement, nothing to show that the boy had been missed.

Martin rowed on in silence for a few minutes until the bend in the river hid the vessel from sight. Then he said again:

“Don’t come out. Keep the basket over you. But tell me why you are on my boat, and what it is that you want.”

## CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH

### STOP, THIEF!

It was a strange scene—had anyone witnessed it. But Martin was careful to keep out of the course of passing wherries, and so far from the ships at anchor that the bottom of his boat was not visible from their decks. The rim of the basket rested on the boy's neck, and his dusky face, with its large pleading eyes upturned towards Martin, looked as though it projected from the planking.

"Me run away," said the boy in a strange, high-pitched sing-song. "No takee me back. No let catchee me. I pray sahib very much."

"Where do you come from?" said Martin. "What are you?"

"Me India boy, come long way over black water. They beat me. See!"

He moved the basket a little, disclosing his thin, bare arms and legs, on which were old scars and the long livid weals of recent lashes.

"Cover yourself," said Martin hastily. "Go on. Tell me more."

The boy went on to relate, in his halting broken English, a story that Martin heard with indignation and pity. His name was Gundra, and his parents were servants of an English merchant at Surat. He had been allowed to run in and out of the merchant's godowns, and had thus picked up the little English he knew.

One day, when he was straying some little distance from the factory, he was kidnapped by two big men, who carried him aboard their ship. There he had been kept as a slave, half-starved, and cruelly used. He had not one real friend among the crew, though the captain now and then interposed when the fat cook was thrashing him.

So wretched was his life that he had long wished he might die, and if he were taken back to the ship he would throw himself overboard and let himself drown, though he could swim, as the sahib had seen. More than once he had been tempted to destroy himself, but had been restrained by the hope that some day he might be rescued and restored to his home.

"Keep me to be your slave, sahib," he pleaded. "Me do all you tell."

The boy's woebegone look, and the sight of the wounds on his limbs, moved Martin so deeply that he had already determined to do what he could to save him from his oppressors. But he foresaw great difficulties. What could he

do with the boy? There was no room in Dick Gollop's apartments; besides, he felt sure the constable, as a man of law, would hold strong views about the offence of harbouring runaways.

Yet he could not land the boy and leave him to his own devices. He would be taken up as a vagrant, and what would become of him then? His lot could hardly be worse than it had been on board the *Santa Maria*; but Martin felt that by giving the boy shelter he had shouldered a certain responsibility, and that he must not throw the little fellow into the uncertain hands of chance.

While he was thinking over the problem so suddenly thrust upon him, he had been paddling gently, but the swift-flowing tide had already borne the boat a good distance up the river. It was clear that he must come to a decision within a few minutes.

He had no friends but the Gollops and some of the watermen, and he could not place the boy with them until he had consulted them. The idea of running up as far as Battersea or Chelsea, and leaving Gundra there until later, occurred to him; but he was due to return to the shop, and he shrank from incurring Mr. Faryner's displeasure. If it had been evening, as on the former occasion, he might have left the boy in the boat until after dark, but there were still many hours of daylight to run, and the boat would be a very insecure shelter, even if the boy were hidden under sacking.

After much thought he decided that the simplest course was the best. He would land at the stairs nearest his home, take the boy there as quickly as possible, hand him over to good-hearted Susan Gollop, and go back to his work. What was ultimately to be done with Gundra must be left for discussion with the constable and his wife after the day's work was done.

There were two or three boats at the foot of the stairs as Martin approached, intending to land on the up-river side. But as he pulled in towards them he suddenly noticed that one of the boats on that side was the ship's boat of the *Santa Maria*, which he had passed when rowing down. The foreign seaman was in his usual attitude when waiting, half doubled up in the stern, and apparently asleep.

Martin at once altered his course, bearing hard on his right oar so as to bring the boat to the nearer side of the stairs. At the same time he gave Gundra an urgent warning to keep himself well covered by the basket.

He pulled easily in to the landing-place. The other boats were unoccupied, the watermen, their owners, being out of sight, though no doubt within hail.

Martin was beginning to tie his boat to the post when footsteps on the stairs

above caused him to look up. It was with a feeling almost of dismay that he saw Mr. Seymour coming down, carrying a large square object wrapped in sacking—no doubt a box, perhaps one of the brass-bound boxes that Blackboard had brought to the house. Behind him came a man laden with a similar burden.

“Next oars, sir?” called a hoarse, loud voice, and a waterman appeared at the head of the steps. “Next oars” was the phrase commonly used by watermen plying for hire.

“Not to-day,” replied Mr. Seymour over his shoulder. “I have my own boat.”

The waterman growled about people who did honest men out of a living, and walked away.

Martin was desperately anxious that Mr. Seymour should not observe him. He dared not go up the stairs and meet him face to face; not that he had any dread of a meeting for himself, but because of his knowledge of the runaway boy and his new-born suspicions of Mr. Seymour’s relations with Blackbeard and Mr. Slocum.

Turning his back to the stairs, he fumbled with his painter, as if he found a difficulty in tying up the boat. He had, in fact, tied, untied, and tied again before Mr. Seymour and his companion had stowed their burdens on board, and his back was still towards them when he knew by the thudding of the oars in the rowlocks that their boat had put off.

It was some little time before he allowed himself to face about, hoping that the danger of recognition was past. But he had not reckoned with the strength of the current. The seaman, pulling the heavily-weighted boat against the stream, had made only a few yards. Mr. Seymour’s face was turned towards the shore. He caught sight of Martin, waved his hand in recognition, and smiled in his usual pleasant way.

“He doesn’t guess what I’ve got under my basket,” Martin thought, at the same time feeling unreasonably annoyed at having been recognised at all.

Now that the coast was clear he paddled round to the side of the stairs, and tied up his wherry at the place vacated by the ship’s boat, wasting time until that craft was well out of sight. Then, after a look all round, he lifted the basket.

“Come with me,” he said to the Indian boy, taking him by the hand, and slinging the basket over his other arm.

Hand in hand they ascended the stairs. Lolling against a rail was the waterman who had offered his wherry to Mr. Seymour—a man whom he knew.

“Ahoy, young master! What have you got there?” said the man, looking quizzingly at the dark-faced boy, who, at the sound of his rough voice, shrank timidly to Martin’s side and clasped his hand more tightly.

“An Indian boy come ashore to see London,” Martin replied. “There’s no need to mention it if questions are asked.”

“Mum’s the word, eh? Ay, ay, I’ll keep my tongue under hatches, never fear.”

The two boys had walked only a few yards when they came upon the man who had accompanied Mr. Seymour. He was seated on a tree-stump, smoking, idly watching the river. As the boys passed him he turned and looked at them, but Martin could not gather from his expression whether he had paid them any special attention or not. A few minutes afterwards, however, when they were going up the gentle hill that would presently bring them to Bishopsgate, Martin chanced to turn his head, and saw, with a feeling of alarm, that the man was following.

In a flash he realised that while he had been watching Mr. Seymour the other man must have been watching him. No doubt he had noticed how he was acting for the purpose of consuming time. Martin had never seen the man before, and felt sure that he knew nothing about him, but had guessed that he had something to conceal from Mr. Seymour. What could be done to shake him off?

Martin knew every inch of this part of London, lying between the river and his home. A minute or two after he had assured himself that the man was indeed dogging him, he turned suddenly into a narrow court, dropped Gundra’s hand, and telling the boy to keep pace with him, started to run.

But he was hindered by his basket. The man must have started to run also, for before the boys had gained the end of the court the pursuer was hard on their heels. To make matters worse, he shouted. “ ’Ware! ’ware! Stop, thief!”

No one was at the moment passing in the court, but windows flew open, heads looked out, and Martin knew that it was only a matter of minutes before the chase would be in full cry.

Dashing out of the court with the Indian, he ran a few yards along the street, then darted into a narrow alley on the other side. In a moment he realised the mistake into which his haste had led him. The place was a cul-de-

sac; there was no opening at the farther end. He was trapped.

## CHAPTER THE EIGHTEENTH

### SALLY TAKES A HAND

For a moment or two Martin felt as a hunted fox might feel when the chase had driven it into an enclosure from which there was no escape.

The narrow alley, a sort of tunnel under the houses, opened into a broader yard, bounded on the one side by a high blank wall, on the other by the palings of square grass plots in front of a row of small houses. At the farther end another wall presented an obstacle which only a cat could have climbed.

But just as Martin was on the verge of despair he caught sight of a familiar figure, and in a flash he saw a possible chance of safety.

On one of the grass plots a buxom woman was bending over a large washtub that stood on a three-legged stool. A clothes-line, propped on poles, was extended from a nail in the house-wall to one of the palings, and from it hung a blue shirt, a pair of stockings, a spotted neck-cloth, and other articles, pegged up to dry in the sun.

“Sally Boulter!” Martin exclaimed, rushing through the little gate.

He had recognised her as the wife of his friend Boulter the waterman, to whom she sometimes brought his dinner to the stairs.

“Please let us come into your house,” he went on breathlessly. “There’s a man after us.”

“Well, to be sure!” she cried, keeping her hands in the tub. “In with you, young master.”

The boys ran past her into the open doorway of the little house. At the same moment the pursuer, red-faced with running, came out of the alley into the yard. Apparently he had seen the boys before they disappeared, for he pounded along straight to Mrs. Boulter’s gate.

When he reached it he found it closed, and on the other side of it a strapping young woman, her stout, muscular arms bared to the shoulder, and in her hands a blanket which she had just wrung dry. Her lips were pressed close together, and her friends would have said that she was in a difficult mood.

Brought up by the gate, the man asked, rather gaspingly:

“Have you seen a baker’s boy and a blackamoor?”



“Have I seen—what did you say?” replied Sally.

“A baker’s boy.”

“Many a one; baker’s boys aren’t that uncommon.”

“Just now, I mean.”

Sally looked up and down the yard.

“No, I can’t see a baker’s boy just now,” she said. “But if you want a baker’s boy, there’s a baker just round the corner, and another two streets away. I’m busy with my man’s washing, so don’t bother me no more.”

“Don’t you talk of bothers, mistress,” said the man, tartly. “You’ll be more bothered yet if you’re not careful. Didn’t I see the tail-end of the basket going into your door? The baker’s boy is inside, and the blackamoor too, and I’ve something to say to them, so——”

He suddenly pushed open the gate, forcing the woman back a pace, and was starting to run across the grass towards the house. But Sally was a woman of spirit. Whirling the roll of blanket round her head she brought it with a swish across the man’s neck, hurling him against the washtub. He caught at the rim to steady himself, disturbing the balance of the tub upon its stool. It toppled over with a crash, and the man lay between the stool and the tub in a pool of soapy water.

“What’s all this, missus?” cried a bluff voice.

In the doorway stood the burly waterman, Boulter himself, surveying the scene. Above his breeches he wore nothing but his shirt.

“Wants bakers’ boys and blackamoors, he does,” answered his wife, jerking her elbow towards the fallen man. “Pushes in, he does, and upsets my washtub; clumsy, I call it.”

“He does, does he!” said the waterman, licking his hands as he stepped out on to the grass. “Bakers’ boys, and blackamoors, *and* washtubs, does he? Pushes in, does he? I’m thinking it’s black eyes what he really wants.”

With every sentence he had drawn a step nearer to the discomfited intruder, who, spluttering with soapsuds, was still recumbent in the swamp, half-hidden by the tub.

“Get up!” cried Boulter.

The man pushed the tub off, and rose slowly to his feet.

“Out you go, after that,” the waterman continued, kicking the man’s hat

over the fence into the yard.

The man slunk through the gateway, leaving a trail of soapsuds.

“Messing up my garden!” growled Boulter, close on his heels. “Pick up your hat.”

As soon as the man had recovered his dripping hat he set off to run to the alley-way. But Boulter took a stride forward, seized him by the collar, and marched him down the yard, prodding him on with regular applications of a bony knee.

“I’ll learn you to come pushing into decent folk’s gardens!” said the waterman. “On a Saturday too! After bakers’ boys and blackamoors! And washtubs! Spilling the water! You get out!”

He had come to the entrance of the alley, and with a parting kick sent the man headlong towards the street.

“Now don’t you tell me nothing,” he said to Martin when he returned to the house. “I’m much mistook if I didn’t see this blackamoor aboard that there Portugal ship, and if I don’t hear no stories I won’t tell no lies, for there may be questions asked.”

“Very well, Boulter,” said Martin. “Thank you very much for your help. Will it be safe for us to go home now?”

“I’ll see to that,” said the waterman.

He accompanied the boys to the street. Lurking at the corner stood the pursuer. On seeing Boulter he shambled away in the direction of the river.

“Drawed out of action,” said Boulter with a chuckle. “You’ve a clear course on t’other tack, and I reckon you’ll come safe to port.”

## CHAPTER THE NINETEENTH

### GUNDRA DISAPPEARS

Gundra, the Indian boy, had been a silent, nervous spectator of these scenes. His lean body seemed to be quivering from top to toe when Martin once more struck away for home, and the curious glances of the persons they met brought a scared look into his eyes.

“Cheer up!” said Martin, noticing his timorousness. “We’ll soon be home, and I’m sure Susan Gollop will be kind to you.”

But the first aspect of Susan Gollop made Gundra shrink back and clutch Martin by the sleeve. The good woman was beating a mat on the waste ground at the rear of the house, and the vigour of her strokes with the cane, and the fierce set of her mouth, seemed to promise little kindness.

“Here’s a poor little Indian boy, Susan,” Martin began.

“Don’t worry me!” Susan interrupted. “I’m late as it is; Gollop will be roaring for his breakfast in a minute. And why aren’t you at your work, I’d like to know?”

All the same, she looked inquisitively at the shrinking child. Martin, knowing her morning temper of old, discreetly said nothing, but took Gundra back into the house, and set him on a stool with a wedge of treacle-cake from the table.

Presently Susan came in, flung the mat upon the floor; then, placing her hands on her hips, stood over the boys and demanded:

“Now what’s all this about? Who’s this black boy?”

“He’s an Indian, and has run away from a ship where they were ill-using him,” Martin replied.

“Sakes alive! And what’s that to do with you, Martin Leake?”

“I want to help him. I want you to keep him here for a day or two, until we can decide what to do with him.”

“Do with him? Take him back, to be sure. There’s no room for a runaway here; you’ll get us all into trouble; and I can’t afford another mouth to feed. I’m surprised at you. And you’ll be out of a job again. What will Mr. Faryner say, neglecting your work like this?”

“We can’t send him back, Susan, to be thrashed and half-starved,” Martin began.

He said no more, for Gundra slipped from the stool, fell upon his knees, and holding up his bare arms, pleaded his own cause.

“Not go back; not go back!” he cried piteously. “Me not eat much; me work very, very hard!”

“What’s them marks on his arms?” said Susan, suddenly.

“Where’s he’s been lashed!” said Martin.

“Wicked; downright wicked!” Susan exclaimed. “Poor lamb! What if he is black? But I don’t know what Gollop will say.”

At this moment the constable entered the room, his cheeks well lathered, and shaving-brush in hand.

“What’s that squeaky voice I hear?” he said. “Bless my eyes, who’s this I see?”

“You may well ask,” said Susan. “It’s a poor little creature of a slave boy what’s run away.”

“From that Portugal ship I’ve told you about,” Martin added.

“Run away, has he?” said Gollop. “Then you’ll convoy him back as quick as quick. Harbouring runaways is an offence in law, and as a man of law ’tis my bounden duty to give him up.”

“For shame, Gollop!” said his wife, now completely won over. “You and your law! What’s law, I’d like to know?”

“Law’s your master and my living, woman,” said Gollop. “Don’t you make any mistake about that. The boy’s a runaway, and back he goes.”

“You’re a hard-hearted monster,” said Susan. “Look at this!” She seized Gundra by the arm and drew him towards her husband. “Scars! Look at ’em!”

“Show your back, Gundra,” said Martin.

Susan herself pulled up the boy’s shirt and revealed livid streaks upon his flesh.

“Is there no law about that?” she demanded indignantly.

The constable stood with his brush poised in his hand.

“Them Portugals did that!” he cried. “Flog a poor little shrimp, eh? Sink me if I give ’em another chance. I’m a freeborn Englishman, I am, and law or

no law, I'll not give up any mortal soul, black or white, to be treated that cruel. Cover him up, Sue. Split my timbers! I've never seen anything like it." He began to stamp up and down the room, kicking over a stool, flourishing his soapy brush. "Brutes, that's what they are. How dare they run into an English port! Constable as I am, English seaman I was, and sooner than send the poor little wretch back into a ship where they treat them so savage, I'd—I'd——"

He knocked over a chair.

"I understand your feelings, Gollop," said Susan mildly, "but you needn't smash the furniture. And you'll want a steady hand for your shaving, my man. Just go and make yourself tidy while I get your breakfast."

"I will. Mind you, Sue, that boy stays here till the ship sails. Don't you give him up to no one whatsoever. And keep a still tongue. Don't go a-babbling."

"And keep him out of Mr. Seymour's sight," said Martin.

"Why?" asked Susan in surprise.

"Because—I'll tell you later on. It's a long story, and Mr. Faryner will be in a rage with me if I don't hurry back. I'm very late."

"What you can't help, make the best of," said Gollop, as he went back into his bedroom to finish his interrupted toilet.

