as he was afraid that the purser's steward was severely hurt, and expressed his fears.

"At all events you did not hit him," replied Gascoigne; "all you have to answer for is the boatswain's mug—I think you've stopped his jaw for the future."

"I'm afraid that our leave will be stopped for the future," replied Jack.

"That we may take our oaths of," replied Gascoigne.

"Then look you, Ned," said Easy; "I've lots of dollars—we may as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb, as the saying is. I vote that we do not go on board."

"Sawbridge will send and fetch us," replied Ned; "but he must find us first."

"That won't take long, for the soldiers will soon have our description and rout us out. We shall be pinned in a couple of days."

"Confound it; and they say that the ship is to be hove down, and that we shall be here six weeks at least, cooped up on board in a broiling sun, and nothing to do but to watch the pilot fish playing round the rudder and munch bad apricots. I won't go on board. Look ye, Jack," said Gascoigne, "have you plenty of money?"

"I have twenty doubloons, besides dollars," replied Jack.

"Well, then, we will pretend to be so much alarmed at the result of this duel that we dare not show ourselves lest we should be hung. I will write a note and send it to Jolliffe, to say that we have hid ourselves until the affair is blown over, and beg him to intercede with the captain and first lieutenant. I will tell him all the particulars, and refer to the gunner for the truth of it; and then I know that, although we should be punished, they will only laugh. But I will pretend that Easthupp is killed, and we are frightened out of our lives. That will be it; and then let's get on board one of the speronares which come with fruit from Sicily, sail in the night for Palermo, and then we'll have a cruise for a fortnight, and when the money is all gone we'll come back."

"That's a capital idea, Ned, and the sooner we do it the better. I will write to the captain, begging him to get me off from being hung, and telling him where we have fled to, and that letter shall be given after we have sailed."

They were two very nice lads—our hero and Gascoigne.

CHAPTER XVIII

In which our hero sets off on another cruise, in which he is not blown off shore.

GASCOIGNE and our hero were neither of them in uniform, and they hastened to Nix Mangare stairs, where they soon picked up the padrone of a speronare. They went with him into a wine shop, and with the assistance of a little English from a Maltese boy, whose shirt hung out of his trousers, they made a bargain, by which it was agreed that, for the consideration of two doubloons, he would sail that evening and land them at Gergenti, or some other town in Sicily, providing them with something to eat and gregos to sleep upon.

Our two midshipmen then went back to the tavern from which they had set off to fight the duel, and ordering a good dinner to be served in a back room, they amused themselves with killing flies as they talked over the events of the day and waited for their dinner.

As Mr. Tallboys did not himself think proper to go on board till the evening, and Mr. Biggs also wished it to be dark before he went up the ship's side, the events of the duel did not transpire till the next morning. Even then it was not known from the boatswain or gunner, but by an hospital mate coming on board to inform the surgeon that there was one of their men wounded under their charge, but that he was doing very well.

Mr. Biggs had ascended the side with his face bound up.

"Confound that Jack Easy," said he, "I have only been on leave twice since I sailed from Portsmouth. Once I was obliged to come up the side without my trousers, and show my bare stern to the whole ship's company, and now I am coming up and dare not show my figure-head." He reported himself to the officer of the watch, and hastening to his cabin, went to bed and lay the whole night awake from pain, thinking what excuse he could possibly make for not coming on deck next morning to his duty.

He was, however, saved this trouble, for Mr. Jolliffe brought the letter of Gascoigne up to Mr. Sawbridge, and the captain had received that of our hero.

Captain Wilson came on board and found that Mr. Sawbridge could communicate all the particulars of which he had not been acquainted by Jack; and after they had read over Gascoigne's letter in the cabin, and interrogated Mr. Tallboys, who was sent down under an arrest, they gave free vent to their mirth.

"Upon my soul, there's no end to Mr. Easy's adventures," said the captain. "I could laugh at the duel, for after all it is nothing—and he would have been let off with a severe reprimand. But the foolish boys have set off in a speronare to Sicily, and how the devil are we to get them back again?"

"They'll come back, sir," replied Sawbridge, "when all their money's gone."

"Yes, if they do not get into any more scrapes. That young scamp Gascoigne is as bad as Easy, and now they are together there's no saying what may happen. I dine at the governor's to-day; how he will laugh when I tell him of this new way of fighting a duel!"

