

## THE ROSE OF PARADISE.

## CHAPTER XIV.—Continued.

"And do you trouble yourself about that?" says I. "Sure he can be no friend of yours, for did I not myself see him knock out a parcel of your teeth with an iron belaying-pin?"

"Yes, you did," says he, "but I bear him no grudge for that."

"Why," said I, "then neither do I bear him a grudge, and I give you my word of honor that I mean no harm to him."

The fellow looked at me earnestly for a while. "You want to know where Ned England is, don't you sir?" said he.

I nodded my head.

"And I want to be preserved from hanging don't I?"

I nodded my head again.

"Then look 'ee, sir," says he, "we'll strike a bit of a bargain; if you'll promise to say nothing to harm me and my shipmates, I'll tell you where to find Ned England."

I considered the matter for a while. The fellow had told me a straightforward story, nor did I doubt that he intended to break away from his evil courses. I may truly say that I verily believe I would not have betrayed the three poor wretches under any circumstances. "Very well," said I, "I promise to keep my part of the bargain."

"Upon your honor?" said he.

"Upon your honor," said I.

"Then, sir," said he, "you will find him at Port Louis, in the Mauritius," and he turned upon his heel and walked away.

## CHAPTER XV.

I was filled with the greatest exultation by the knowledge which I had gained through the deserter from the pirates, for not only had I discovered the whereabouts of the one man in all of the world whom I felt well convinced had knowledge of the Rose of Paradise, but that man no longer had a crew of wicked and bloody wretches back of him, but stood, like me, upon his own footing. Therefore I determined that I would by some means or other either regain the treasure or perish in the attempt, for I would rather die than live a life of dishonor such as now seemed to lie before me. However, I plainly perceived that if I would recover the treasure I would have to escape from the ship by some means or other whilst we were upon our passage and near the island of Mauritius, for if I lost time by going home and standing my examination, many things might occur which would lose the chance to me forever; England might quit the Mauritius, or gather together another crew of pirates upon his own account, for with such a treasure as the Rose of Paradise he had it clearly in his power to do that and much more.

At that time our English vessels were used to lay their course up and down the Mozambique Channel, and not along the eastern coast of Madagascar; for the Mauritius and other islands which lie to the north-east of that land belongs to the French or Dutch, as those in the Channel belong to us. Therefore it was necessary to my purpose that I should persuade Captain Croker to alter his course, so as to run down outside the island instead of through the Channel, for it was plain to see that even if I should be able to escape from the *Lavinia* to Juanna or to any of the adjacent islands, I would be as far as ever from getting to Mauritius, which lieth many leagues away around the northern end of Madagascar.

So I determined to make a clean breast of it, and confide the whole plan to Captain Croker from beginning to end, only I would say nothing as to how I had gained my knowledge of England's whereabouts, for I would not break the promise which I had given to the deserter, as told above.

As no time was to be lost in following out the plan which I had determined upon, I requested that I might have speech with Captain Croker that very night. I told him everything concerning the affair from beginning to end, adding nothing and omitting nothing. Although so old and so well-ried a friend, he was cast into the utmost depths of wonder and amazement at my audacity in proposing that he should alter the course of his vessel, and at my boldness in daring to tell him my plans for escaping from the restraint under which I had been placed. He questioned me closely concerning many matters; as to what led me to think that England was the present possessor of the jewel; as to how I proposed to proceed after I had escaped to the land; and as to how I had become informed of the pirate's whereabouts, concerning which last particular I would give him no satisfaction.

I knew not what he had in his mind, nor where all these questions tended, and by and-by left the cabin, though in a sad state of uncertainty, not knowing how Captain Croker inclined, nor what might be his feeling in regard to me.

Nor was my uncertainty lessened for several days, in which time I knew not what to think, but waited for some sign from him. One evening, however, the whole matter was resolved in a most simple and unexpected manner.

At that time we were about seventy or eighty leagues north of the island Madagascar. All the passengers being at supper with Captain Croker at the head of the table, conversation began to run upon

those pirates who had much infested these waters of late.