The baker was in an irritable mood when Martin reached the shop. He had had to find another messenger to carry the morning's delivery of bread and pastries to Mr. Pasqua's coffee-house. His annoyance was increased when Martin told him that the *Santa Maria* was taking in cargo in preparation for sailing.

"They've given me no notice," he said. "But I've given no credit, that's a blessing. What have you been doing all this time? Gaping at the sailors, I suppose. I know you boys—eyes for anything but your proper work. Get away into the back shop and scrub the floor."

Martin was thankful not to be questioned further. He had half expected that by this time Mr. Faryner had been informed of his having brought an Indian boy away from the ship, and he was on thorns for the rest of the day. But nothing was said about it, and he left the shop at the usual hour.

When he got home, he found that Gundra was the centre of interest. Seated on a settle beside Lucy, he was chatting cheerfully to the little girl, answering her innumerable questions in his queer, broken English.

“He is such a nice little boy,” she whispered to Martin. “I am so glad you brought him.”

Mrs. Gollop, in high good humour, was full of his praises. She related how eagerly he had made himself useful, scouring her pots and pans, peeling potatoes, and even showing her how to cook rice in the Indian way.

She had made him a shakedown in a cupboard under the stairs.

“It’s a dark place,” she said, “and I won’t say but he’ll have mice for company, but it was the only place I could think of, and when I’d swept it out he was quite pleased with it. It’s very stuffy this hot weather, but I told him to leave the door open when he goes to bed, or he’ll be stifled. He’s a willing little fellow, that I will say.”

The next day was Sunday, but Martin rose at his usual hour, because he had to make a round with fresh hot rolls before the day was his own. He noticed as he passed the cupboard under the stairs that the door, which had been open when he said good-night to the boy, was now nearly closed.

“Well, let it be,” said Susan, upon his telling her. “Them Indians live in a hot country, by all that’s said, and he won’t mind the stuffiness. And we won’t wake him; a long sleep will do him good, poor lamb.”

Martin cleaned his boots and ate his breakfast; then, as he was about to start for the shop, he thought he would peep into the cupboard and see if the boy was awake.

He listened at the door. There was no sound from within. Then very cautiously he pulled the door towards him and looked in. The narrow cupboard with its sloping roof was in black darkness, and for a few moments his eyes could not distinguish even the shakedown on the floor. But presently he was able to discern its dim outlines, and then he started and hurriedly entered.

Half a minute later he rushed back into the living-room, where Mrs. Gollop was cleaning the hearth.

“Susan,” he cried, “the cupboard is empty. Gundra has gone!”

Mrs. Gollop was considerably upset.

“Well, of all the ungrateful little wretches!” she exclaimed. “Coming here whining and dropping on his knees, and me making up a bed for him and all—and then to slink out without a word! I’ll never do anything for a foreigner again.”

“But we don’t know that he slunk out, Susan,” Martin protested.

“We don’t *know*!” she retorted sarcastically. “Did he say good-bye to *you*, then? Did you hear him go? And I warrant he didn’t go empty-handed, either. Wait till I count my spoons!”

“I don’t believe he’s a thief!” said Martin. “I don’t believe he ran away. I believe someone got into the house and took him!”

“Well, them that took him had a right to him, didn’t they? A good riddance to bad rubbish! Now eat your fill, and be off; ’tis your first Sunday with Mr. Faryner, and he won’t thank you if you’re late.”

It was only six o’clock. Gollop had not returned from his nightly duty, and Lucy was still asleep. Martin hurriedly swallowed a thick slice of bread-and-dripping, thinking hard all the time, while Susan inspected her drawers and cupboards to find evidence of the Indian boy’s knavery.

“I’m sure he did not go willingly,” thought Martin. “Mr. Seymour’s man saw him with me, and no doubt told Mr. Seymour, and he knows Blackbeard, and—oh, what a puzzle everything is!”

His mind was full of the matter as he started for the shop. He wondered whether Mr. Seymour had let Blackbeard into the house during the night—whether the boy was now back on board the *Santa Maria*, perhaps at that very moment being thrashed by that fat bully the cook. And he foresaw a very unpleasant time for himself when he took his bread to the ship on Monday morning.

## CHAPTER THE TWENTIETH

### FIRE! FIRE!

Within a minute or two Martin's mind was taken off the fate of the Indian boy by something much more actual and immediate. On turning the corner he was aware that there were many more people in the streets than was usual at that hour on Sunday morning. They were all hurrying in one direction—the same direction as himself. There was excitement in their looks and in the way they spoke to one another; some appeared to be asking eager questions which those they addressed were in too great haste to answer.

He caught the word Fire!

"Is there a fire? Where is it?" he asked a lad in a 'prentice's cap who was trotting over the cobblestones.

"London Bridge," panted the lad, and ran on.

Martin began to run too. The crowd grew thicker; from every street and lane poured men and boys, and a few women, some only half dressed, all excited, all eager. From mouth to mouth ran the terrible word Fire! and as the throng swelled their pace quickened, and their cries, mingling with the clatter of their shoes, raised a din that strangely disturbed the Sabbath quiet of the bright morning.

"It must be a big fire," thought Martin, and he remembered hearing Gollop speak of a fire on London Bridge when he was a boy, which had burned all night and destroyed more than forty houses.

"Where is it? Where is it?"

The question was repeated again and again as newcomers joined the crowd. No one seemed to know with certainty. Some said London Bridge, others Cannon Street. Nothing could be seen of it. The streets were narrow, the houses high and overlapping in their upper storeys; between their tops the sky was cloudless blue.

The clamour grew louder; every now and then there were strange popping noises which for a moment startled the crowd to silence. They ran faster and faster, jostling one another, pushing aside the less active. Swept along in the pouring tide, Martin found himself in Little Eastcheap, and then, far ahead in that broader thoroughfare, he saw over the roofs a brownish tinge in the sky.



On and on he ran, his excitement growing with every step he took. At the corner of Gracechurch Street the meeting streams of people made so dense a block that for a while his progress was checked; he was hemmed in amid a press of stout citizens, unable to see anything but their backs.

His ears were deafened by their shouts, which rose above the distant roar and crackle. Presently, when he again began to move onward, he heard a man near him say, in a loud voice:

“ ’Tis Pudding Lane, I tell you.”

The words were taken up around him. Pudding Lane! The cry flew from lip to lip, and stirred the crowd into a vast surging movement southward.

“Pudding Lane! What house, I wonder?” thought Martin. “The Three Tuns, perhaps; they’ve a lot of straw in their yard. Or perhaps it’s at Noakes’s, the oil-man’s. His shop would blaze.”

More and more eager to reach the scene of the fire, he began to push and wriggle and worm his way through the mob, getting his toes trodden on, and indignant thrusts and cuffings from those he incommoded. As he drew nearer to his goal the roar swelled; at moments, when he was able to look ahead, he saw dense clouds of smoke, brown and black, sweeping across the housetops westward, carried swiftly along by the north-east wind.

After what seemed to be hours of struggling he arrived at the corner of Fish Street Hill. The air was full of smoke and floating blacks and the suffocating smell of burning. The crowd here was denser than ever; the din louder and more terrible. Martin, already half-choked with the smoke, felt that his breath would be squeezed out of him by the pressure around. But he pushed and prodded, taking advantage of the least gap that opened as the throng swayed, and by and by he managed to force his way to a point where he should be able to see the houses on Fish Street Hill and in Pudding Lane opposite.

But where were the houses? He rubbed his smarting eyes, and looked and looked again. There were no houses any more. Where the great Star Inn had stood, with its galleries and yards and outbuildings, there was now nothing but a black smouldering heap. All down the Hill, all down the Lane, it was the same black waste and desolation: not a house remained standing. And as he looked he saw flames burst from the belfry of St. Magnus Church beyond, and a huge column of smoke shoot up around its lofty tower.

“The church is ablaze!” roared the crowd.

“The parsonage too! Save us all!”

Here and there among the throng were persons wringing their hands and lamenting the loss of all their possessions. Martin forced his way to one of them, and asked eagerly:

“Have you seen Mr. Faryner?”

“My house is gone—my house is gone!” was all the reply he received.

He went from one to another, repeating his question; no one knew the whereabouts of the baker. Martin felt anxious; the house and shop were utterly destroyed, their site was occupied only by heaps of charred and smouldering debris. Had Mr. Faryner and his family and journeyman escaped? It was clear that the fire must have broken out in the middle of the night. Had they been taken by surprise and perished in the flames?

Martin was at a loss what to do. His occupation was gone; there was no bread for him to carry; he could learn nothing of his employer, and he debated with himself whether to stay and watch the progress of the fire or to run home and tell the Gollops what he had seen. Deciding for the second course, he turned his back and tried to fight his way to Gracechurch Street. But the crowd had enormously increased. There were no policemen in those days to clear the streets, no firemen to dash up with their engines and pour water on the flames. In the churches were kept a few leather buckets and metal squirts, but they were useless in so great a conflagration.

An eddy in the stream of people carried Martin into Cannon Street, and he suddenly found himself pressed against Mr. Faryner’s man. He was swept past him, but managed to dodge back, and seized his arm firmly.

“Where is Mr. Faryner?” he cried.

“Safe and sound, thank God, with his friend the mercer in Cheapside,” the man answered. “But he’s in a terrible state of mind, and no wonder, seeing as the fire broke out in his shop.”

“In our shop?” asked Martin, in amazement.

“Ay, about two o’clock this morning. I woke out of my sleep feeling I was choking, and the place was full of smoke. I roused the master. We couldn’t get downstairs, so we had to climb through the garret window and along a gutter-pipe to the roof next door. How we did it, Heaven alone knows, and I wouldn’t venture it again for a thousand pounds.”

“What caused the fire?”

“Who knows? ’Tis my belief——”

But at this moment there was a cry of "Make way for the Lord Mayor!" People pushed this way and that, and in the commotion Martin was torn from the man's side and swept along the street. It was hopeless to attempt to reach him again, or to take a direct course for home, and Martin allowed himself to drift on the tide.

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIRST

### WHAT SUSAN FOUND

The circular movement of the crowd brought Martin in time to a point where he was able to see how swiftly the fire was spreading. The houses at the end of London Bridge were ablaze. Between the bridge and Fishmongers' Hall was a warren of dilapidated timber houses intersected by narrow alleys. Into those passages the strong wind bore sparks and blazing fragments; the dry wood easily caught fire, and it was evident that the whole district would soon be a furnace.

And now the inhabitants, at first careless spectators, were seized with panic fear, and in desperate haste began to move their goods and furniture from the doomed houses. From every door they sallied forth, laden with every article they could carry. There was a fierce demand for trucks and carts; some people hastened downhill to the riverside, and besought the aid of the watermen in conveying their goods out of harm's way.

This suggested an idea to Martin. Mr. Faryner's boat lay at the stairs some distance below the bridge. Why should he not use it to help the frantic people? He ought to ask Mr. Faryner's leave, but it would take him hours to get through the crowd to the mercer's house in Cheapside; indeed, it would be difficult enough, even by a roundabout route, to reach the stairs.

The arrival of the Lord Mayor on horseback, attended by his javelin men, had fortunately thinned the crowd at the corner of Eastcheap, and Martin, by dodging and winding, succeeded in making his way into one of the lanes running down to the river.

He would hardly have been surprised to find that the boat had already been taken away; but it was in its usual place, padlocked to the post. Springing in, he rowed out upon the river, which was already crowded with craft of all kinds: the wherries of the watermen, who would reap a rich harvest to-day: the barges of fine gentlemen come to view the spectacle.

Martin pulled over to the Surrey side, to avoid the sparks and burning masses that were falling from the houses at the northern end of the bridge, shot through one of the arches, and rowed across to the other shore. The fire was speeding westward like a devouring monster. He observed the flames leaping from house to house; the smoke, driven before the wind, already reaching past Blackfriars; the blazing particles that were whirled up and round, and fell

hissing into the river.

The waterside was thronged with people clamouring for watermen, even throwing their goods into the water. When Martin pulled in to the nearest stairs he had to keep an oar's length distant to prevent his boat from being overcrowded and swamped, and it was only after some argument and even altercation that he was able to take on board an old man and woman with all their little wealth tied up in huge bundles.

Having rowed them to Westminster, where they had a married daughter, and refused pay, he returned, and again selected the older people from those who besought his services. Time after time he went up and down the river, finding it more and more difficult to steer a course among the hundreds of craft, large and small, that almost blocked the waterway. And on shore the roar and crackle of the flames mingled with the cries and lamentations of homeless people.

At last, tired and hot and hungry, Martin pulled his empty boat down stream, fastened it to its post at the stairs which, being behind the fire, were deserted, and dragged himself wearily homeward. It was long past his dinner-time, but Susan Gollop had kept food waiting for him and for her husband, who had not yet returned.

"What's come of the man?" she said, when Martin entered the room. "Stopping to see the fire they're talking about, I suppose. And you're as black as a sweep. What have you been doing?"

"Helping to save people's goods," Martin replied. "It's a frightful fire, Susan; hundreds of houses burnt already, and there's no stopping it while the wind's so strong. Mr. Faryner's house is burnt down."

"Gracious me! What'll you do for your living now? Where did this dratted fire start?"

"At our shop."

"Well, to be sure! Some careless wretch didn't rake out the embers, I warrant."

"Shall we be burnt, Martin?" asked Lucy, timorously.

"Of course not, child," Susan interposed. "It's far enough off, and the wind blows it away from us, thank goodness. I don't know what the world's coming to, what with fires, and men who won't come in to their vittles, and dark doings under the stairs."

"What do you mean?" Martin asked.

“Why, look at this: what do you make of that?”

She held up a large brass button, to which were attached a few threads.

“Well?” said Martin, wondering.

“It’s not well: it’s a mystery. That’s a button from a man’s coat, and I found it in the cupboard under the stairs. I went in with a candle to take down the bed that Indian boy slept in, and tidy up, and there was the button a-shining on the floor.”

“What of that?”

“Why, that boy had no buttons: his clothes was all rags and strings.”

“It may have been there before.”

“That I’m sure it wasn’t, for I swept out the place myself for the boy. I ask you, how did that button come in my cupboard?”

“I can’t tell, and it doesn’t matter much. By the look of it it’s been torn off. I’ll just eat my dinner and then go off and see if I can find Gollop.”

But Martin did not find Gollop, nor indeed did he look very earnestly for him, so much interested was he in watching the fire. Soldiers, horse and foot, had been sent from Westminster to keep order in the streets. At the King’s command houses were being pulled down to stay the course of the flames. The streets were clogged with carts and barrows laden with the goods of fugitives. And the crowds were now declaring that the fire was the work of foreigners, and clamouring for vengeance.

It was late in the evening when Martin, tired out, once more reached home. Meeting the old Frenchman on the doorstep, he mentioned the excitement about foreigners, and suggested that his friend should avoid the crowds. Mounseer smiled and thanked him, but showed no signs of concern.

They stood on the doorstep watching the glow in the sky. It was a dark night, but every now and then a burst of flame in the distance lit up the street. Presently Mr. Seymour came along from the direction of the river. As he reached the foot of the steps a sudden brief illumination fell upon him. And in that moment Martin noticed that the top button of Mr. Seymour’s coat was missing.

Mr. Seymour halted, and, dangling his tasselled cane, said with a pleasant smile: “A magnificent spectacle, is it not? And we need not pay for seats.”

“As you say, sir,” replied the Frenchman coldly, turning to enter the house.

Martin was trying to see clearly the kind of buttons on Mr. Seymour’s coat,

but that gentleman had faced about, so that his back was towards the fire, and the glow in the sky had dulled a little. In order to detain him, Martin asked:

“Are we quite safe here, sir?”

The Frenchman heard the question, and turned at the door, as if waiting with some anxiety for the answer.

“There’s not a doubt of it,” said Mr. Seymour. “We are a good distance behind the fire, and the east wind is driving it from us along the waterside.”

Martin had paid little attention to Mr. Seymour’s answer, so eager was he to satisfy himself as to the nature of the buttons. Mounseer, apparently reassured, had disappeared. Wheeling round to follow him into the house, Mr. Seymour came for a moment within the illumination from the red sky, and Martin almost jumped as he noticed that the buttons appeared to be made of the same metal as the one that Susan Gollop had found. They seemed also to be the same size, but of that he was not quite so sure.

He went into the house behind Mr. Seymour, watched him ascend to the upper floor, then ran down the basement stairs. Mrs. Gollop had prepared supper, and there was a look of disappointment on her face when she saw Martin enter alone.

“Have you seen Gollop?” she asked anxiously.

“I’m sorry, I haven’t,” Martin replied.

“What has become of the man? I’m beginning to worrit. He’s such a regular man for his meals. He’s never missed his Sunday dinner since he came home from sea.”

“Isn’t that his step?” said Martin, running to the door.

Heavy, dragging footsteps were heard on the stairs. Lucy jumped up and joined her brother: Mrs. Gollop stood in her place, and with a quick lift of her apron wiped the corners of her eyes.

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SECOND

### THE EMPTY ROOM

The constable tumbled rather than walked into the room. His hands and clothes were begrimed and black; his hat was crushed and shapeless; his fat, rosy cheeks were streaked with irregular patterns where his fingers had rubbed.