"Yes, sir, it is just the thing that will tickle old Tom."

"We must find out if they have got off the island, Sawbridge, which may not be the case."

But it was the case. Jack and Gascoigne had eaten a very good dinner, sent for the monkey to amuse them till it was dark, and there had waited till the padrone came to them.

"What shall we do with the pistols, Easy?"

"Take them with us, and load them before we go—we may want them. Who knows but there may be a mutiny on board of the speronare? I wish we had Mesty with us."

They loaded the pistols, took a pair each, and put them in their waists, concealed under their clothes, divided the ammunition between them, and soon afterwards the padrone came to tell them all was ready.

Whereupon Messrs. Gascoigne and Easy paid their bill and rose to depart, but the padrone informed them that he should like to see the colour of their money before they went on board. Jack, very indignant at the insinuation that he had not sufficient cash, pulled out a handful of doubloons, and tossing two to the padrone, asked him if he was satisfied.

The padrone untied his sash, put in the money, and, with many thanks and protestations of service, begged our young gentlemen to accompany him; they did so, and in a few minutes

were clear of Nix Mangare stairs, and passing close to his Majesty's ship *Harpy*, were soon out of the harbour of Valletta.

Of all the varieties of vessels which float upon the wave, there is not, perhaps, one that bounds over the water so gracefully or so lightly as a speronare, or any one so picturesque and beautiful to the eye of those who watch its progress.

The night was clear, and the stars shone out brilliantly as the light craft skimmed over the water, and a fragment of a descending and waning moon threw its soft beams upon the snow-white sail. The vessel, which had no deck, was full of baskets, which had contained grapes and various fruits brought from the ancient granary of Rome, still as fertile and as luxuriant as ever. The crew consisted of the padrone, two men and a boy; the three latter, with their gregos, or night greatcoats with hoods, sitting forward before the sail, with their eyes fixed on the land as they flew past point after point, thinking perhaps of their wives, or perhaps of their sweethearts, or perhaps not thinking at all.

The padrone remained aft at the helm, offering every politeness to our two young gentlemen, who only wished to be left alone. At last they requested the padrone to give them gregos to lie down upon, as they wished to go to sleep. He called the boy to take the helm, procured them all they required, and then went forward; and our two midshipmen laid down, looking at the stars above them for some minutes, without exchanging a word. At last Jack commenced—

"I have been thinking, Gascoigne, that this is very delightful. My heart bounds with the vessel, and it almost appears to me as if the vessel herself was rejoicing in her liberty. Here she is capering over the waves instead of being tied by the nose with a cable and anchor."

"That's a touch of the sentimental, Jack," replied Gascoigne; "but she is no more free than she was when at anchor, for she now is forced to act in obedience to her steersman, and go just where he pleases. You may just as well say that a horse if taken out of the stable is free, with the curb, and his rider on his back."

"That's a touch of the rational, Ned, which destroys the illusion. Never mind, we are free, at all events. What machines we are on board of a man-of-war! We walk, talk, eat, drink, sleep, and get up, just like clock-work; we are

the padrone and one of the men, who was with him in advance, who both fell, with the send aft of the boat, so as to encumber the midshipmen with the weight of their bodies. The third man started back. Jack, who could not rise, from the padrone lying across his legs, took a steady aim with his second pistol, and the third man fell. The boy at the helm, who, it appeared, either was aware of what was to be done, or seeing the men advance with their knives had acted upon what he saw, also drew his knife and struck at Gascoigne from behind. The knife fortunately, after slightly wounding Gascoigne on the shoulder, had shut on the boy's hand; Gascoigne sprang up with his other pistol—the boy started back at the sight of it, lost his balance and fell overboard.

Our two midshipmen took a few seconds to breathe.

"I say, Jack," said Gascoigne at last, "did you ever——"

"No, I never—" replied Jack.

"What's to be done now?"

"Why, as we've got possession, Ned, we had better put a man at the helm—for the speronare is having it all her own way."

"Very true," replied Gascoigne, "and as I can steer better than you, I suppose it must be me."

Gascoigne went to the helm, brought the boat up to the wind, and then they resumed their conversation.