"Why," says Captain Croker, "the presence of the rascals had so affected me that I have determined to alter the course of my vessel, and to run outside of Madagascar instead of through the Mozambique Channel, for it is well to have plenty of sea-room either to fight or to run from these wicked rogues. So now, if the wind holds good, seeing we are such friends with the Frenchmen in these peaceful days, I propose stopping at the Mauritius to take aboard fresh provisions."

Captain Croker did not look at me whilst he was saying all this, but studiously kept his eyes upon the plate before him, and presently rose and left the table.

As for me, I sat with my heart beating within my breast as though it would burst asunder, for I saw that my fate was decided at last, and that one of the greatest happenings in all my life was soon to come upon me.

In two days, as Captain Croker had predicted, we dropped anchor in the harbor off Port Louis at about three o'clock in the afternoon. I ate but little supper that night, my mind being so engrossed upon that which I had undertaken to do.

We lay about half a mile from the shore the water in the bay being very calm and still. I had procured four large calabash gourds, with which I had made shift to rig up a very decent float or life-preserver, for I had need of some such aid in my expedition, not being a very expert swimmer.

In all this time I had said nothing to Captain Croker, nor he to me; but about seven o'clock, it being at that time pretty dark, he came to me where I stood by the rail of the poop-deck.

"Jack," said he, in a low voice, "are you still in the mind for carrying this thing through?"

"Yes, I am," I said.

"To-night?" says he.

"To-night," says I.

"Then God bless you!" said he, and he gave my hand a hearty grip. Then he turned upon his heel and went below, and I knew that my time for acting had arrived.

I had not much fear of sharks, for I had seen enough of those cowardly creatures to know that they rarely or never attack a swimmer or a moving man, but only a body floating upon the water as though dead; moreover, at night they are asleep or in deep water, for they are not often seen upon the surface after darkness has fairly fallen.

After the captain left me I looked around and saw that no one else was nigh upon the deck. I took my calabash gourds and entered the boat that hung from the davits astern. Taking a hint from Captain Leach, I had secured a coil of line by which I might lower myself into the water, for if I had dropped with a splash I would have been discovered. Having removed my shoes and stockings, which I wrapped in a piece of tarpaulin, together with my tinder-box and flint and steel, all of which I secured upon my head and having slipped the cord which bound the calabashes under my arms, I slid down the line into the water astern.

Having committed my life into the keeping of Providence, I struck out boldly for the shore, being aided by a current which set towards it, and directing my course by the lights which glimmered faintly in the distance. So I reached the beach, and built a fire, whereby I dried my clothes. Then, having put on my shoes and stockings, which had been kept pretty dry by the tarpaulin, I walked up the beach in the direction of the scattered row of houses which, the moon having now risen, stood out very plain at about a quarter of a mile distant.

I found the town to consist of a great straggling collection of low one-story buildings, mostly made of woven palm-branches, smeared over with mud which had dried in the sun. At this time it could not have been much less than nine o'clock, and all was dark and silent. I went aimlessly here and there, not knowing whither to direct my steps, until at last I caught sight of a little twinkle of light, which I perceived came through a crack of an ill-hung shutter. I went around to the front of the hut, which seemed larger and better made than others I had seen. Above the door hung an ill-made sign, and the moon shining full upon it, I could plainly see a rude picture of a heart with a crown above it, and underneath, written in great sprawling letters,—

"LE COEUR DU ROY."

—From this I knew that it was an ordinary, at which I was greatly rejoiced, and also what suited me very well to find that it was French, for I had no mind to fall in with English people just then, and I knew enough of French to feel pretty easy with the lingo. So into the place I stepped, as bold as brass, and ordered a glass of grog and something to eat.

There were perhaps half a score of rough ill-looking fellows gathered around a dirty table playing at cards by the light from a flame of a bit of rope's-end stuck in a calabash of grease. They laid down their cards when I came in, and stared at me in a very forbidding fashion. However, I paid no attention to them, but sat down at a table at some little distance, and by-and-by the landlord, a little pot-bellied, red-faced Frenchman, brought me a glass of hot rum and a dish of greasy stew seasoned with garlic. He would have

entered into talk with me, but I soon gave him to understand that I had no appetite for conversation just at this time; so after having made a bargain for lodgings during the night, he withdrew to a bench in the farther corner of the room, where I presently saw him fall asleep.