Susan Gollop stood with arms akimbo, grimly eyeing the returned wanderer.

“Well, if you’re not a pretty object!” she said severely; but her lips were trembling a little. “There! Fetch a basin of water, Lucy, and the pummy stone, and there’s a dirty towel on the rack.”

Dick Gollop plumped heavily into a chair.

“I’m dead beat, missus,” he murmured. “Give us a drink.”

Martin handed him a mug, and he took a deep draught.

“What a Sunday!” he exclaimed. “Fire and brimstone! The everlasting fire! And the Lord Mayor’s just as silly as any common man. My throat’s as dry as a bone. Another drink, lad.”

“Don’t you talk lightly of the Lord Mayor, my man,” said his wife reproachfully.

“Pish! He’s scared out of his wits, no good at all. The King’s the man for my money. ’Twas he sent orders to pull down houses so’s the fire wouldn’t have nothing to feed on; but bless me! the Lord Mayor goes up and down wringing his hands and crying, ‘What can I do?’ But I’m dead beat, I say: all day and all night at it; I’ll drop asleep where I sit.”

“Pardon,” said the Frenchman’s voice in the doorway. “You are of return. Tell me, I pray, the house: is it safe?”

“Don’t worrit about the house, Mounseer,” said Gollop. “There’s more call to worrit about yourself. Keep below deck, that’s my advice to you. The people are raging about all foreigners, specially French and Dutch, and if they catch you in the street, ten to one they’ll do you a mischief. I saw a Frenchman nearly torn limb from limb by a parcel of women because he was carrying fire-balls, they said. Turned out to be tennis-balls; that’s their ignorance. Don’t go out, Mounseer: what you can’t help, make the best of.”



The Frenchman smiled and thanked him, and returned to his own apartment.

“You’re sure we’re safe, Gollop?” said Susan. “We can go to sleep in our beds?”

“Sure I’m going to sleep in mine,” answered Gollop. “One more drink, then——”

“If you’re so sure, why’s that Mr. Seymour so frightened, then? He’s been going in and out all day; men have been traipsing up and down, carrying out boxes and parcels and things. *He’s* not so sure, seemingly.”

The mention of Mr. Seymour reminded Martin of the button.

“I say, Susan,” he said, “where’s that button you found in the cupboard?”

“Bless the boy! What’s buttons to do with it? It’s on the mantelshelf, if you must know.”

Martin reached it down, examined it, and in a moment exclaimed:

“This is Mr. Seymour’s. His top button is missing. I saw him as he came in.”

“Well!” said Susan.

“Gundra must have torn it off. It was Mr. Seymour spirited him away.”

“Did you ever! You hear that, Gollop?”

“Eh? What?” said Gollop, who was beginning to doze in his chair.

“That Indian boy was carried off in the night, and ’twas Mr. Seymour done it. Poor little wretch! That’s kidnapping. You can’t go to sleep yet: what’s your precious law say to that?”

“The law says,” muttered Gollop drowsily, “what you can’t help, make \_\_\_\_\_”

“Listen to me,” said his wife, shaking him. “You’ll just go upstairs at once with this button and show it to that Seymour, and ask him what he means by \_\_\_\_\_”

“Avast there, woman!” cried the constable, heaving himself out of his chair. “I’ll sheer off to my bed and nowhere else, not for all the laws in the kingdom. Talk of buttons and nigger boys when all the world is afire! I’m dead-beat, I say, and I’ll turn in this minute.”

He lurched away into the bedroom and shut the door with a bang.

Susan looked at the door as if in a mind to follow her husband and drag him back. Then her face softened.

“Poor dear!” she said. “He’s that tired I never did see, and when a man’s tired let him be, that’s what I say. But that there Seymour!” Her lips shut tight. “Gollop can’t go, so I’ll go myself.”

“He won’t tell you anything,” said Martin.

“Maybe he will, maybe he won’t. But I’ll not rest till I know what he’s done with that poor shrimp of a blackamoor. And if he won’t tell, leastways I’ll show him the button, and ask whether he owns it, and I warrant I’ll tell by the look on his face whether he’s a villain or not.”

“I’ll go with you—light you upstairs,” said Martin, taking a candle from the table.

“Go to bed, Lucy,” said Susan. “You are over-late already.”

“I want to know about the Indian boy,” said Lucy.

“Now, don’t make me cross. Go to bed at once; you shall hear all about it in the morning.”

Smoothing her apron and setting her cap straight, Mrs. Gollop marched out of the room, Martin following with the candle.

“*I’ll* talk to him!” said the angry woman, as she began to climb the stairs. “*I’ll* teach him to come stealing down in the dead of night and poking his nose into the rooms of honest people! *I’ll* give him a piece of my mind, and his ears will be all of a tingle before he’s done with Susan Gollop!”

Martin noticed with amusement that the higher she got the lower fell the tone of her voice, until by the time she reached Mr. Seymour’s door and knocked, and asked, “Can I speak to you, sir?” her voice was as mild as the cooing of a dove.

There was no answer. She knocked again.

“Mr. Seymour, sir!”

There was still no answer. She waited a moment or two, then summoned up her resolution and turned the handle. To her surprise the door opened. The room was dark.

“Show me a light,” she whispered.

Martin, with the candle, stepped in front of her. A glance showed that the room was empty, except of the furniture and a quantity of litter on the floor.

“Well, I declare!” Susan cried, in loud indignation. “He’s gone, and took all his belongings. There’s a coward for you!”

Among the litter there were a few pieces of paper, suggesting that Mr. Seymour had torn up old letters before he left. Martin, all his suspicions revived, had the curiosity to collect these scraps.

“We can do nothing more,” he said. “I’d like to look at these bits of paper carefully downstairs.”

“They’re just love-letters or other rubbish,” scoffed Mrs. Gollop, “and I’ve come up all these stairs for nothing at all!”

But half an hour later Martin, poring over the papers spread before him on the table by the light of two candles, was inclined to think that the journey had not been in vain. He had put together a number of scraps that appeared to be all in the same handwriting, and by shifting their positions until the torn edges fitted together he had composed a sentence or two that clearly formed part of a letter. What he read was as follows:

*. . . . Maria sails on Tuesday. All cargo must be stowed by Monday. Tell W. S. that I do not communicate with him direct, for reasons which . . .*

There was no more. Martin was at no loss to understand that the vessel sailing on Tuesday was the *Santa Maria*; nor was it long before he came to another conclusion. W. S. were the initials of his old employer, William Slocum.

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-THIRD

### 'PRENTICES TO THE RESCUE

Dick Gollop and Martin both rose very late next morning. They left the house together, but soon parted, the former to return to his duty, the latter to resume his self-imposed office of helping people in need.

The Fire was still raging unchecked, and was spreading from the riverside streets towards the heart of the city. Many people who had indulged a careless belief in the safety of their dwellings had now flown to the opposite extreme of panic and despair, and the supply of carts, barrows, and wherries was hopelessly unequal to the demands of those anxious to save their goods. The streets in every direction were blocked by frantic fugitives, and the fields north of the city were already dotted with the encampments of homeless people.

When Martin reached the stairs where he had left his boat he found that it had disappeared. It was hopeless to look for it among the hundreds that were plying on the river, and Martin, feeling himself deprived of his occupation, made his way westwards, first with the idea of inquiring after Mr. Faryner, and then of getting a view of the progress of the Fire.

As he was jostling his way among the crowds who were moving up Cheapside, he was thrown against the old Frenchman, struggling along in the opposite direction. It flashed into his mind that Mounseer might have been paying another visit to Mr. Slocum, and his former feeling of puzzlement returned with redoubled force.

"Ah, my friend, what do you here?" asked the old man.

"My boat has been taken," replied Martin, looking around rather anxiously; for the Frenchman's words must have been heard by the persons near him, and his accent, coupled with the cut of his clothes and his general appearance, would certainly betray him as a foreigner.

"So you have nothing to do," the Frenchman continued. "Same as me; your little sister go not to the school to-day, therefore am I unoccupied. I enjoy the holiday," he added, with a smile. "We shall enjoy it together, eh?"

"Hadn't you better go home, sir?" said Martin, remembering what Gollop had said overnight about the mob's treatment of foreigners.

"Not at all, not at all. This great sight interest me very much. You shall take me to a place where the spectacle is most beautiful."

Martin noticed one or two people scowling, and wished that Mounseer would hold his tongue. Determined to draw him away from the main stream of traffic he turned into an alley-way, intending to go by back streets as far as St. Paul's, where, perhaps, the sacristan might allow them to ascend the tower.

Their course led them past the back entrance to Mr. Greatorex's premises. Just before they reached it a man came out and walked towards Cheapside. Martin and the Frenchman recognised him at the same moment; he was the man whose scarred face they had seen at the window—the man who had knocked Martin down in Whitefriars.

"What next?" thought Martin. This was a new shock of surprise. Was this man also among Mr. Slocum's acquaintances? The idea would never have occurred to Martin but for his thorough distrust of Mr. Slocum, and a strange suspicion was dawning on his mind when his attention was diverted by a sudden movement of the Frenchman, who hurried after the man, seized his arm, and began to speak excitedly in French.

The man stared, swore, caught sight of Martin, then suddenly shouted:

"Frenchy! Ho, boys, here's one of the foreign spies what sets us afire. Down with all Frenchies!"

They were near the end of the lane, and the man's words were heard and taken up by the crowd in Cheapside. A number of roughs surged towards them, and the accuser, finding himself supported, turned on the Frenchman, dealt him a violent blow, and started to tear his coat off.

"Away, you coward!" cried Martin, rushing forward to help the old gentleman; but a burly ruffian caught him in his arms and hurled him back.

At this moment there was a cry from behind.

"Why, it's Martin Leake! Clubs! Clubs! 'Prentices to the rescue!"

A tall figure dashed past Martin, who was staggering under the big man's assault, and with doubled fists attacked the aggressor with a whirling ferocity that drove him back reeling. In the lad who had come to his help Martin recognised his fellow-'prentice and opponent, George Hopton.

Next moment from several doors in the neighbourhood darted one or more flat-capped 'prentices brandishing the clubs from which they took their rallying cry.

For centuries the London 'prentices had been renowned for their prowess in faction fights among themselves and against the rougher elements of the population. The street now rang with the cry "Clubs! Clubs!" and those

formidable weapons were soon thudding on the heads and shoulders of the rabble.

The Frenchman had fallen to the ground, but rose when his assailant turned to defend himself against the 'prentices, and leant, bruised and shaken, against the wall. The success of the 'prentices' attack was due to its suddenness rather than its strength. There were only about six of them altogether, and the man with the scar, seeing that no more were joining them, again raised his cry of "Down with all Frenchies!" and called on all true Englishmen to support him.

By this time the crowd had increased, and several truculent fellows broke from it and rushed towards the fight. They were heavier metal than the 'prentice lads; soon they outnumbered them; the little band was forced back step by step, some of them losing their clubs to the enemy. The combat swept past the old Frenchman, carrying Martin with it, and in a few moments the 'prentices would have suffered a disastrous rout had not a loud shout in a tone of authority imposed a sudden peace.

All eyes were turned upon the speaker, an elderly gentleman wearing a well-curled periwig, and a coat of purple cloth, and carrying a gold-headed cane which he brandished at the crowd. Martin recognised him as the important customer of Mr. Slocum's who had been hustled in the course of his fight with George Hopton.

"Back, rascals!" cried the gentleman. "Are you fools enough to believe these absurd tales of foreign incendiaries? I tell you there's no ground for them. Foreigners in our midst should be treated as guests. Your conduct is a disgrace to Englishmen and citizens of London. Away with you, and find something useful to do."

"Hurrah for Mr. Pemberton!" cried the 'prentices.

The combatants shamefacedly drew back and mingled with the more peaceable spectators. Martin hurried to the old Frenchman's side.

"What! You again!" said Mr. Pemberton, recognising him. "Are you always fighting?"

"I owe my life to him and the others," began Mounseer.



“Away with you, and find something useful to do”

“You had better go home, sir,” was the reply, “and remain within doors while men’s minds are affected by this great calamity. As for you lads, I hope, though I don’t expect, that you will always use your clubs in as good a cause.”

He moved away, followed by another cheer from the ’prentices, and Martin

started to accompany the Frenchman home, supporting him on his arm. George Hopton and one or two other 'prentices set off to see them a little distance on their way.

In a few moments they became aware that the man with the scar was skulking after them.

“Whoop!” cried Hopton. “Clubs! Clubs!”

With his fellow 'prentices he turned and chased the man, who did not wait their onslaught, but dived into a narrow entry and disappeared. And all the way home Martin was wondering what the baffled ruffian had to do with Mr. Slocum.



## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FOURTH

### MR. SLOCUM MOVES AT LAST

Anxious to avoid any repetition of the attack on Mounseer, Martin conducted the old gentleman across Cheapside into Wood Street, intending to go home by way of Aldermanbury and Cripplegate, though it involved a long round. George Hopton accompanied them for some little distance, then he stopped.

“I say, I must go back,” he said, “or Slocum will be in a rage. I don’t know what’s come to him. He seems to have lost his wits. Most of the other goldsmiths have removed their valuables to the Tower, and Slocum has been urged to do the same. But he refuses. ‘Time enough, time enough,’ he says, ‘the Fire is by the river; it may not reach as far as Cheapside.’ ”

“I think he’s wrong,” said Martin. “What’s to stop it?”

“That’s what everybody says. But his answer is that the goods are safer in the vaults than they’d be if he moved them; there are thieves about. That’s true enough; I’ve heard of several shops having been robbed. But though Slocum talks like that he has been packing the stock. At least, I suppose he has; he hasn’t asked for any help from me. He was in the strong-room nearly all day yesterday, alone, and we heard hammering time after time.”

“He’s not so stupid after all,” Martin rejoined. “I suppose he talks to keep up other people’s courage, though he’s making preparations to go. But he’ll be lucky if he gets a cart. There are so many doing the same thing that there aren’t enough carts to go round.”

“Well, I must go,” said Hopton, adding in a whisper: “Keep the old man indoors. I mayn’t be at hand next time.”

“Thanks for your help,” said Martin, with a smile: Hopton certainly did not suffer from an excess of modesty.

Mounseer himself seemed to have realised at last that his friends had given him good advice. He walked quickly, begged Martin to keep close to him, and declared that he would not stir from the house again until the Fire had ceased and the excitement died down.

When they reached home they found Dick Gollop snatching a meal. He told Martin that the services of the constables were not so necessary in the streets now that the troops had arrived to keep order.

"But it's a terrible calamity," he said, "and I'm afeard we're not near the end yet. The flames are spreading: they've got across Cannon Street, and I was pretty near stifled as I came through Bucklersbury by the stench from the druggists' shops. I passed the back of your old place, Martin. Does Mr. Seymour know Slocum?"

"Why?" asked Martin.

"Because I saw him coming out of the door. There was a sneaking way about him. 'Hallo!' thinks I, 'has my fine gentleman been to pawn something?' Then I thought maybe he knew Slocum, though you've never said you saw him at the shop."

Martin thought it was time to acquaint the constable with what he knew of the relations between Slocum and Seymour and the captain of the *Santa Maria*. He spoke of Blackbeard's visits by night, and the brass-bound boxes, and the meeting in Mr. Pasqua's coffee-house.

"You ought to have told me all that before," said Gollop reproachfully when the story was concluded. "Me being a man of law, 'twould have been proper I should know of them queer goings on."

"I did try, but you shut me up," said Martin.

"So I did. I was wrong. I own it; dash my sleepy head! Never you sleep your brains away, my lad. Them brass boxes, now. There's no telling what mischief's in them boxes. Still, what you can't help, make the best of, and I say no more for the present. When the Fire's over maybe I'll look into things a bit: I've no time for it now—indeed, I must get back to my duty."

He went out hurriedly, before Martin had related what had happened to the old Frenchman. Susan and Lucy, when that story was told, were both indignant at the crowd's treatment of their friend, and nothing would satisfy the girl but that she must take him a bowl of syllabub to comfort him, as she said.

Martin was too restless to remain indoors. The fascination of the Fire drew him again into the streets, which were now still more congested, the stream of fugitives hurrying to the fields meeting a stream of countrymen whom the prospect of making money by hiring out their carts had drawn to the City. The roar of the flames, the crash of falling houses, the cries and oaths of the people struggling to save their goods, the smells from burning oil and spices, the blazing flakes fantastically whirling in the wind, made up a series of vivid impressions that remained in Martin's memory for many a day.

Towards evening he found himself again in the neighbourhood of Mr. Slocum's house. He had not gone there of set purpose, but had been drawn

there unconsciously, perhaps, by a vague recollection of Dick Gollop's remarks.

Going down the lane towards the back entrance, he was brought to a halt by the sight of a large hand-truck at the door. The three 'prentices, in their shirt sleeves, were loading it with boxes under the direction of Mr. Slocum.

"He's scared at last," thought Martin. "But what a strange time to choose for going away."

He remained in a shady corner, watching. It was certainly high time that the goldsmith's valuables were removed, for the Fire had reached the foot of the streets leading up to Cheapside.

The loading was finished a few minutes after Martin's arrival, and the 'prentices put on their coats.

"Am I not to come, sir?" Martin heard Hopton say.