"That rascal of a boy gave me a devil of a lick on the shoulder; I don't know whether he has hurt me—at all events it's my left shoulder, so I can steer just as well. I wonder whether the fellows are dead."

"The padrone is, at all events," replied Jack. "It was as much as I could do to get my legs from under him—but we'll wait till daylight before we see to that; in the meantime I'll load the pistols again."

"The day is breaking now—it will be light in half-an-hour or less. What a devil of a spree, Jack."

"Yes, but how can one help it? We ran away because two men are wounded, and now we are obliged to kill four in self-defence."

"Yes; but that is not the end of it—when we get to Sicily what are we to do? we shall be imprisoned by the authorities—perhaps hung."

"We'll argue that point with them," replied Jack.

"We had better argue the point between ourselves, Jack, and see what will be the best plan to get out of our scrape."

"I think that we just have got out of it—never fear but we'll get out of the next. Do you know, Gascoigne, it appears to me very odd, but I can do nothing but there's a bobbery at the bottom of it."

"You certainly have a great talent that way, Jack. Don't I hear one of those poor fellows groan?"

"I should think that not impossible."

"What shall we do with them?"

"We will argue that point, Ned—we must either keep their bodies, or we must throw them overboard. Either tell the whole story, or say nothing about it."

"That's very evident; in short, we must do something, for your argument goes no further. But now let us take up one of your propositions."

"Well, then, suppose we keep the bodies on board, run into a seaport, go to the authorities, and state all the facts, what then?"

"We shall prove beyond all doubt that we have killed three men, if not four; but we shall not prove that we were obliged so to do, Jack. And then we are heretics—we shall be put in prison till they are satisfied of our innocence, which we never can prove, and there we shall remain until we have written to Malta, and a man-of-war comes to redeem us, if we are not stabbed or something else in the meantime."

"That will not be a very pleasant cruise," replied Jack. "Now let's argue the point on the other side."

"There is some difficulty there. Suppose we throw their bodies overboard, toss the baskets after them, wash the boat clean, and make for the first port. We may chance to hit upon the very spot from which they sailed, and then there will be a pack of wives and children, and a populace with knives, asking us what has become of the men of the boat!"

"I don't much like the idea of that," said Jack.

"And if we don't have such bad luck, still we shall be interrogated as to who we are, and how we were adrift by ourselves."

"There will be a difficulty about that again—we must swear that it is a party of pleasure, and that we are gentlemen yachting."

"Without a crew or provisions—yachts don't sail with a

clean-swept hold, or gentlemen without a spare shirt—we have nothing but two gallons of water and two pairs of pistols."

"I have it," said Jack—"we are two young gentlemen in our own boat who went out to Gozo with pistols to shoot sea-mews, were caught in a gale, and blown down to Sicily—that will excite interest."

"That's the best idea yet, as it will account for our having nothing in the boat. Well, then, at all events we will get rid of the bodies; but suppose they are not dead—we cannot throw them overboard alive—that will be murder."

"Very true," replied Jack; "then we must shoot them first, and toss them overboard afterwards."

"Upon my soul, Easy, you are an odd fellow; however, go and examine the men, and we'll decide that point by-and-by; you had better keep your pistol ready cocked, for they may be shamming."

"Devil a bit of sham here, anyhow," replied Jack, pulling at the body of the padrone; "and as for this fellow you shot, you might put your fist into his chest. Now for the third," continued Jack, stepping over the strengthening piece—"he's all among the baskets. I say, my cock, are you dead?" and Jack enforced his question with a kick in the ribs. The man groaned. "That's unlucky, Gascoigne; but, however, I'll soon settle him," said Jack, pointing his pistol.

"Stop, Jack," cried Gascoigne, "it really will be murder."

"No such thing, Ned; I'll just blow his brains out, and then I'll come aft and argue the point with you."

"Now do oblige me by coming aft and arguing the point first. Do, Jack, I beg of you—I entreat you."

"With all my heart," replied Jack, resuming his seat by Gascoigne; "I assert that in this instance killing's no murder. You will observe, Ned, that by the laws of society any one who attempts the life of another has forfeited his own; at the same time, as it is necessary that the fact should be clearly proved, and justice be duly administered, the parties are tried, convicted, and then are sentenced to the punishment."