If I had hoped to escape from meeting my own countrymen, I soon discovered that I was to be sadly disappointed, for before I had been in the place a quarter of an hour I found that at least half the fellows around the table were Englishmen. They were the most villainous, evil-looking set of men that I had beheld in a long time, and I could not but feel uneasy, for I had with me gold and silver money to the value of between ten and eleven guineas, and by their muttering together and looking in my direction now and then I knew that they were talking concerning me.

Presently one of the fellows got up from the table and came over to the place where I sat.

"Look 'ee, messmate," said he, seating himself upon the corner of the table beside me; "be ye English, French, Dutch, Portuguese, or what?"

At first I was of a mind to deny being an Englishman, but on second thoughts I perceived that it would be useless to do so, there being the scum of so many people at that place that I could not hope to escape exposure.

"Why, shipmate," said I, "I'm an Englishman."

"Where do ye hail from?" said he.

"Over yonder," said I pointing in the direction of the *Lavinia*.

"Did ye come aboard of the craft that ran into the harbor to-day?"

I nodded my head.

"Did ye come ashore without leave?"

I nodded my head again.

The others had all laid down their cards and were looking at us by this time, and I knew not what would have been the upshot of the matter had not the door just then been flung open and a great rough fellow come stamping into the place.

"Well," he bawled, in a loud, hoarse voice, "poor Ned is on his way to hell-foot to-night. I just came by his stew-hole over yonder. Pah!—here the fellow spat upon the floor—" he was screeching and howling and yelling as though the devil was basting him already.

"Who's with him now?" says one of the fellows at the table.

"Who's with him?" says the other, in a mightily contemptuous tone. "Why, d'ye think that anybody would be such a fool as to stay with him now, with nothing to be got for it but the black tongue and a cursing?"

"But what I say is this," said an ill-looking one-eyed fellow: "he's not the man to serve his trade for all these years and nothing to show for it. It's all very well to say that Jack Mackra shot the hoops off his luck; but you mark my words, he's got a cable out to windward somewhere, and he ain't goin' to run on the lee shore with an empty hold."

I was so amazed to hear my own name spoken that I knew not at first whether to believe that which mine ears had heard or whether they had heard aright. Then it was as though a sudden light flashed upon me. I needed not the next speech to tell me everything.

"Well," says one of the fellows, "even if so be as Ned England is going to smell brimstone before this time to-morrow, I for one see no reason to lose our game. Come along, Blake," he sang out to the fellow who had been speaking to me, and who rejoined the others upon being bidden.

I was in a great ferment of spirits at all this, for I perceived very clearly that England was mightily sick, and perhaps dying with that dangerous fever known as the "black tongue," from which it is a rare thing for a man to recover with his life.

I observed that the fellow who had lately come into the ordinary did not join in the game along with the rest, but sat looking on. By-and-by I contrived to catch his eye as he glanced in my direction, whereupon I beckoned to him, and he came over to the table where I sat. Only a few words passed between us, and those in a very low tone.

"Is Ned England all alone?" said I.

"Yes," said he.

"Will you show me where he is?" said I.

"He's shot a quick look at me from under his brows. 'How much will you give?'"

"A guinea," said I.

"I'll do it."

"When?"

"To-morrow morning."

That was all that passed, and then he moved away and joined the others at the table.

The next morning I purchased a good large pistol from mine host, for I saw that with such companions as I was like to fall in with I would need some sort of weapon to protect myself. Having loaded it with a brace of slugs, I thrust it in my belt, and then stepped out of the door, where I found my acquaintance of the night before waiting for me.

"Are you ready?" said I.

"Yes," said he, "I am; but I must see the color of your money before I go a single step."

"It is yellow," said I, and held the guinea out in the palm of my hand.

When he saw it his eyes shone like coals and his fingers began to twitch. "Hand

(Continued on Page 5.)

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