"No; you are to stay and guard the shop. Jenks and Butler can wheel the truck. Too many of us would attract attention, and the dusk will bring out the thieves."

He threw a sheet over the truck, tying it down at the corners. So far as appearance went, the load might have consisted only of household goods like those which hundreds of citizens had been moving all the day.

The two younger 'prentices seized the handles of the truck and wheeled it up the lane. Martin, shrinking back in his corner, noticed that Mr. Slocum, walking close behind, had a pistol projecting from his pocket.

When they had turned into Cheapside, Martin went up to Hopton as he was going back to the door.

"Hallo!" said Hopton. "Is the Frenchman in trouble again?"

"No; he won't stir out again," replied Martin. "So Slocum has moved at last."

"The lunatic! Why didn't he go earlier? He'll have to make a long round to get to the Tower, and it will be nearly dark before he arrives: just the time for footpads to attack him. There's nobody left in the house, or I'd follow and see that he gets there safely."

"I'll go," said Martin, once more amused at Hopton's idea of his own importance.

Hopton gave a snort. "What could you do if they were attacked?" he asked. "You've no weapons."

“But I could shout.”

“Go, then. It’s no concern of yours, but you might raise a hullabaloo if anything happens. I suppose I must kick my heels here until Slocum releases me, though I promise you I won’t stay if the flames come anywhere near.”

Martin set off, but during the minute or two he had been talking with Hopton the barrow had passed out of sight among the thronging people. Knowing that it must take a northerly direction in order to skirt the Fire, he crossed Cheapside and dodged his way into Milk Street, the nearest of the streets branching out of the main thoroughfare. There was no sign of the barrow, yet it could not have got far, owing to the crowd.

He struck into a by-lane and came to Wood Street. The crowd here was not so thick, and he was able to move more quickly. At the corner of Silver Street he stopped and looked round on all sides. The evening gloom was already descending, though the glow in the sky lit up the over-arching houses.

“I shall never find them now,” he thought. But just at that moment the grinding of wheels on the cobbles drew his attention. He glanced round and saw the barrow coming along from the direction of the Guildhall.

“They tried that way and couldn’t get through, I suppose,” he said to himself, and slipped into the entrance of a yard until the barrow had passed. “Now to keep them in sight.”

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-FIFTH

### MARTIN FOLLOWS

Martin could hardly have explained why he felt so keenly interested in the progress of the barrow. Mr. Slocum was only doing what most of the goldsmiths had already done, and it was certainly his duty to save the property of his master, Mr. Greatorrex. But recent incidents had inspired Martin with so deep a distrust of Mr. Slocum that he was determined not to lose sight of him until the barrow had safely entered the portals of the Tower.

He kept far enough behind not to be observed, yet close enough to run no risk of missing the party again.

“I’m glad I’m not shoving the barrow,” he thought.

The air that summer evening was hot, and its oppressiveness was enhanced by the pervasive smell of burning. Martin followed the toiling ’prentices into Aldersgate Street and turned after them into London Wall, expecting them to swing to the right at Bishopsgate, and so finish their long round to the Tower.

To his surprise, they took the eastward direction, and struck into a winding lane that would bring them, certainly, to the river, but at a point far away from their supposed destination. Martin was conscious of a growing curiosity, even of excitement. The lane was narrow, and as the dusk was deepening he lessened the distance between him and the barrow. But a little farther on, where the lane made a sharp curve, he hung back for a moment to give the party time to get well round the corner.

As he did so a man came suddenly round on the inside of the curve, brushed past him, and continued his course up the lane towards the main street. Martin glanced round; the man was fast disappearing into the dusk, but there was something in his shape and gait that reminded Martin vaguely of someone he had seen, he could not remember when or where. The impression passed in a moment, and he hurried on, anxious not to lose sight of his quarry.

Turning the corner, he found himself between parallel lines of tall warehouses, some flush with the lane, others standing back behind small yards in which goods were no doubt unloaded. He had not taken many steps when he heard shrill cries ahead, and broke into a run, wondering why thieves had been attracted to so quiet a spot, remote from the crowds.

Some thirty yards ahead the lane made another sharp twist. When Martin

reached the bend he was just in time to see, dimly in the fading light, one of the 'prentices being shoved by a man through the gateway of a warehouse yard. The barrow, Mr. Slocum, and the other 'prentice were already out of sight.

Martin recognised the voice of the lad who was being roughly used as that of Butler, and he dashed on at his topmost speed, shouting as he ran. For a moment he had no other thought than to save the lad who had been his fellow-'prentice from the hands of his assailant. But before he gained the scene the wooden gate was banged to; he heard the grating of a bolt and Butler's protesting cries as he was lugged across the yard.

He looked up. The gate and the wall on either side of it were at least ten feet high; their tops were studded with nails or jagged glass; even if he found a foothold it would be impossible to scale them. He banged at the door, still shouting; but there was no response. Work in the warehouse was over for the day, and no doubt any workmen or loungers who might ordinarily have been about were far away, watching the Fire. The cries of Butler had ceased; within the yard all was silent.

Feeling that to knock or shout any longer here would merely be wasting time, Martin wondered whether he could find admittance at the back of the warehouse. He ran on a few yards and came upon a narrow passage striking off at right angles to the lane. At a venture he turned into this, and found himself within a few moments in a lane that evidently ran parallel with the one he had left.

He had only just rounded the corner when he heard the rattling of cart wheels on the cobbles at the river-end of the lane, and caught sight of a few strange figures dimly outlined against the background of sky.

"Stop thief!" he shouted, dashing down the lane.

For some minutes he had been so confused that he only now guessed that Mr. Slocum's barrow had entered by the gateway through which Butler had been forced; otherwise it could scarcely have disappeared so suddenly. As he ran, calling for help, he noticed that a large gateway, with a wicket beside it, stood wide open on his left. He rushed up to the first man he overtook.

"There is villainy going on," he said. "Help me!"

"I'm helping myself," the man growled; and the strangeness of his figure was accounted for by the huge bundle he carried on his back. He was one of the fugitives who were conveying their possessions to the river in the hope of finding a boat.

Martin ran on, and in the fast-gathering darkness cannoned into another man laden almost as heavily.

“Mind your steps!” shouted the man; and with his free hand he dealt Martin a blow that sent him staggering against the wall. Recovering himself he dashed on, his cries to one and another going unheeded. People were too much concerned with their own troubles to regard the vague demands of a lad.

And then suddenly he found himself on the edge of a little quay stretching into the river. There was a reddish glow reflected from the water, and by this light he recognised, at the farther end of the quay, the handcart he had lost sight of. It was standing deserted. A boat was putting off, piled with boxes. The glow of the fire glinted on their brass-bound corners and on the swarthy face of Blackbeard, who held the tiller strings while two other men rowed steadily down stream.

Beyond the quay there were two or three other boats into which fugitive citizens were dumping their goods.

“Row after that boat!” Martin cried to the watermen. “It contains stolen goods.”

“Not the only one,” chuckled one of the men.

“Things of great value,” Martin persisted, looking round in vain to find a waterman whom he knew. “The owner will reward you richly.”

“Out of my way,” cried the man with whom Martin had collided. “What’s your fare, waterman?”

“Five shillings a mile,” the man replied.

“You’re a shark, making your profit out of other folk’s calamities. But I suppose I must pay you, though ’tis five times the proper price. Take this bundle.”

Seeing that the watermen were too intent on present gain to trouble about a visionary reward, Martin turned away. And then he asked himself, what had become of Slocum and the other ’prentice? They were certainly not with Blackbeard in the boat. Was it possible that they too had been carried prisoners into the warehouse?

He retraced his steps and came to the large gateway which he had guessed to be the main entrance to the warehouse. It was now closed, as was also the wicket at the side. He was trying the latch when a man came up behind.

“Want to get in, eh? Well, so you shall.”

Martin turned hastily, and recognised with alarm the sinister face of the man with the scar.

Before he could recover his wits he was seized in an iron grip. His captor inserted a key in the lock of the wicket gate, turned it, and snarling: "Oh, you shall get in, you shall," pushed Martin before him into the yard.



## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SIXTH

### PRISONERS

Just inside the gate, on the right, was a small brick cabin, where during working hours the gatekeeper attended for the purpose of checking merchandise that entered or left the yard. It was now closed; its window was shuttered; but a streak of light shone between the door and the lintel.

Grasping Martin firmly with one hand, with the other the man unlocked the door, and pushed his prisoner in. An oil lamp stood on a table, and on a chair near it sat Mr. Slocum. He started up on seeing Martin.

"Heavens above! Have they caught you too?" he exclaimed, with an air of genuine surprise.

Martin glanced from him to his captor, and caught a fleeting grin on that man's face.

"But how came you in this unhappy plight?" Slocum went on, speaking very rapidly. "Why should the wretches attack you? In my own case the explanation is simple. I set out to save Mr. Greatorex's property from this disastrous Fire, with Jenks and Butler; you remember them? We were suddenly rushed upon by half a dozen footpads, hustled into the yard, and while I was shut up here the 'prentice lads were taken—who knows where?"

"Not far," said the man, grinning again. "Not so very far. You can see 'em out in the yard there."

He pointed through the open doorway. Shading his eyes against the light, Martin saw dimly two figures with their backs to the wall, and a big fellow apparently standing guard over them.

"You can cheer each other up," said the man, going out and locking the door behind him.

"A monstrous outrage!" said Slocum. "But what have the villains against you?"

"I'd like to know that myself," said Martin, cautiously.

"You were passing up from the waterside, no doubt?" said Slocum.

"No; I was going the other way."

"Strange coincidence! You saw the ruffians attack me?"

“No, I did not.”

Martin’s answers were short. He guessed that the object of Slocum’s questions were to ascertain how much he knew, and though he had been almost taken in by Slocum’s manner, he now suspected that his surprise had been feigned, and that he was playing a part.

“Well, it is a gross attack on our personal liberty,” Slocum continued; “and I won’t stand it!”

He rose with an air of grim determination, and hammered sharply on the door. The man with the scar entered.

“Enough of this foolery!” said Slocum, elbowing the man from the doorway. “Let me out, fellow. I warn you that you are incurring punishment of the highest severity in holding two citizens in durance!”

“Take it easy; none of your shoving,” said the man. “You can’t go out without I get orders.”

“Orders! From whom do you get your orders?”

“That’s my look-out.”

“You are insolent, fellow! Don’t dare to use that tone to me! I will not put up with insolence from a ruffian and a gaol-bird!”

“Who are you a-calling a gaol-bird?” said the man, scowling fiercely.

Martin had already suspected that the men were play-acting. It now seemed that the captor had forgotten his part, and was taking Slocum’s expressions seriously. Slocum realised that he had gone too far with a person of limited intelligence, and hastened to reassure him by pantomimic signs which, slight as they were, did not pass unobserved by Martin.

“I demand to be taken outside,” Slocum went on. “I want air. What with the hot evening and the stinking lamp this place is suffocating.”

“Well, I’ve no orders to stifle you,” said the man. Thereupon, he took Slocum by the sleeve and marched him out into the yard. Martin was following, but the man turned at the door, thrust him back, and locked him in. “Your turn presently,” he said.

Martin sat down on the chair. He was convinced that Slocum and the man were acting in collusion, and supposed that their object was to retain him for an hour or two until the boat conveying Mr. Greator’s valuables had got away. Remembering that the *Santa Maria* was to sail next day, he felt sure that those valuables would form part of her freight, the fruits of a conspiracy in

which Slocum, Blackbeard, and Seymour were concerned.

Waiting in the hot, stuffy room soon became tedious and uncomfortable. Martin got up and tried the door and the window; both were securely fastened against him. Presently he heard voices outside, the creaking of the gate, and the rattle of wheels on the cobbles of the yard. A minute or two later the key was turned in the lock, the door was thrown open, and three men, one of them the man with the scar, who was now carrying a lantern, stamped into the room. They stood for a moment looking at Martin.

“Why not leave him here?” said one of them. “ ’Twill save trouble.”

“Won’t do,” said the man with the scar. “There’ll be folk about in the morning; he’ll be found, and then—you see he knows too much.”

“Well, then, why not shut his mouth? The river’s handy. With a stone round his neck——”

“Stow your gab, Bill,” interrupted the other irritably. “We can’t drown ’em all. Besides, orders is orders, so you’d better set about it.”

Martin had risen at their entrance, and stood facing them, his heart beating rather quickly and his cheeks flushing as he listened to this frank discussion of his fate. He was not prepared for what happened. The man who had wished to save trouble made a sudden pounce, flung his arm round Martin’s neck, and deftly slipped a gag into his mouth. He was then tripped up, and as he lay on the floor his hands were roped together, and he was shoved into a sack that covered him completely.

Thus bundled up, he was carried into the yard and dumped into the handcart, which had been brought empty from the quay. The cart jolted over the cobbles; he heard the gate slammed behind him, and wondered to what destination the men had orders to convey him.

The jolting did not last long. In a minute or two the legs of the handcart were let down with a bump, and Martin was hoisted out. His head being covered, he could not see where he had been brought, but he felt himself being carried downstairs, then flung down upon boards that rocked under his weight. He was in a boat.

He judged by their voices that two of the three men got into the boat after him. It moved away, and through the sack he heard the men talking of matters he knew nothing about. After a journey that seemed much longer than it was the boat stopped; he felt its side grate against stone. He was lifted out and carried up a few steps, then for some yards on the level.

Once more he was set down. There was a knock upon a door; after an interval of waiting the bolts were drawn; some words were exchanged between his bearers and the man who had opened; then he was carried along, up a flight of stairs, and finally dropped roughly to the floor.

“Cut the sack open,” said one of the men. “Better give him some air and take the gag out,” he added. “He won’t do no harm now.”

The string was cut, and the sack pulled down to his shoulders.

“Best tie him up,” said one.

“He can’t get away.”

“Never mind that; let’s make it sure.”

A rope was tied round the middle of the sack, and knotted to a staple in the wall.

“Now all’s snug,” said a man. “We’ve lost enough time over him; let’s get back to the City; we ought to be able to prig a thing or two out of those fine shops in Cheapside.”

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-SEVENTH

### MARTIN FINDS A WAY

By the light of the lantern carried by the man with the scar Martin had made a hasty survey of his prison. It was a large, empty room, apparently part of a disused warehouse. When the men went away they took the lantern with them, leaving the place in complete darkness.

Martin was at once aware of sounds of movement on the floor above—sounds of heavy cases or bales being dragged over the boards. At intervals also he heard a creaking that suggested the lowering of goods over a rusty pulley.

“Where am I?” he thought.

The sounds lulled, and his ears caught a slight rustle in the room itself.

“Rats!” he said to himself. “I hope they won’t attack me.”

During the next pause in the louder sounds he heard another rustle somewhat more prolonged, a faint clanking, and he had the strange feeling that some human being besides himself was in the room. Startled, he called out quickly: “Who’s there?”

From some distant corner came a thin, piping voice:

“Me, Gundra.”

“Gundra!” He felt surprise and relief; the Indian boy was at least a friend. “Come and untie me.”

“Me no can,” was the reply.

“Why not?”

“Me tied, too.”

“How?”

“To thing in the wall. No can move it.”

“Your hands tied?”

“No; a band round me, tight.”

Martin guessed that the boy, like himself, was fastened to a staple, which was out of his reach. It was clear that neither could get to the other.

But Martin was not ready to admit that the situation was hopeless. His

hands, it is true, were tied, so that he could not loose the knot at the staple, and he knew that if he strained on the rope he would only tighten the knot. It might be possible to jerk the staple from the wall. He made several attempts, but finding that there was no sound of tearing wood, no yielding of the metal, he bent his mind to considering another way.

There was only a few feet of rope between him and the staple. By a series of convulsive jerks he managed to wriggle over the floor until he lay at the foot of the wall. Supporting himself against it, he got on to his knees, and was then able to touch the rope with his mouth. He asked himself whether it would be easier to cut through it with his teeth, or to rise to his feet, trace the rope to the staple, and work away until he had loosed the knot.

Before he could make up his mind he heard heavy footsteps outside, growing louder as they approached. Instantly he dropped to the floor, wriggled back to his former position, and, when the door opened, lay on his elbow as though he were incapable of rising higher.

Through a door at the farther end of the room came Sebastian, the fat cook of the *Santa Maria*. From one hand swung a horn lantern; in the other he carried a large platter holding a pitcher of water and a hunk of bread. He crossed to the corner where Gundra lay, gave him a kick, set the platter beside him, then moved along to Martin, and leered down upon him, pouring out a stream of abuse in his own language. Having examined the staple and rope, he laughed maliciously, banged Martin's head with the lantern, and left the room, locking the door behind him.

Martin had taken advantage of the lantern light to make a careful mental note of the position of the staple. As soon as the sound of Sebastian's footsteps had died away he wriggled again to the wall, rose upon his knees, then upon his feet, and began to tug with his teeth at the knot about the staple.

For some time he toiled in vain, trying one part of the knot after another. Despairingly he felt that his teeth would yield before the hempen rope. But presently he was aware of a slight loosening, and taking heart, he continued to bite at the same coil. To his joy the knot grew looser and looser; the second coil was easier to undo than the first; now he felt the free end of the rope slipping out, and in a few more minutes it was clear of the staple and dropped on the floor.