"I grant all that."

"In this instance the attempt has been clearly proved; we are the witnesses, and are the judges and jury, and society in general, for the best of all possible reasons, because there is nobody else. These men's lives being therefore forfeited to

society, belong to us; and it does not follow because they were not all killed in the attempt, that therefore they are not now to be brought out for punishment. And as there is no common hangman here, we, of course, must do this duty as well as every other. I have now clearly proved that I am justified in what I am about to do. But the argument does not stop there—self-preservation is the first law of nature, and if we do not get rid of this man, what is the consequence?—that we shall have to account for his being wounded, and then, instead of judges, we shall immediately be placed in the position of culprits, and have to defend ourselves without witnesses. We therefore risk our lives from a misplaced lenity towards a wretch unworthy to live."

"Your last argument is strong, Easy, but I cannot consent to your doing what may occasion you uneasiness hereafter when you think of it."

"Pooh! nonsense—I am a philosopher."

"Of what school, Jack? Oh, I presume you are a disciple of Mesty's. I do not mean to say that you are wrong, but still, hear my proposition. Let us lower down the sail, and then I can leave the helm to assist you. We will clear the vessel of everything except the man who is still alive. At all events, we may wait a little, and if at last there is no help for it, I will then agree with you to launch him overboard, even if he is not quite dead."

"Agreed; even by your own making out, it will be no great sin. He is half dead already—I only do half the work of tossing him over, so it will be only quarter murder on my part, and he would have shown no quarter on his." Here Jack left off arguing and punning, and went forward and lowered down the sail. "I've half a mind to take my doubloons back," said Jack, as they launched over the body of the padrone, "but he may have them—I wonder whether they'll ever turn up again."

"Not in our time, Jack," replied Gascoigne.

The other body, and all the basket lumber, &c., were then tossed over, and the boat was cleared of all but the man who was not yet dead.

"Now let's examine the fellow, and see if he has any chance of recovery," said Gascoigne.

The man lay on his side; Gascoigne turned him over and found that he was dead.

"Over with him, quick," said Jack, "before he comes to life again."

The body disappeared under the wave—they again hoisted the sail. Gascoigne took the helm, and our hero proceeded to draw water and wash away the stains of blood; he then cleared the boat of vine-leaves and rubbish, with which it was strewed, swept it clean fore and aft, and resumed his seat by his comrade.

"There," said Jack, "now we've swept the decks, we may pipe to dinner. I wonder whether there is anything to eat in the locker."

Jack opened it, and found some bread, garlic, sausages, a bottle of aquadente, and a jar of wine.

"So the padrone did keep his promise, after all."

"Yes; and had you not tempted him with the sight of so much gold, might now have been alive."

"To which I reply, that if you had not advised our going off in a speronare, he would now have been alive."

"And if you had not fought a duel, I should not have given the advice."

"And if the boatswain had not been obliged to come on board without his trousers at Gibraltar, I should not have fought a duel."

"And if you had not joined the ship, the boatswain would have had his trousers on."

"And if my father had not been a philosopher, I should not have gone to sea; so that it is all my father's fault, and he has killed four men off the coast of Sicily without knowing it—cause and effect. After all, there's nothing like argument; so, having settled that point, let us go to dinner."

Having finished their meal, Jack went forward and observed the land ahead; they steered the same course for three or four hours.

"We must haul our wind more," said Gascoigne; "it will not do to put into any small town. We have now to choose whether we shall land on the coast and sink the speronare, or land at some large town."

"We must argue that point," replied Jack.

"In the meantime, do you take the helm, for my arm is quite tired," replied Gascoigne; "you can steer well enough. By-the-bye, I may as well look at my shoulder, for it is quite

stiff." Gascoigne pulled off his coat, and found his shirt bloody and sticking to the wound, which, as we before observed, was slight. He again took the helm, while Jack washed it clean, and then bathed it with aquadente.

"Now take the helm again," said Gascoigne; "I'm on the sick list."

"And as surgeon—I'm an idler," replied Jack. "But what shall we do?" continued he; "abandon the speronare at night and sink her, or run in for a town?"

"We shall fall in with plenty of boats and vessels if we coast it up to Palermo, and they may overhaul us."