His lips were sore, his jaw ached intolerably; and the uneasy posture he had had to maintain had strained his muscles to the point of extreme fatigue. For a while he lay quietly resting, not even telling Gundra that he was free. The noises still continued on the upper floor.

At length he started to jerk and worm his way across the floor.

“I’m coming to untie you,” he said in a low tone.

Moving only inch by inch, with frequent pauses for rest, he was a long time in reaching the Indian boy’s corner. When at last he rolled beside him he said:

“Now, your hands are free; untie the rope round the sack.”

Gundra groped with his fingers, and found the knot, but it had been so well tied that it was some minutes before he succeeded in loosening it. Then he pulled the sack away, and made a shorter job of untying Martin’s hands.

“Now to release you,” said Martin; “but I must wait until my hands are less cramped. What is this place, Gundra?”

“A big godown by the river,” replied the boy. “Plenty goods upstairs, belong for *Santa Maria*.”

Martin suddenly remembered that on the evening when he had rowed Blackbeard down the river his passenger had directed him at first to row towards a large warehouse on the bank, but had changed his mind. No doubt this was the very warehouse which had been chosen for the safe-keeping of the boys. It was plain, too, that it had been used as a place of storage for ill-gotten goods until the time came when they might safely be transferred to the *Santa Maria*.

“If only I can get out,” Martin thought, “I’ll be in time to put a spoke in Blackbeard’s wheel.”

He felt over Gundra’s body to ascertain how he was fastened. About his middle was a steel girdle, connected by a fine chain with the staple in the wall. Martin discovered in a few moments that it was impossible to detach the chain at either end; the links, though small, were of tough metal, and gave no sign of yielding under the strongest strain he could put upon them.

“This is thirsty work,” said Martin. “I’ll take a drink from your pitcher, Gundra. They haven’t brought me any water or food; I suppose they think they’ll tame me. They don’t starve you?”

“No; give food; not much.”

“And how long have you been here?”

Gundra explained that in the dead of Saturday night someone had come into the cupboard under the stairs, gagged him, and carried him out of the house. He had struggled hard.

“That accounts for Mr. Seymour’s button,” thought Martin. “But how am I to get Gundra free?”

He sat for a while considering, with his knees up and his chin on his hands. “I’ll try it,” he exclaimed at length.

The staple was driven deep into the wall, but Martin’s idea was that its setting might be loosened by picking at the wood around it, and that then a tug would wrench it away. Opening his clasp knife he began to scrape and chip at the wood, which being oak offered a considerable resistance to his rather blunt blade. More than once he pulled at the staple without detecting any sign of its yielding.

“What about a violent jerk?” he thought.

He explained to Gundra what he proposed to do. They both stood close to the wall. Martin got his hands firmly between Gundra’s body and the steel girdle; then at the same moment both he and the Indian made a sudden leap into the room. The staple was torn from its setting; the boys fell in a heap on the floor, and the metal rattled and clanged. Claspng each other, they listened breathlessly. Had the sounds been heard by the men above?

There were no cries, no sudden movement, no footsteps. Every now and then came the creaking of the pulley-block which had been going on at intervals ever since Martin had been brought into the room, and the exchange of a few words between the men who were presumably attending to the lowering of the goods. They were too much occupied with their task to notice the sounds in the room.

“Now to get out!” said Martin in a whisper. “I think I can find my way to the door.”

“Me come; no let go,” said Gundra, clinging to him.

They moved together in the direction of the door. The chain on the Indian boy’s girdle clanked.

“This won’t do,” said Martin. “Tuck it up inside the belt.”

When this was done they started again. Martin had taken his bearings by the light of the fat cook’s lantern, but in the pitch darkness he was at fault, and it was only by feeling round the wall that they at last reached the door. It was locked. There was no escape that way.

“Any windows?” asked Martin.

“No, sahib. But another door; oh, yes, over there.”



“You have seen it open?”

“No, but see light in crack.”

“Then we’ll make for that. Keep close to me.”

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-EIGHTH

### THE BOYS ESCAPE

The two boys groped across the room to find the second door. Suddenly Martin tripped and almost fell; he had stepped into a hole where the floor-boards were rotted away.

“Take care, Gundra,” he said, recovering himself.

He felt on the floor to ascertain the size of the gap, then led the Indian boy cautiously across it, and almost immediately touched a wall. Passing his hand along it, he came upon an iron bar.

“I think this is it,” he said.

Feeling along the bar and the wall behind it, he discovered a vertical crack.

“A folding door,” he thought. “Now to lift the bar and see if we can open the door and find out where it leads to.”

The bar was thick and heavy, and so well settled down into its sockets that it had evidently not been used for some time. Martin’s efforts to lift it at first had no success, but after much pulling and pushing it shifted upward suddenly with a loud squeaking noise.

The boys held their breath, wondering whether the sound had been heard in the room above. But the slow creaking still went on, and Martin ventured to raise the bar from its place and lay it gently on the floor.

There was an iron ring in one of the panels of the double door. Inserting his finger in this Martin pulled, and the panel, sticking at first, presently came inward with a squeak; clearly its hinges needed oiling. Inch by inch he drew it towards him. A strong breeze blew into the room, carrying with it a salt tang. The clear sky eastward was studded with stars, which kindled reflections in the river. Nearer at hand a reddish glow suffused the sky.

While they were gazing out there was a creak above them, much louder than they had heard before, and a large object dangling at the end of a rope passed slowly downward within a yard of their faces. It was plain that goods were being let down from the store-room above with some care to avoid noise, for there was no shouting, no giving and receiving directions, no cries of “Are you ready?” “Lower away!” such as were usual in operations of the kind.

Holding on by the door, Martin bent down and peered over the edge,

careful to keep out of sight. The package that had been lowered rested on a sort of quay between the wall of the warehouse and the shored-up bank of the river. A man was disengaging it from the rope. When it was free he shook the rope as a signal that it might be drawn up, then hoisted the package on to a truck and wheeled it along the quay until he came to a short jetty. There he halted and lowered it over the side; evidently a boat was moored below. Apparently the tide was too low to allow of the boat's drawing in nearer to the bank.

Meanwhile a second load came slowly down over the pulley, and reached the ground with a slight jolt. The man had not yet returned from the jetty with the truck. Martin wondered whether it would be possible to slide down the rope without attracting attention. The stars gave very little light, and the glow from the Fire was intercepted by the angle of the warehouse. The distance from the door to the ground was less than twenty feet.

Leaning out he cautiously tried the rope. It gave under a slight pull, showing that the man above was no longer holding it firmly. But he must have noticed the movement, for Martin heard a hoarse voice whisper, "Don't pull the rope through the block, you fool!"

He shrank back into the room.

"Are you there?" whispered the voice again.

At this moment the man below reached the package on the ground.

"What's the matter?" he growled.

"I said, don't pull on the rope!" repeated the man above.

"Didn't touch it!" responded the other gruffly.

There was an inaudible reply from the upper storey. The second load was discharged and trundled away, the rope again wound up, and by the time the man returned from the jetty a third package had been lowered.

By this time Martin had arrived at a conclusion. If he and Gundra were to escape by the rope, they must cling to it while it was descending weighted with a load, and while the man below was still absent at the jetty. There was the risk of their being discovered through the man at the pulley feeling the extra drag on the rope, or through the return of the other man while they were still suspended in the air. Even should they reach the ground safely, there was the further risk of their being intercepted, for they would have to pass the jetty on their left, and go through the lower floor of the warehouse, the quay on the right apparently ending at a high blank wall.

But it was clear that they must either face these risks, with a chance,

however slight, of escaping, or remain as prisoners in the room, with the certainty that the breaking of their bonds would be discovered as soon as fat Sebastian paid them his next visit.

In rapid whispers Martin explained his plan to the Indian boy. Timid as Gundra had hitherto appeared, it was plain that ill-usage had not utterly broken his spirit, for he agreed eagerly to make the attempt, and promised to follow Martin's instructions faithfully.

"I will go first," said Martin, with the idea of giving Gundra confidence. "We can't both go down with the same load. You must wait for the next, but don't come down till you see I am safe."

They waited, tingling with impatience and excitement, until once more a heavy package came swaying past the open door. As soon as it had descended below the sill, Martin took a firm hold of the rope and swung off. There was a louder creaking of the pulley above, a more violent oscillation of the load, a sudden quickening of the rate of descent; then the slow, even movement was resumed.

Martin glanced up. The pulley block hung from the wall above a similar door some twelve feet above. The man who operated the machine was not visible.

Martin slid down until his feet touched the package. The moment this reached the ground he slipped off and glided along the wall until he came to a shaded corner beyond the shore end of the jetty. There he drew back as far as possible into the shadow and waited.

"Are you there?" he heard the man in the upper room whisper huskily, and saw him lean over, holding on to the rope.

There was no answer. His mate was at that moment half-way back from the jetty, pushing the truck before him. A minute or so later, when he began to loose the package, the man above noticed the movement of the rope, and said:

"You there, Bob?"

"Ay! What's up? In a hurry, ain't you? You've got the easy job."

"No call to be nasty! Have a care to stand from under when the loads are coming down. These old blocks are sticking. There was a mighty bad jolt just now. I don't trust 'em."

"All right; be there much more?"

"Half a dozen boxes or so."

“I’m not sorry. The tide is making. I might as well wait a few minutes, then I can pull the barge up a bit and save all this hiking with the truck.”

Martin’s heart sank. If the man did as he suggested, Gundra would have no opportunity of escaping. But next moment he was reassured.

“ ’Tain’t safe,” said the man above. “Barge might stick in the mud, and tide take an hour or more to lift her. The sooner we get these things on board the better.”

While the men were talking the rope had been drawn up, and another load was fastened to it almost as soon as the man below had started to wheel the previous one away.

The pulley creaked, the package descended. Martin watched anxiously, wondering whether Gundra’s nerve would fail, whether the addition of his weight to the rope would cause the man this time to look over. He saw the slight form issue from the doorway and clutch the rope. Gundra was much lighter than Martin; the extra weight made scarcely any difference to the rate at which the rope descended. But Martin did not feel secure until the load bumped on the ground, and the Indian boy, running as lightly as a wild animal, reached his side.

## CHAPTER THE TWENTY-NINTH

### MARTIN USES HIS WITS

Both the boys were panting a little, as much from excitement as from exertion. For a few moments they remained, silent and still, in the shadowy recess. Martin's thoughts were busy with the new problem, how to make good their escape. They were free, but they were not at large.

"Shall we wait until the loading is finished?" Martin asked himself. "There are only a few more loads to come down, then the barge will put off. No doubt these men will leave, too, and we shall be able to get away at leisure."

But as he pondered the matter he decided for immediate action. Convinced that the goods now being removed were stolen property, he was bent on saving it if that were possible, and the only obvious means of saving it was to inform someone in authority who would send officers of the law to arrest both goods and men. There was very little time. To win complete freedom was a matter of urgency.

"Come along," Martin whispered when the man was once more busy at the jetty.

They crept along by the wall to the door of the warehouse. It was shut and bolted. On each side of it was a window, but the shutters were up, and heavily barred. It would be impossible even to attempt to force an entrance without making a noise that would bring the man hot-foot upon them.

Martin glanced this way and that. The quay on the landward side was entirely enclosed. It seemed that there was no exit from it except through the warehouse, and that was shut. They were trapped after all.

But there was the river. Could they escape by that? Was there, below the jetty, a wherry or any kind of row-boat in addition to the barge that was being loaded? Martin could not see one. Nor could they seize an opportunity and dive into the river, for beneath the shore end of the jetty there was nothing at low tide but liquid mud, probably deep enough to engulf them.

All at once the man's remark about pulling the barge up recurred to Martin. An idea struck him that made his heart bound and his nerves tingle. He whispered a few words to Gundra, and anyone who could have observed them would have noticed how they braced themselves up.

The result of Martin's inspiration showed itself when the man next left the

barge and wheeled the truck back along the jetty and across the quay. As soon as his back was turned, they quitted their hiding-place and, stooping low, made a dash for the jetty, the sound of their movements being drowned by the noise of the rumbling wheels.

At the place where the jetty sprang from the quay they stopped, lowered themselves over the side, and slipped on to one of the cross-beams that supported the planking. There they crouched breathlessly. It was a perilous position, for the timber was slippery with slime, and they had to hug it closely to prevent their sliding off. There, clinging and crouching, they remained until the man had again come and gone.

As soon as the man was at a safe distance, they clambered up to the jetty, and crept along it on all fours until they came just above the barge. This was now well afloat, but it was moored stem and stern to posts on the jetty, as they saw by the light of a small oil-lamp standing on a tub amidships. Boxes were piled fore and aft.

The two boys slid down on to the barge by the rope by which the man had lowered the goods. Martin ran to the stern and tried to cast the aft mooring rope loose; but the knot was firm and the rope hard, and he had not succeeded when he heard the rumbling of the truck wheels along the quay. There was not time to complete the job before the man arrived. The urgent necessity at the moment was to hide and hope that he would not see them.

Together they crouched down in the narrow space between the piled boxes and the gunwale. With beating hearts they heard the rumbling draw nearer; the heavy tramp of the man; his mutterings as he heaved his load from the truck and lowered it to the deck of the barge. They held their breath. Would the man follow it? No; he swung it almost over their heads, and it settled with a bump a few feet short of them.

The moment the man retreated, Martin dashed back to the aft rope, struggled with the knot until he managed to cast it off, hastened forward and cast off the rope there likewise. The barge swung free. Against its gunwale lay the long heavy sweeps with which it was propelled. Martin attempted to lift one of these, but found it impossible to do so without Gundra's help.

The barge was already lurching shoreward on the tide. In a few moments, unless its motion was checked, it would strike the mud, and then all hope of escape was lost. Holding the sweep between them, the boys drove it against the beams that supported the jetty, and tried to push off.

Unused to the handling of so clumsy an implement, the boys were unable to prevent its end from glancing off the slimy timber, and it plunged with a

splash into the water. But they had not let it go. Levering it up across the gunwale, they once more made the attempt, and by exerting all possible pressure were able to force the barge a yard or two from the jetty. Then they were almost undone by their own vigour, for the sweep slipped again as the barge sheered away, and they fell forward, striking against the gunwale, and dropping the sweep with a loud clatter.

They seized it just in time to save it from being carried overboard. Meanwhile the barge had lost the impetus they had given it, and was again drifting shoreward. It was clear that the noise they had made had been heard by the men. There was a shout and hurried footsteps on the quay, and Martin, looking up, could just see in the starlight the man at the upper door leaning out and making wild movements with his arms, evidently to urge on his mate below.

In a moment this man came in sight, running along the quay to the spot where he expected the barge to strike if it escaped the mud. Martin saw that the next few minutes would decide his fate.

“Catch hold!” he cried to the Indian boy. “Shove when I tell you.”

He pointed the sweep at the angle between two supporting beams, and with Gundra’s help drove it into the notch, and brought all his weight and strength to bear upon it. The barge sidled outward, slowly, too slowly. Martin realised that if the man had run on to the jetty, he could have jumped on board before the heavy vessel was out of range.

“Don’t let go,” Martin called, as the sweep dropped from its resting-place into the water.

Keeping a tight grasp on the pole, the boys pulled it slowly through the water. The barge swung about a little, and Martin saw with joy that the gap between it and the quay was wider. It was now too late for the man to attempt the leap. He stood on the quayside, shouting, cursing, gesticulating to his companions, two men who were running to join him. The second of them, lumbering along in the rear, Martin recognised as Sebastian the fat cook.

Unwieldy though the sweep was, Martin was learning under the stress of necessity how to manipulate it, his knowledge of oarsmanship assisting. Laboriously he and Gundra dragged it through the water, and at every stroke the barge forged a little farther from the quay.

The men there were in all the agitation of helpless rage. There was a flash, a crack; one of them had fired a pistol.

“You fool!” shouted one of his companions. “Do you want to bring all



Deptford down upon us!”

The answer was inaudible on the barge. There the boys, panting and sweating from their exertions in the hot night, did not relax their efforts until the heavy vessel was clear of the jetty and had begun to drift upstream on the tide. Then, as they paused, they heard the same voice apparently giving an order, though the words could not be distinguished. Dimly they saw the three figures run along the quay, then they were lost to sight in the darkness. A few moments later there came the sound of rusty hinges creaking; somewhere a gate was opening.

“What are they about now?” thought Martin; and he noticed for the first time that Gundra’s eyes were wide with amazement and fright as they gazed upon the ruddy glow of the Fire.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTIETH

### THE BOYS SWIM FOR IT

Martin felt that he had been uncommonly lucky. The utmost he had hoped for was to escape with Gundra from the warehouse; it now seemed to his sanguine spirit that he would save the stolen property as well. The barge was slowly drifting upstream; there was no present sign of pursuit; and if his luck held, before long he would get assistance from friendly hands, and the evil schemes of Blackbeard, Slocum, and the rest would be brought to nought.

But he had pitched his hopes too high. The heavy barge moved only at the pace of the tide, and neither Martin nor the Indian had sufficient muscular strength to work the cumbersome sweep for more than a few minutes at a time. And they were soon aware that the pursuit had started. In the light from the glowing sky they caught sight of three or four men hurrying along the road that bordered the river. They were outstripping the barge; it was probably their intention to get well ahead, find a boat, and cut across the course of the fugitives.

They might be delayed by the fact that every serviceable boat had been engaged for the conveyance of householders' goods, but sooner or later they would get some kind of craft, and then the end was inevitable.

The same dearth of boats operated against Martin. He hailed one or two that passed, but the watermen would not so much as wait to hear his explanations; they were reaping a golden harvest.

What could be done? The only chance seemed to be to run the barge across the river to the north bank, as near as possible to the stairs where Martin's friends were wont to ply, and trust to finding one or other of them at hand and ready to help.

The barge was drifting broadside with the stream, and it was only by dint of great efforts and strenuous pulling at the sweep that the boys were able to bring her head in the desired direction. They had hardly begun to creep towards the north bank when they heard shouts ahead, and saw a wherry putting out from the southern shore and making to cross their bows.

The fiery aspect of the sky seemed to increase the heat of the summer night, and Martin felt the sweat pouring off him in streams as he tugged desperately at the sweep. He realised in a few moments the impossibility of

gaining the stairs before the wherry overtook him. To save the goods was beyond hoping for; it would be as much as he could do to save himself and Gundra from capture. They must abandon the barge and swim for the shore, now perhaps some fifty yards distant. Could they do so without being seen and followed? Martin had little doubt that the pursuers would strain every nerve to capture them, and so ensure that the sailing of the *Santa Maria* should not be interfered with.

“We must swim for it,” he said, dropping the sweep. “Come with me, and keep low.”

They crept behind the pile of cargo that had sheltered them when they first boarded the barge, and slipped over the gunwale into the water on the side remote from the pursuing wherry. Martin hoped to get at least half way to the shore before he was seen. With Gundra he struck out vigorously, but was soon conscious that his strength had already been overtaxed, and he would be unable to keep up his stroke for more than a minute or two.

It seemed that they had only left the barge a few seconds when they heard the wherry bump into its side, and the men scrambling on board, cursing as they searched for the fugitives. The search did not last long; one of the pursuers caught sight of the swimmers, who might perhaps have got away unseen but for the glare of the Fire.

“There they are!”

The shout caused Martin and Gundra to put all their remaining strength into their strokes. The pursuers rushed for their boat, and it was fortunate for the swimmers that it lay on the farther side of the barge. By the time it had been pulled round the stern the boys had entered shallow water, and were wading ashore in the mud.

And then the pursuers made a mistake. Had they continued on their course upstream and rowed across to the nearest stairs, or to one of the quays that broke the riverside, they could have landed well ahead of the boys and met them while they were still floundering in the mud flats. But in their haste and flurry, due no doubt to their wish to avoid drawing too much attention from passing boats, they swung round against the current and made toward the boys.

Ankle deep in slime, Martin and Gundra struggled on to gain the waste land that stretched up from the river bank. The pursuing boat rapidly approached them, and was only some twenty yards behind when its nose stuck in the mud, throwing the rowers forward over their oars. Cursing violently, the men strove to back water, but the boat was held fast, the oars were useless, and it was only after precious time had been wasted that the men decided to jump

overboard and continue the pursuit on foot.



Wading ashore in the mud

In the clinging mud their weight told against them. By the time they had dragged themselves on to the dry land the boys were already disappearing into the hedge-lined lane that wound north-westward in the direction of Spitalfields.

As they ran the chain by which Gundra had been fastened slipped from his steel girdle, and its clanking gave a clue to their line of flight. They heard the heavy feet of their pursuers thundering after them. Martin tucked the chain up as well as he could, scarcely changing his pace, and dragged Gundra along. In a minute or two they would reach houses, and among them, shadowed from the glare of the Fire, they might hope to elude further pursuit.

“No can run,” panted Gundra suddenly, placing his hand over his heart.

“A stitch,” thought Martin.

To lose time would be fatal. Without a moment’s hesitation he hauled the Indian through a thin place in the hedge.

“Lie flat,” he whispered. “Don’t make a sound.”

They lay beneath the hedge, trying to smother the sounds of their quick breathing. The pursuers came up, passed; their footsteps receded.

“Better wait and see if they come back,” thought Martin. “We are both dog-tired, and want a rest.”

Minutes passed. Martin listened for the sound of returning footsteps. Presently he heard them, slow, dragging. The men went by on the other side of the hedge; there was sullen rage in the tone of their voices. Martin waited until he could hear them no longer; then he turned to the Indian boy.

“We can go now,” he said. “The pain is gone, Gundra?”

Gundra was asleep.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FIRST

### GOLLOP MAKES A DISCOVERY

The little fellow screamed when Martin roused him, and started up in a fright.

“Hush! It’s all right,” said Martin. “The men have gone. We must get home and tell Gollop all about it. He will tell us what is best to be done.”

He reflected that if, as he supposed, the barge held stolen goods that were to form part of the cargo of the *Santa Maria*, it would take some time to row that clumsy craft against the tide, and it might still be possible to intervene before the vessel sailed. No doubt she would leave her moorings as soon as the tide turned, and make what headway she could against the east wind.

Martin had no idea what hour of the night it was, and he was surprised, before they had gone far on the homeward way, to notice signs of dawn in the sky. When they reached the house the sun was peering above the horizon, its beams competing with the glow of the Fire.

Descending into the basement, Martin found the old Frenchman in anxious consultation with the Gollops.

“Here’s Martin!” cried Lucy gleefully. “Oh, I *am* glad you’ve come home. We’ve been in such a state about you.”

“Not a wink of sleep for any of us all night,” said Susan. “Why, bless me! Here’s the blackamoor too.”

Gundra had crept in timidly behind the elder boy.

“Now what have you to say for yourself?” the woman went on. “As if there weren’t worries enough without——”

“Peace, woman!” cried the constable. “Don’t rate the lad. He’s fair foundered, by the look of him. Sit you down, Martin, and tell us what has kept you out all night.”

Martin was glad enough to rest, and Lucy had already taken possession of Gundra, placed him in a corner of the settle, and was asking eager questions about the strange girdle he wore about his body.

Without wasting words Martin related how he had followed Mr. Slocum’s handcart, been trapped in the yard, and finally carried off to the disused

warehouse; how he had escaped with Gundra, and got away on the barge.

“You’re a chip of the old block,” said Gollop delightedly; “and your poor father would be proud of you.”

“That Slocum’s a wretch,” said Susan. “I always said so. Now, what are you going to do, Gollop?”

“Do! What can I do?”

“There’s a man for you! Just as bad as the Lord Mayor. What can you do, indeed! Why, just set off after that barge this very minute and stop it before it’s too late.”

“Spoken like a woman,” responded Gollop. “You don’t understand the law, Sue. Before that barge can be stopped there must be a warrant drawn up proper, saying as how Richard Gollop, constable——”

“Fiddle-diddle!” Susan broke in scornfully. “Go out and get your warrant, then, instead of talking about it.”

“I’d get never a magistrate to listen to me; they can’t think of nothing but the Fire. But I’ll tell you what I will do: I’ll go down to the river and see this vessel, *Santa* something or other; there’s plenty of time, for they’ve got to unload the barge. I’ll ask a question or two along the riverside, and if what I hear bears out the lad’s tale——”

“There! Get along with you,” cried his wife. “It’s a mercy the world isn’t all made of men.”

“What you can’t help, make the best of,” said Gollop, as he hurried away.

Susan quickly prepared a meal for the famished boys. While she did so she continued the conversation with Mounseer which Martin’s entrance had interrupted. It appeared that the Frenchman was becoming anxious about the safety of the house. On returning home about midnight the constable had reported that there were signs of the Fire’s working back against the wind. Already several houses eastward of Pudding Lane had been consumed by the flames, and although the danger was as yet not imminent, there was a risk that if the wind lulled or changed, the area of destruction would extend to the Tower and the adjacent streets.

“Keep your mind easy, Mounseer,” said Susan with comfortable assurance. “The neighbours will give us good warning if so be the Fire comes nigh, and you’ll have time to collect your belongings; not that you’ve got much to lose, so far as I know.”

Martin caught a strange look on the Frenchman's face as he left the room to return to his own apartment.

"When you've eat your fill, Martin," said Susan, "you'd better go to sleep. The blackamoor child has dropped off already, poor lamb!"

Martin lay down on his bed, but he found it impossible to sleep. His brain whirled with thoughts of the Fire, and the barge, and the *Santa Maria*; of Slocum, and Blackbeard, and the rest; and in spite of Susan's confidence the mere suggestion that the Fire might spread to their own house and swallow it up filled him with alarm. He could not bear to think that the Gollops might presently be among the thousands of families that had lost their all.

Presently he could not endure inaction any longer. He sprang up.

"I am going out," he said. "I must see for myself where the Fire has got to. I won't be very long."

At the top of the stairs he banged into Gollop, red-faced and panting through haste.

"Bless my eyes! Here's a wonder!" gasped the man.

"What is it? Has the Fire got to us?" said Martin.

"The Fire! What's the Fire to you? Martin, my lad, never did I think I'd live to see this day."

"Tell me—what is it?" asked Martin in wonder.

"Why, call me a Dutchman if that there Portugal ship ain't the *Merry Maid*, your father's own vessel what never came home, to his ruin, poor old captain of mine. The moment I set eyes on her I rubbed 'em, 'cos I couldn't believe it. But I knowed them lines; I knowed the pretty creature, though they'd done something to alter the look of her. She's the captain's ship as sure as I'm alive. And now you must come with me; we'll go to the Lord Mayor or somebody and get a warrant. She's ready to slip her moorings; we must arrest her; what's your father's is yours; that's the law, and soon they'll know it!"

Waiting just long enough to tell his wife of his amazing discovery, the constable hurried away with Martin in his quest of the Lord Mayor. But that magnate was not to be found; nor were any of the sheriffs discovered in the devastated city. Gollop, distracted, was beating his wits to recall the name and address of some magistrate in a district still untouched when Martin suddenly caught sight of Mr. Pemberton, the customer of Slocum's whom he had met on two occasions. The gentleman was standing among a group of his friends, to whom he was pointing out the site of his own ruined dwelling.



“He must be a magistrate,” thought Martin, remembering how Mr. Pemberton had interfered when the crowd was molesting the Frenchman. “I’ll ask him.”

He ran up to the group, pushed his way among them without much ceremony, and said:

“Sir, may I speak to you?”

Mr. Pemberton stared at the eager boy, displeased at what appeared to be an unmannerly intrusion. Then his brow cleared; he smiled and said:

“My friend the fighter, isn’t it? Well, what have you been fighting about now?”

Martin coloured as he felt the eyes of the group focussed on him. But he recovered his composure in a moment, and began to pour out his story. At first the gentlemen listened with smiles of amusement or toleration, but as he proceeded their interest was awakened, and Mr. Pemberton himself watched him with keen attention.

“Stay,” he said at one point. “Your father was Reuben Leake?”

“Yes, sir, that was his name.”

“I have heard of him; a sound mariner. Go on.”

Martin continued his story, doing his best to make its complications clear.

“Now let me understand,” said Mr. Pemberton when he had finished. “This vessel, the *Santa Maria*, once the *Merry Maid*, is on the point of sailing with a cargo which you suspect to consist of stolen goods, some of them the property of the respected goldsmith Mr. Greatorex. You say that Mr. Slocum, Mr. Greatorex’s man, is concerned in this crime with the captain of the vessel, whom you call Blackbeard, and a man named Seymour. The crew is mainly foreign; they have held an Indian boy as a slave, and they kidnapped him when you had rescued him from them, and shut you up with him in a warehouse at Deptford. Have I the story right?”

“Yes, sir; all that is true.”

“Well, let me say—and my friends will agree with me—that you have shown uncommon intelligence and courage and resource. Your running off with the barge was an admirable device and deserved to succeed. And now I understand that you wish to have a warrant for the arrest of the vessel before she leaves the river. But you must have someone in authority to execute the warrant, and in the present state of the city——”

“There’s me, your worship,” broke in Gollop, who had stood at hand. “Being a man of law in the shape of a constable——”

“Ah! Well, we must lose no time. But I have no paper, no pen—— Stay, is that a half-burnt ledger I see among the ashes there?”

Martin leapt to the spot and picked up the book. Mr. Pemberton tore out a page, hurriedly wrote a few lines upon it with a pencil, and handed it to the constable.

“There, my man,” he said, “that is the best I can do for you. I cannot swear that the phraseology is absolutely in form, but it will serve. I don’t know what you will do if your Blackbeard shows fight. There is no available force to put at your disposal; you must do the best you can. I wish you success. I shall be glad to learn the issue of this strange affair.”

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SECOND

### THE PURSUIT

Martin sat on a thwart side by side with Hopton, listening intently to the discussion that passed between Gollop and Boulter as they pulled the boat steadily downstream.

“She got away with the first of the ebb,” said the constable. “What’s the odds on our catching her?”

“That depends,” replied the waterman cautiously. “I reckon she’s got three or four hours’ start, but she won’t go faster than the tide.”

“Not so fast, against this wind,” said Gollop.

“True, but it ain’t blowing so hard, and it’s my belief it’ll drop to a calm afore night. Well then, she’ll hardly make Gravesend afore the turn of tide, and as she can’t beat up against the wind in the narrow reaches she’ll have to lay up when the ebb fails. For summat about three hours we ought to gain a bit on her, but not so much as to overhaul her, and then we’ll have the tide against us.”

“And be dead beat; I ain’t so handy with an oar as I was in my sea-going days.”

“Well, I’ve a friend or two in Woolwich, and if so be they ain’t saving the London folk’s goods I’ll get ’em to come aboard and take a spell while we rest. But suppose we catch the Portugal ship, what then, Gollop?”

“Why, I’ve got a warrant, ain’t I?”

“Much good that’ll be,” said Boulter scornfully. “They won’t care a fig for warrants or anything but swords and firelocks. You ought to have took a boatload of soldiers, that’s what I say.”

“Ay, it’s easy to say, but it couldn’t be done. Well, what you can’t help, make the best of. I tell you this: that Portugal ship, leastways the *Merry Maid*, shan’t get out of the river if I can help it.”

Martin was half-inclined to regard the pursuit as a wild-goose chase, and Hopton had nothing to say to encourage him; but uncertainty gave a spice to the adventure, and they felt a pleasant thrill of anticipation.

By the time they reached Woolwich the tide had turned, and Boulter

thought it well to pull to the shore, partly for rest and food, partly to seek out his friends, enquire of them whether they had noticed the Portugal ship, and try to enlist their help. Luckily he came upon two watermen whom he knew well, and who were disengaged. From them he learnt that the vessel had passed about three hours before; she had towed boats out, towing her, and it was a matter of speculation on the riverside why her crew were putting themselves to so much exertion in such hot weather.

Gollop's face fell when he heard this news. It was clear that Blackbeard expected pursuit, and was making all possible speed to evade it. Boulter's friends agreed to join the expedition, under promise of a good reward if it proved successful, and the boat set off again after half an hour's delay, the fresh oarsmen making good progress even against the tide. When all four men were pulling its pace was noticeably rapid, and at Erith, six miles beyond Woolwich, Gollop was delighted to learn on enquiry from an upgoing barge that the *Merry Maid* was now little more than two hours ahead.

Hour after hour the rowers plied their oars, taking turns to rest in couples. Martin and the old Frenchman, who had been up all night, fell asleep on their seats, and when they awoke it was five o'clock in the afternoon, and the boat was approaching Gravesend. Here Gollop decided to go ashore, for as the day wore on he had become less confident, and recognised that if Blackbeard and his crew resisted the arrest of the ship the pursuers, hopelessly outnumbered, would not be able to enforce it unless they could engage a party adequately armed.

Both he and Boulter had acquaintances among the mariners of Gravesend, but some of these were absent from their usual haunts, having been drawn to London by the prospect of making money out of the Fire. Those who remained showed themselves distrustful and suspicious; they were not to be tempted to lend their services in a cause that might fail; and Gollop, angry and troubled, made his way to the office of the Customs officer of the port, and sought his aid as a brother man of the law. The officer appeared to resent this claim of relationship, and treated the constable very off-handedly.

"Let me see this warrant you talk of," he said, and when Gollop produced the scrap of paper, creased, oddly-shaped, its edges frayed and scorched, he sniffed. "I cannot act on this," he said. "It is not drawn up in proper form. The *Santa Maria* has cleared; she is bound for Lisbon, the port of an ally; she is beyond my jurisdiction."

At this Gollop lost his temper.

"You and your long words!" he said. "That there vessel ain't a Portugal

ship; she's English from stem to stern; don't I know? You're neglecting of your duty, master officer, and I'll take good care that them above you hear about it and you'll get a rough hauling, my fine fellow."

"Get out of this," cried the officer, losing his temper in turn. "You may be a constable; I don't know; but you'll find your legs in the stocks if you air your insolence on an officer of His Majesty's Customs."

"Come away, Dick," said Boulter soothingly. "We ain't done yet. And we can't afford to lose any more time. If the craft weathers Hope Point she'll have a clear run out and give us the slip altogether. Come on, man."

Within a few minutes the boat was again under way. It was heavy work pulling her down Gravesend Reach, and heavier still when, in Lower Hope Reach, she came full in the teeth of the wind. An exclamation from Martin caused Gollop to fling a hasty look over his shoulder. Strung out along the lee shore three ships lay at anchor, evidently waiting for the tide.