"We shall fall in with plenty of people if we go on shore, and they will overhaul us."

"Do you know, Jack, that I wish we were back and alongside of the *Harpy;* I've had cruising enough."

"My cruises are so unfortunate," replied Jack; "they are too full of adventure—but then I have never yet had a cruise on shore. Now, if we could only get to Palermo, we should be out of all our difficulties."

"The breeze freshens, Jack," replied Gascoigne; "and it begins to look very dirty to windward. I think we shall have a gale."

"Pleasant—I know what it is to be short-handed in a gale; however, there's one comfort, we shall not be blown off shore this time."

"No, but we may be wrecked on a lee shore. She cannot carry her whole sail, Easy; we must lower it down, and take in a reef—the sooner the better, for it will be dark in an hour. Go forward and lower it down, and then I'll help you."

Jack did so, but the sail went into the water, and he could not drag it in.

"Avast heaving," said Gascoigne, "till I throw her up and take the wind out of it."

This was done. They reefed the sail, but could not hoist it up; if Gascoigne left the helm to help Jack, the sail filled; if he went to the helm and took the wind out of the sail, Jack was not strong enough to hoist it. The wind increased rapidly, and the sea got up; the sun went down, and, with the sail half hoisted, they could not keep to the wind, but were obliged to run right for the land. The speronare flew, rising on the crest of the waves with half her keel clear of the water; the

moon was already up, and gave them light enough to perceive that they were not five miles from the coast, which was lined with foam.

"At all events they can't accuse us of running away with the boat," observed Jack, "for she's running away with us."

"Yes," replied Gascoigne, dragging at the tiller with all his strength; "she has taken the bit between her teeth."

"I wouldn't care if I had a bit between mine," replied Jack, "for I feel devilish hungry again. What do you say, Ned?"

"With all my heart," replied Gascoigne; "but, do you know, Easy, it may be the last meal we ever make."

"Then I vote it's a good one—but why so, Ned?"

"In half-an-hour or thereabouts, we shall be on shore."

"Well, that's where we want to go."

"Yes; but the sea runs high, and the boat may be dashed to pieces on the rocks."

"Then we shall be asked no questions about her or the men."

"Very true; but a lee shore is no joke—we may be knocked to pieces as well as the boat—even swimming may not help us. If we could find a cove or sandy beach, we might perhaps manage to get on shore."

"Well," replied Jack, "I have not been long at sea, and, of course, cannot know much about these things. I have been blown off shore, but I never have been blown on. It may be as you say, but I do not see the great danger—let's run her right up on the beach at once."

"That's what I shall try to do," replied Gascoigne, who had been four years at sea, and knew very well what he was about.

Jack handed him a huge piece of bread and sausage.

"Thank ye, I cannot eat."

"I can," replied Jack, with his mouth full.

Jack ate while Gascoigne steered; and the rapidity with which the speronare rushed to the beach was almost frightful. She darted like an arrow from wave to wave, and appeared as if mocking their attempts as they curled their summits almost over her narrow stern. They were within a mile of the beach, when Jack, who had finished his supper, and was looking at the foam boiling on the coast, exclaimed—

"That's very fine—very beautiful, upon my soul!"

"He cares for nothing," thought Gascoigne; "he appears to have no idea of danger."

"Now, my dear fellow," said Gascoigne, "in a few minutes we shall be on the rocks. I must continue at the helm, for the higher she is forced up the better chance for us; but we may not meet again, so if we do not, good-bye, and God bless you."

"Gascoigne," said Jack, "you are hurt, and I am not; your shoulder is stiff, and you can hardly move your left arm. Now, I can steer for the rocks as well as you. Do you go to the bow, and there you will have a better chance. By-the-bye," continued he, picking up his pistols, and sticking them into his waist, "I won't leave them, they've served us too good a turn already. Gascoigne, give me the helm."

"No, no, Easy."

"I say yes," replied Jack, in a loud, authoritative tone, "and what's more, I will be obeyed, Gascoigne. I have nerve, if I haven't knowledge, and at all events I can steer for the beach. I tell you, give me the helm. Well, then, if you won't, I must take it."

Easy wrested the tiller from Gascoigne's hand, and gave him a shove forward.

"Now do you look out ahead, and tell me how to steer."