"Easy all!" cried Gollop, shipping his oar. A look of triumph gleamed in his eyes. "The second o' them vessels—she's the *Merry Maid*, bless her heart!"

"Are you sure?" said Boulter. "She's three-quarters of a mile away."

"Sure! Am I sure I've a nose on my face? That there's my dear old captain's craft, one in a thousand. She's safe for a few hours. We'll go ashore and wet our whistles, my mates; this is a chance we've got to make the best of."

They pulled in towards the shore, but lay a few yards off the mud flats to talk over the next step before they landed.

"We can't fight 'em, that's certain," said Boulter, "being only seven all told, two of us just boys, and one a aged furriner."

Mounseer smiled, and fingered his rapier.

"True for you, mate," said Gollop. "Well, if you ain't strong enough to fight, what do you do?"

"Speaking for myself, I plays a trick."

"Spoke like a wise man. Now what trick could you play?"

"That depends," said Boulter, scratching his head. "What about boring a hole in her hull?"

"Seeing as none of us is a sword-fish, that can't be done without 'tis noticed. What about giving 'em a scare? Them furriners are easy frightened."

“You couldn’t scare ’em into quitting the vessel. But you talk of furriners. Now I come to think of it, I’ve knowed furren gentlemen put aboard outgoing vessels in the river—gentlemen as want to get away secret, and pay well for it. If so be——”

He paused and looked at the Frenchman.

“If so be as our furren gentleman could go aboard as a passenger, maybe the rest of us could get aboard too, eh?”

“Well, what then?”

“Why, that’s the trick, d’you see? What I say is——”

“But perhaps Mr. Seymour’s aboard, and he knows Mounseer,” said Martin.

“So much the better,” cried Gollop, slapping his thigh. “But what does Mounseer say?”

“I do anything what please you,” said the Frenchman quietly.

Five minutes’ close discussion ensued. Then the boat’s head was turned upstream, and the little party, hopeful and elated, was speeding back to Gravesend.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-THIRD

### AT GRIPS AT LAST

In Gravesend they spent a busy hour. While Boulter bought a small sea-chest at a marine store, Gollop purchased cutlasses for the watermen and a stout staff for Martin: Hopton fortunately had brought his club. A visit to a slop shop provided sea-jackets and hats for the two boys, and so disguised they might have been taken for cabin boys ashore. The cutlasses, wrapped in sacking, were laid in the chest.

"We'd better wait for the dusk," said Gollop. "How about the tide, Boulter?"

"'Twill turn at dusk or thereabouts," replied the waterman. "But the wind's dropping, so we mustn't bide too long or the barque will slip us."

"True; but we'll have time to fill our holds, which I mean to say our stomachs. An empty man's only half a man, and every one of us will have to make two to-night, or I'm a Dutchman."

Repairing to the Three Tuns inn, the little party made a good meal; then they returned to the wherry and set off on their adventure. The tide was still running up, but the force of the wind had sensibly diminished, and they made good progress toward their destination.

The sun was setting behind them, and a slight haze crept over the river. Presently the *Santa Maria* hove in sight.

"All's quiet on deck," said Gollop, looking eagerly ahead. "They feel pretty snug: so much the better."

The approach of the wherry was apparently not noticed on board. It had drawn under the vessel's quarter before Boulter raised a hail.

"*Santa Maria* ahoy!" he called.

A dark face showed itself above the gunwale.

"Captain aboard?" said Boulter.

The man nodded.

"I want a word with him," the waterman continued.

There was no answer: the man simply stared.

“Speakee capitano,” said Boulter, as if obligingly suiting his language to the comprehension of a foreigner.

In a few halting words of broken English the man declared that the captain was at supper and must not be disturbed.

“What you want?” he concluded.

“Never you mind,” said Boulter. “Bring capitano: maybe he’ll understand plain English.”

After some further colloquy the man was prevailed upon to seek the captain, and Martin felt a cold trickle along his spine when he saw in the fading light the face of Blackbeard looking down from the poop. Instinctively he shrank down on his seat.

“What you want?” demanded the captain, with his foreign accent.

“A gentleman wishes a passage in your vessel, captain,” said Boulter, persuasively. “He must get aboard at once: a foreign gentleman, you understand: can pay well: fifty pounds, say.”

“It is impossible,” said Blackbeard bluntly. “There is not cabin room for passenger. No; impossible.”

Another face was peering over his shoulder, and Martin effaced himself more thoroughly as he recognised Slocum. The goldsmith threw a searching glance over the boat. Martin saw him start, pluck Blackbeard by the sleeve, and draw him out of sight.

“Did he see me?” thought Martin, quaking a little.

In a minute he was reassured. Blackbeard returned alone, and Martin noticed that his eyes at once sought Mounseer, who was sitting on a thwart next to Gollop.

“I have considered,” he said. “Perhaps for one. You said one?”

“Yes: one gentleman: a Frenchman,” said Boulter. “London is not safe for the French. He was beset in the street.”

“Very well; he shall come. And quick: soon will the tide turn.”

He called up a seaman, and bade him lower a rope-ladder from the waist. Mounseer got up, and staggered.

“He is old and weak,” said Boulter. “Some of you help him, there.”

According to the plan previously arranged, Martin and Gollop each took one of the Frenchman’s arms and led him to the ladder. Martin climbed nimbly



to the deck, then turned to assist Mounseer, who ascended slowly, Gollop following. To all appearances the Frenchman was feeble, exhausted; he tottered and swayed between the others when all three were on board. Meanwhile Boulter's two watermen friends were proceeding to carry up the sea-chest, which might be supposed to contain the passenger's baggage.

"Come with me," said Blackbeard. "We will make bargain."

He led the way towards the round-house, a sort of cabin on the upper deck. Martin and Gollop led Mounseer between them. Slocum had disappeared; the only persons visible were Blackbeard, the dark-faced seaman, and some members of the crew who were lying outstretched on the planks, resting, no doubt, after their exertions in towing the vessel.

Martin looked curiously about the round-house as he entered. It contained a well-spread table, two chairs and two berths; the walls were lined with racks containing arms of all kinds: firelocks, picks, swords, pistols.

At a gesture from Blackbeard the Frenchman sank into one of the chairs.

"Now you go," the captain commanded, turning to Martin and Gollop. "I will finish the bargain with this gentleman."

"Begging your pardon, sir," said Gollop quietly, "but afore I go it is in a manner of speaking——"

"What you mean?" said Blackbeard, truculently. "I say you go: there is no more for you: you have done; the business is with this gentleman."

"So it is, to be sure," returned Gollop unperturbed. "Leastways a part of it. But afore I go, it is in a manner of speaking my duty as an officer of the law to show you a dokyment——"

He had drawn from his pocket the warrant signed by Mr. Pemberton and was proceeding to unfold it. But something in his manner had aroused suspicion in the captain, who made a quick sidelong movement and snatched at a pistol in the nearest rack.

Then the Frenchman, who had appeared so weak and faint, showed a marvellous alacrity for a man of his years and impotence. He sprang up from his chair, whipped out his rapier from under his cloak, and had its point within an inch of Blackbeard's throat while his hand was still closing over the pistol butt.

For a second or two there was silence as the men faced each other. Martin, quivering with excitement, took in the details of the scene: Gollop flourishing the paper in his hand; Blackbeard, his hand outstretched, his nostrils dilating,

his eyes glaring; Mounseer cool, smiling, watching the other as a cat watches a mouse.

Then the silence was broken. The Frenchman, wearing his inscrutable smile, said gently, in a tone not above the conversational pitch:

“Monsieur recognises—is it not so?—that he must render himself?”

Blackbeard made no answer in words, but his eyes narrowed, his fingers tightened on the pistol, and he made an almost imperceptible movement. The Frenchman read the intention in his eyes. The smile disappeared, giving place to a look of grim resolution. One twist of the wrist, and the rapier point, an instant before at the man’s throat, flickered like a flash of lightning and pricked him in the forearm. He winced; the pistol fell clattering to the floor; and he let out a cry, a loud wild cry that must have rung through the ship from stem to stern: a rallying cry to his crew.

Next instant a door at the farther end of the round-house, which had stood ajar, was flung open, and a water-bottle hurtled across the room. It missed the Frenchman’s head by an inch, and crashed against the wall. Through the door rushed two men, one behind the other. In the foremost Martin recognised Mr. Seymour, the tenant of the upper floor whose dealings with Blackbeard had first awakened his suspicions. It was he who had thrown the bottle; the second man was for the moment hidden from view behind him.

Between the table and the wall on either side there was only a narrow gangway, partly obstructed by the chairs. As he dashed forward, Seymour snatched at a cutlass hanging above the rack of arms. He grasped it, but by the blade, for the hilt was higher than his head. To make effective play with it he must needs lift it from its nail and reverse it: even then the narrow gangway would allow him no room to swing it, nor the low roof space in which to bring it above his head: he could only give point.

But before he could reverse the weapon and grasp the hilt Gollop had found himself. Dropping his warrant, he flung himself forward with a leonine roar. Recalling the fight afterwards Martin wondered how the burly constable had managed to squeeze himself between the table and the wall to meet the attack. The chair went clattering along the floor; a blow from Gollop’s sledge-hammer fist, with sixteen stone of brawn behind it, caught Seymour clean between the eyes and sent him hurtling over the broken chair upon the man behind. He dropped; his companion staggered, recovered himself, and, shouting a furious curse, sprang forward cutlass in hand.

Protected in some degree by the huddled form of Seymour, he made a desperate lunge at Gollop, who had been carried forward by his own

momentum, and could now neither advance nor retreat. At this critical moment Martin seized the second chair, and, gathering his strength, hurled it at Slocum. It took him at the level of his belt and doubled him up.

Then from without came a medley of shouts and the rustling thud of bare feet upon the boards.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FOURTH

### GOLLOP AT BAY

The light of battle gleamed in Gollop's eyes. He was no longer the constable, whose weapons were a staff and a rattle, but the boatswain of old, who had borne his part in many a fight with pirates in the days when he sailed the far seas with Captain Leake.

"I carries more flesh now than I did then," he said afterwards, when telling the story to his cronies. "That's what comes of marrying a good wife what looks after your vittles. Still, what you can't help, make the best of; that's what I always say."

Bulky though he was, at this critical moment he showed himself astonishingly agile. He snatched two cutlasses from the stand of arms, and thrust one into Martin's hand.

"Better than a stick, my lad," he said. "Stand you guard over they two rascals"—he indicated Slocum and Seymour, who were sitting more or less disabled on the floor. "If they stir, touch 'em with the point."

Then, rather breathlessly, he turned to meet the rush at the door.

Meanwhile the Frenchman was keeping an eye on Blackbeard. Disarmed and injured, the captain of the *Santa Maria* stood between the table and the wall, his dark face distorted with fury. Mounseer could not attack him again while he was unarmed, nor was there space or time for the duel that would have rejoiced the Frenchman's heart. But he knew that if he took his eye off him for a moment he might expect a rush, and all that he could do was to shift his ground slightly so that he might be able to lend aid to Gollop if the crew made a determined assault through the door.

"You will have the goodness to retire yourself one step or two," he said to Blackbeard, his tone icily polite. To give himself room it was necessary that the captain should move backward into the round-house.

Blackbeard muttered a curse under his breath, but refused to budge.

"Eh bien, voilà!" said the Frenchman, with a sudden deft movement pricking him with the point of his rapier.

The captain winced, shrieked out an oath, but made no more ado about obeying orders. Then Mounseer half turned, and stood so that he could either

check Blackbeard if he showed fight, or move to Gollop's help, as the occasion might demand.

Cutlass in hand, Martin stood over his prisoners, who had shown no sign of activity themselves, but were looking eagerly, hopefully, towards the door. Martin found it difficult to prevent his attention from being distracted by the fight that was now raging there. The crew of the vessel, headed by the officer whom Martin had seen once before, had surged in a yelling crowd towards the round-house, catching up as they ran any object that would serve as a weapon. Some had marline-spikes, one brandished a short spar, another a hanger; several had drawn evil-looking knives, and fat Sebastian wielded a meat chopper.

But there was no order or discipline among them. Shouting, gesticulating, they got in one another's way in their struggle to reach the door, where Gollop coolly awaited their onset. His broad form blocked up the narrow entrance; the foreigners could attack only one at a time; and as they came on, one by one, each was put out of action by a sudden thrust or cut or lunge of the cutlass wielded by a master hand.

Martin glowed with admiration as he watched the swift movements of the big man. Planted firmly on his feet, his body scarcely swayed; but his sword-arm swept from side to side, and the furious yells of his opponents bespoke their sense of failure. Baffled, they fell back; they collected in a group to devise some plan whereby they might overcome this doughty defender of the door.

Suddenly there was a shout behind them.

"Ahoy! ahoy! Firk 'em! At 'em, my hearties!"

The startled group turned; there were a few moments of wild confusion. Martin, looking under Gollop's arm, saw a welter of men, some bowled over like ninepins, others crawling away on hands and knees. The watermen, with George Hopton, taking their cue from the noises on deck, had swarmed up from the wherry and swept upon the foreigners from the rear. They burst through, irresistible; the crew scattered to right and left; and then Gollop issued forth from the doorway and joined his friends with a roar of welcome.

"Round 'em up! Round 'em up!" he cried, and striding ahead of his little party he chased the crew around the deck, across the waist, down the ladders, into every corner where they sought refuge. Bereft of their leaders they had no heart to fight. Within a very few minutes the foreigners had surrendered, and were herded into the forecastle.

A few minutes more, and the prisoners in the round-house were sitting in a disconsolate line against the wall, their hands and feet securely tied.

“A very pretty job,” said Gollop, looking approvingly at the watermen’s work. “I reckon they knots be firm enough, Mounseer; still, ’tis as well to make sure; so maybe you’ll stand over ’em with that steel of yours while we go and see what’s in them brass-bound boxes.”

The Frenchman smiled, and held his rapier at the salute.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FIFTH

### MARTIN TO THE RESCUE

Gollop was in a quandary.

He had got possession of the *Santa Maria*, which would henceforth be called by her old name, the *Merry Maid*: what was he to do with her? Night had fallen; the tide was running out again to the sea; it seemed necessary to wait for morning light and the turn of the tide before the vessel could be floated back to London. But the constable had left his duty without leave from his commanding officer, and though he had Mr. Pemberton's warrant to produce in self-justification, he felt that if a strict judgment were passed upon his action, he was in danger of losing his livelihood.

"Seems to me I'd better leave you in command, lad," he said to Martin, "the ship being yours, and row back to the city."

"But you are tired," replied Martin; "it would be a terribly hard pull against the tide, and we can't spare anyone to go with you; we're very few to hold the ship if the crew break out of the forecastle."

"Besides, there's them boxes," Boulter put in. The boxes had been opened and examined: they were full of plate and jewellery. "I reckon they're worth a good few thousands of pounds, and Mr. Greatorix is so much beholden to you that he'll see you don't lose by the night's work."

"Maybe; gratitude ain't a partickler common virtue. Howsomever, what you can't help, make the best of. I'll bide here till morning, and then we'll see. Martin, my lad, you're dead beat; you've got old eyes; turn in, you and your friend, and sleep sound till I wake you."

Martin was glad enough to stretch himself on the deck against the bulwark; his recent experiences had worn him out.

"Your Gollop's a Trojan," said Hopton as he threw himself beside him. "I say, I'll go with you to Tyburn to see Slocum hanged."

"I suppose he *will* be hanged?" said Martin sleepily.

"Certain sure. It will be a great show. I expect he'll make a fine speech on the gallows."

But Martin was already asleep.

When he awoke in the early morning he found that Gollop, in consultation with the watermen, had planned out his course of action. The vessel would be left in charge of the Customs officers, who would put a crew on board, and lodge the criminals, Slocum, Blackbeard, and Seymour, in jail; then the boarding party would return to the City, Gollop would report to his captain, and a posse of constables would no doubt be dispatched to convey the criminals to London for trial.

About half-past five Boulter's wherry set off on its return journey to London. The party were well satisfied with the result of their expedition, but the pleasure of some of them was alloyed with anxiety. During the night the wind had fallen away; the air was still; and Gollop, equally with the Frenchman, was filled with foreboding as to the progress the Fire might have made during the twelve hours of his absence. Already, before his departure, the flames had worked back against the wind in the direction of the Tower, and now that there was not even the wind to check them, he was on tenterhooks lest they might have gained his house.

Mounseer, so calm and self-possessed during the scene in the round-house of the *Merry Maid*, was now a prey to nervous agitation, which increased minute by minute as the wherry neared its destination. He said nothing, but the twitching of his eyelids and the restless movements of his hands were clear signs of his perturbation of spirit. Martin wondered, for, like Susan Gollop, he had seen nothing of value in the old gentleman's apartment, and such possessions as he had could be removed in a few minutes if the house were attacked by the Fire.

The watermen pulled in to the steps where Martin had first become suspicious of Slocum. There the party separated: Gollop to seek his captain, Hopton to return home, the watermen to resume their vocation; Martin and the Frenchman to regain their dwelling-house.