Whatever may have been Gascoigne's feelings at this behaviour of our hero's, it immediately occurred to him that he could not do better than to run the speronare to the safest point, and that therefore he was probably more advantageously employed than if he were at the helm. He went forward and looked at the rocks, covered at one moment with the tumultuous waters, and then pouring down cascades from their sides as the waves recoiled. He perceived a chasm right ahead, and he thought if the boat was steered for that, she must be thrown up so as to enable them to get clear of her, for at every other part escape appeared impossible.

"Starboard a little—that'll do. Steady—port it is—port. Steer small, for your life, Easy. Steady now—mind the yard—don't hit your head—hold on."

The speronare was at this moment thrown into a large cleft in a rock, the sides of which were nearly perpendicular; nothing else could have saved them, as, had they struck the rock outside, the boat would have been dashed to pieces, and its fragments have disappeared in the undertow. As it was, the cleft

was not four feet more than the width of the boat, and as the waves hurled her up into it the yard of the speronare was thrown fore and aft with great violence, and had not Jack been warned, he would have been struck overboard without a chance of being saved; but he crouched down and it passed over him. As the water receded the boat struck, and was nearly dry between the rocks; but another wave followed, dashing the boat further up, but at the same time filling it with water. The bow of the boat was now several feet higher than the stern, where Jack held on; and the weight of the water in her, with the force of the returning waves, separated her right across abaft the mast. Jack perceived that the after part of the boat was going out again with the wave; he caught hold of the yard which had swung fore and aft, and as he clung to it the part of the boat on which he had stood disappeared from under him, and was swept away by the returning current.

Jack required the utmost of his strength to maintain his position until another wave floated him, and dashed him higher up; but he knew his life depended on holding on to the yard, which he did, although under water, and advanced several feet. When the wave receded he found footing on the rock, and, still clinging, he walked till he had gained the fore part of the boat, which was wedged firmly into a narrow part of the cleft. The next wave was not very large, and he had gained so much that it did not throw him off his legs. He reached the rock, and as he climbed up the side of the chasm to gain the ledge above, he perceived Gascoigne standing above him, and holding out his hand to his assistance.

"Well," says Jack, shaking himself to get rid of the water, "here we are ashore, at last—I had no idea of anything like this. The rush back of the water was so strong that it has almost torn my arms out of their sockets. How very lucky I sent you forward with your disabled shoulder! By-the-bye, now that it's all over, and you must see that I was right, I beg to apologise for my rudeness."

"There needs no apology for saving my life, Easy," replied Gascoigne, trembling with the cold; "and no one but you would ever have thought of making one at such a moment."

"I wonder whether the ammunition's dry," said Jack; "I put it all in my hat."

Jack took off his hat, and found the cartridges had not suffered.

"Now, then, Gascoigne, what shall we do?"

"I hardly know," replied Gascoigne.

"Suppose, then, we sit down and argue the point."

"No, I thank you, there will be too much cold water thrown upon our arguments—I'm half dead; let us walk on."

"With all my heart," said Jack, "it's devilish steep, but I can argue up hill or down hill, wet or dry—I'm used to it—for, as I told you before, Ned, my father is a philosopher, and so am I."

"By the Lord! you are," replied Gascoigne, as he walked on.

CHAPTER XIX

In which our hero follows his destiny and forms a tableau.

OUR hero and his comrade climbed the precipice, and after some minutes' severe toil arrived at the summit, when they sat down to recover themselves. The sky was clear, although the gale blew strong. They had an extensive view of the coast, lashed by the angry waves.

"It's my opinion, Ned," said Jack, as he surveyed the expanse of troubled water, "that we're just as well out of that."

"I agree with you, Jack; but it's also my opinion that we should be just as well out of this, for the wind blows through one. Suppose we go a little farther inland, where we may find some shelter till the morning."

"It's rather dark to find anything," rejoined our hero; "but, however, a westerly gale on the top of a mountain with wet clothes in the middle of the night, with nothing to eat or drink, is not the most comfortable position in the world, and we may change for the better."

They proceeded over a flat of a hundred yards, and then descended—the change in the atmosphere was immediate. As they continued their march inland they came to a high road, which appeared to run along the shore, and they turned into it; for, as Jack said very truly, a road must lead to something