"If so be the house has caught, lad," said Gollop at parting, "I trust to you to look after my Sue and the little one. I'll come home the very first minute I can."

Martin's misgivings increased as he hurried with Mounseer through the streets.

"I'm sure that's Clothworkers Hall in Mincing Lane," he said, noticing a huge body of yellow flame rising high into the air some distance to the left.

He stopped a man who was hurrying past, and asked him how far the Fire had got.



“How far? Where have you been, then?” was the reply. “Paul’s Church is in ashes; so’s Fleet Street and——”

“I mean on this side.”

“Why, the Custom House by the river has gone, so’s a part of Tower Street, and Mincing Lane, and the parsonage of Barking Church——”

“Juste ciel!” cried the Frenchman. “Our house is near of that. Haste! haste!”

His mental distress, following on the fatigues of the night, rendered the old gentleman’s steps unsteady, and he clung to Martin’s arm for support. They hurried on, their alarm growing from moment to moment. Every now and then they heard a terrific explosion, and saw immense columns of smoke, dust, and fragments of wood spring into the air.

“What’s that?” asked Martin of a passer-by.

“Blowing up houses in Seething Lane,” the man replied.

“Mon Dieu! How close!” muttered the Frenchman. “For me it is ruin, ruin!”

At last they turned the corner from which their house could be seen. One glance was enough. Flames were bursting from the roof. It appeared that the house had caught fire at the top from floating sparks. People were running hither and thither in the street, carrying away their goods from the neighbouring houses. In the roadway before the house was a little group of three—Susan Gollop, Lucy, and the Indian boy, standing guard over the household gear piled in the roadway.

Susan’s set face relaxed as she saw Martin running towards her.

“Where’s Gollop? Where’s my man?” she cried.

“He’s quite safe; he’ll be here soon,” Martin replied. “Have you got everything out?”

“Everything but the copper. We couldn’t lift that. Come back, Mounseer; we’ve got your things too.”

The Frenchman had withdrawn his arm from Martin’s and was hurrying into the open doorway of the house. He paid no attention to Susan’s cry, but disappeared.

“Well I declare!” cried Susan. “Did you ever know such a foolish old gentleman! Because he’s French, I suppose. Me and the blackamoor brought out all his bits of things with our own hands: here they are. But I suppose he

wants to make sure we've got 'em all."

"I'll go and bring him back," said Martin.

"No, no; bide here. He'll see the room's empty and come back himself in a twink. There's no call for you to go into the smother."

Martin allowed himself to be restrained. A knot of spectators had gathered, and stared up at the burning house. The flames were spreading from the roof downwards. Smoke was pouring out of the windows. Susan watched grimly; Lucy, her eyes wide with awe, clung convulsively to Gundra, who seemed the least concerned of all.

Minute after minute passed. There was no sign of the Frenchman. The window of his room was closed, but smoke was trickling out at the edges of the casement.

"Oh! where is my dear Mounseer?" cried Lucy, tearfully.

"Drat the man!" said Susan. "What in the world he's doing I don't know. He must have a bee in his bonnet. Here now—Martin—come back! Come back, I say!"

But Martin, unable to bear the suspense any longer, had broken away and dashed into the burning house to find his old friend.

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SIXTH

### MARTIN'S ORDEAL

Martin was only partly conscious of what he passed through during the next minute, and not at all aware of the risks he ran.

The old timber house had ignited from the top; the roof had burnt through, and blazing fragments, falling on to the landings below, had set fire to the walls and the floors. Already the flames were eating away the stairs, and Martin, groping his way up through the smoke and by the aid of the banisters, was awakened to realities by a sudden sharp stinging pain as his hand touched a place that was on fire.

"Mounseer! Mounseer!" he called as he bounded up.

There was no answer.

He reached the landing at the top of the first flight. Through the Frenchman's open doorway, a little way to the right, thick grey smoke was pouring. Moment by moment red-hot splinters crashed down upon the landing, and from above came the roar and crackle of the devouring flames.

"Mounseer!" Martin shouted; then caught his breath and coughed as the acrid smoke filled his throat.

His smarting eyes streamed with water. Half blinded, he pressed his lips firmly together and dashed across the landing into the open doorway. The room was thick with smoke: for a moment Martin was compelled to close his eyes; when he opened them again he saw flames bursting through the ceiling. Part of a blazing rafter fell at his feet, and he staggered back as innumerable sparks flew up in his face.

"Mounseer! Mounseer!" he spluttered.

There was no sound but the ever-growing roar of the flames.

Guessing from the denseness of the smoke that the windows were closed, unable to see anything clearly, Martin in desperation caught up a small stool which he had touched with his feet and hurled it in the direction of the window overlooking the waste ground at the back. There was a crash of breaking glass; the smoke began to pour out through the shattered pane, and taking advantage of the immediate lightening of the air Martin started to grope round the room in search of the Frenchman.

He stumbled against the table, knocked his shins against the edge of the bed, felt across it with his hands: there was no sign of Mounseer. Finding that he could breathe more freely near the floor he dropped on his hands and knees and began to crawl, wincing every now and then as he touched a fragment of burning wood.

He made for the cupboard in the corner, thinking that Mounseer might have been overpowered by the smoke as he stood to save some of his few possessions there. But there was no sign of him in the corner. He worked back, and had almost completed the tour of the room when, behind the door, he stumbled upon something hard. It was the sole of a shoe. In another moment he knew that the body of the Frenchman was stretched along the floor close against the wall.

Raising himself, he seized Mounseer's feet and tried to drag him out upon the landing. But suddenly his strength failed: overcome by the smoke he fell gasping across the prostrate body, and lay for a few moments in a state of collapse.

Collecting himself with a great effort, he struggled to his feet and managed to pull the inert form as far as the doorway before once more faintness overtook him, and again he fell.

He tried to shout for help, but only a feeble croak issued from his parched lips. A terrible fear assailed him: if a few minutes' immersion in the smoke could rob him of his strength, how must it be with the Frenchman, who had been so much longer exposed? Was he too late? Was the old gentleman past help?

The thought nerved him to one more effort. He rose, and pulled with all his might at the Frenchman's legs. Staggering, he got him through the doorway on to the landing. Here there was a little more air, but Martin's head swam; sick and dizzy he reeled, fell, and struck his head against the banisters. At the moment of his losing consciousness there was a noise in his ears, above the roar of the flames—a noise as of people shouting and running.

When he came to himself he was lying in the roadway. His head and chest were wet. His dazed, aching eyes saw Susan Gollop bending over him; in the background were other figures, among which he by and by recognised that of George Hopton.

"Mounseer!" he murmured.

"Mounseer is safe, my lamb," said Susan, her tone unusually soft. "Take a drink: you'll soon be all right again."

He drank greedily from the cup she offered. A well-dressed elderly gentleman came forward.

“He is recovering, mistress?” he said.

“Ay, sir, thank God!” replied Susan. “But I wish Gollop would come. I don’t know what in the world we are to do now. The old house is done for: we’ve got our little bits of furniture here, but nowhere to go.”

“Don’t distress yourself, my good woman,” said the gentleman. “I will make it my charge to look after you all until something can be arranged. I would take you to my own house were it not so far away; that is impossible; but I will at once ride off to a farm I know at Islington, where I make no doubt I can arrange for your housing.”

He crossed the road to where a boy was holding a horse, mounted, and rode away.

“Who is that?” Martin murmured. George Hopton came and stood by him.

“Mr. Greatorex, to be sure,” answered Susan, “and a real kind gentleman. Brave too; ay, a man of bravery if ever there was one, and quick of his mind. He came riding up with this lad perched behind him, and the way he got off that horse—well, ’twas a wonderful spring for a man of his years. ‘Where’s Martin Leake?’ he sings out. ‘In the house,’ says I, ‘a-saving of the old gentleman on the first floor.’ ‘Isn’t there a *man* that could have done that?’ says he, scornful-like, looking round on the crowd. And I must own they was an idle lot, all eyes and no sense. Well, he didn’t wait a moment, but dashed into the house—though I’ll own this lad was in front of him. My heart was in my mouth when I saw ’em vanish into that furnace and heard ’em shouting for you——”

“Mounseer! what of Mounseer?” asked Martin again, as remembrance came to his dazed mind.

“Safe and sound, bless you,” replied Susan; “that is, he will be, when he’s come to proper. He’s over yonder, with a doctor looking after him. It seemed an age before Mr. Greatorex came out again, though I suppose ’twas no more than a minute or two. He had you in his arms, and my heart went pit-a-pat that dreadful when I saw your pale face and your poor burnt hands. And behind him was this lad with Mounseer on his back: a strong lad, and a good lad too. And you hadn’t been out of the house two ticks when the floors fell in with a terrible crash, and sparks flying all across the street. ’Twas a merciful Providence that sent Mr. Greatorex in the very nick of time to save you from being burnt alive.”

“But I don’t understand—Mr. Greatorex—how—why did he want me?”

“I can tell you that,” said Hopton. “I went up to the shop to see if there was anything left of it. My word! the ground did scorch my feet. Of course it’s nothing but a black ruin: all Cheapside is burnt. I was just coming away when Mr. Greatorex rode up. He’d come up from the country; only think: the smoke and bits of black paper and stuff have been carried forty or fifty miles away. He asked me about Slocum, and whether the goods had been saved in time; and then I told him all I knew, and said that the goods were safe on board the ship, and ’twas all owing to you. ‘Take me at once to that Martin Leake,’ says he, and he was in such a hurry that he made me get up on the saddle behind him: first time in my life I’ve ever been on a horse, and don’t I ache with the jolting! Then it happened as Mrs. Gollop said: we found you and the old Frenchman in a heap on the landing, and we weren’t long bringing you out, I can tell you.”

“And such foolishness of Mounseer!” said Susan. “Nearly lost his life, and yours too, and what for? Just for a bit of a box.”

“A brass-bound box?” said Martin.

“No, there’s no brass about it, so far as I could see, though he kept it so tight in his arms that no one could see it proper. He’d quite lost his senses when the lad brought him out, but d’you think he’d let go of that box? Not for ever so. He clung to it as if it was the most vallyble thing in the whole world—just a bit of a box, leather I fancy, but so old and worn that—there, you never can tell what queer things some folks take a fancy to.”

“But what’s in the box?”

“Ah, who’s to say? He’s got it in his arms still, and there it’ll be until he’s rightly come to himself. Are you feeling better now, my dear?”

“Yes, though I’m rather chokey, and my hands smart.”

“To be sure they do, and I’ve no oil to put on ’em. But I’ll get some soon, and if Mr. Greatorex is a man of his word—and I don’t say he isn’t—we’ll soon have you in a comfortable bed in a farm-house, and milk and cream, and—why, it’ll be a holiday in the country, what I’ve wanted for years. You’ll like that, won’t you, Lucy?” she asked, as the child ran up.

“Mounseer’s opened his eyes,” said Lucy. “I’m so glad. He smiled at me. And then he asked for Martin. And then he said some funny words *I* couldn’t understand. And then he told me to come and say ‘Thank you’ a thousand times to Martin. That was just his fun, of course, for I couldn’t say it so many times as that, could I?”

“That’s just his foreign way, my dear,” said Susan. “Once is enough with English people. Run back and tell him that Martin is all right, and we’re all going to a farm in the country. I do wish Gollop would come home.”

## CHAPTER THE THIRTY-SEVENTH

### ALL'S WELL

Not many hours later, in one of the comfortable rooms of a large farmhouse near the village of Islington, Dick Gollop and his wife, Martin and Lucy and Gundra, and Mounseer—whose name was Monsieur Raoul Marie de Caudebec—had just finished the best meal they had had for many a day.

Mr. Greatorrex—proving himself to be a man of his word—had sent them from the City in a hired coach, and arranged that their furniture should follow in a wagon. He himself had promised to come and see them as soon as he had had an interview with one of the sheriffs.

The burns of Martin and the Frenchman had been treated with oil and flour, and it was Susan Gollop's opinion that, except for a scar or two, they would show no permanent marks of their recent terrible experience.

"And I daresay Martin won't show none at all," she said. "He's young, and young skin has time to change itself over and over again. And as to Mounseer—well, he's old, and I don't suppose he'll mind if he do bear a blemish or two."

"That is philosophy, madam," said the Frenchman with a smile.

"Your box is marked worse than you," Susan went on, eyeing with simple curiosity the small leather casket that lay on the table at Mounseer's right hand. "You can't make a new thing of a bit of old leather, specially when it's had a thorough good scorching."

"That is true, madam." Mounseer laid his hand on the casket. "It is old, older than I am; it was to my grandfather."

"Gracious me! Then it must be very ancient, for you ain't a chicken yourself. I don't mean no offence, Mounseer."

"I am sure of that: it is just the English way. Eh well, my friends, you have been so good to me that I owe you to explain. One does not talk of the private affairs until the time comes. This is the time."

And then he proceeded to relate a story that held the rapt attention of his hearers. Escaping from persecution in France, he had brought with him nothing but his rapier and the casket that contained a number of valuable jewels, heirlooms in his family. These were his only means of support. One by one, as



he needed money, he had sold them to Mr. Slocum. His wants being simple, he had made the money go a long way, and he hoped that the contents of the casket would last for the rest of his life.

“There now!” exclaimed Susan. “And you *would* buy lollipops for Lucy! You didn’t ought to, Mounseer, and I wouldn’t have allowed it if I’d known.”

“And so you would have robbed me of a great pleasure,” said the old gentleman.

“I see it now,” said Martin. “You sold your jewels from time to time to Slocum, and he knew how valuable they were, though I don’t suppose he paid you anything like what they were worth. And then he had planned to rob Mr. Greatorrex, and being greedy, wanted the rest of your jewels as well. That explains the attacks on your room.”

Mounseer assented, adding that he had of course never suspected Mr. Slocum of any part in those attacks. Determined to protect his property, he had removed a length of the wainscoting of the wall of his room, and hidden the casket in the cavity behind. When his room was ransacked, this hiding-place remained undiscovered. He had only just removed the casket when he was overcome by the smoke.

“And it is to you, my friend,” he said, turning to Martin, “that I owe that I have still the means to live; and when I die, if any of my jewels are left, they shall be to you: I will so ordain it in my testament.”

“That’s handsome said,” cried Dick Gollop.

“But I hope there will be none left,” said Martin, flushing.

“Meaning that you’ll live as long as Methusalem, Mounseer,” said Susan. “And we all agree: of that I’m very sure.”

“I do not covet so long a life,” said Mounseer, “but it must be as the good God pleases.”

“Ay, and what you can’t help, make the best of,” said Gollop. “That Slocum and his crowd, now—their course is set for the gallows, and I hope as they’ll put a cheerful face on it. Nothing upsets me more than to see a man draw down his chops when he’s on his way to be hanged. He can’t get out of it, so his looks might just as well be sweet as sour.”

Next day, when Mr. Greatorrex paid his promised visit to the farm, he brought some interesting news. The man who called himself Seymour, but whose real name was Smith, had purchased his freedom by volunteering to turn King’s evidence, and had already made a long statement. It appeared that

the man whom Martin had called Blackbeard was a brother of Slocum, and had spent a good many years in piracy on the eastern seas. He had captured Captain Leake's vessel the *Merry Maid*, made some few alterations in her cut—not skilfully enough to deceive the sharp eyes of Dick Gollop—changed her name to the *Santa Maria*, and brought her into dock after a brush with the French. He himself pretended to be a foreigner and had assumed a foreign accent at times.

Meeting his brother after many years' absence, he had suggested that the most valuable articles in Mr. Greator's stock of plate and jewellery should be gradually transferred to his vessel, carried to Portugal and sold. Seymour had been admitted as a partner, and had taken a lodging in the same house as the Frenchman, partly because his room would be convenient as a temporary storing place, and partly that he might assist in the robbery of Mounseer's valuables. The outbreak of the Fire had enabled Slocum to carry off the whole of the stock openly.

Mr. Greator was loud in praise of Martin for the large share he had had in saving the goods. He offered to take him as a regular apprentice, but learning that Martin had a passion for the sea, he agreed to place him on a King's ship, and promised to take charge of Lucy. And being in want of a gardener for his country house, he asked Gollop whether he would like to exchange his constable's staff for a spade.

"Well, sir, I take it kind of you," said Dick. "I don't mind if I do. I knows nothing about gardening, but then I knowed nothing about the law till I took up with it, and as a man of law I reckon I've a pretty good name in London town. I'll do my best, and if I ain't very good at it just at first, well, what *I* can't help, *you'll* make the best of, I'll be bound."

It only remained to dispose of Gundra. Susan Gollop undertook to give him a home until Martin should sail on his first voyage to the East. Some two years later Martin had the pleasure of restoring the boy to his own family in Surat.

Slocum and his confederates were not destined to be hanged after all. It was discovered one day that they had broken prison, and they were never captured. Years afterwards, when Martin was a captain in the King's Navy, he was accosted one day in Portsmouth by a wretched-looking beggar, who suddenly stopped in the midst of his whining plea for help and slunk off rapidly round the first corner.

"I could swear that was Slocum," Martin said to himself. "I suppose he recognised me and was afraid I should give him up to justice. How it all comes back to me—that night of the Fire!"

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected or standardised.

Inconsistency in accents has been corrected or standardised.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

[The end of *Martin of Old London* by Herbert Strang]