

"We have preserved, and not enslaved these Indians, ancient Señor," said Amyas proudly; "and tomorrow will see them as free as the birds over our heads."

"Free? Then you cannot be countrymen of mine! But pardon an old man, my son, if he has spoken too hastily in the bitterness of his own experience. But who and whence are you? And why are you bringing into this lonely wilderness that gold—for I know too well the shape of those accursed packets, which would God that I had never seen!"

"What we are, reverend sir, matters little, as long as we behave to you as the young should to the old. As for our gold, it will be a curse or a blessing to us, I conceive, just as we use it well or ill; and so is a man's head, or his hand, or any other thing; but that is no reason for cutting off his limbs for fear of doing harm with them; neither is it for throwing away those packages, which, by your leave, we shall deposit in one of these caves. We must be your neighbors, I fear, for a day or two; but I can promise you, that your garden shall be respected, on condition that you do not inform any human soul of our being here."

"God forbid, Señor, that I should try to increase the number of my visitors, much less to bring hither strife and blood, of which I have seen too much already. As you have come in peace, in peace depart. Leave me alone with God and my penitence, and may the Lord have mercy on you!"

And he was about to withdraw, when, recollecting himself, he turned suddenly to Amyas again—

"Pardon me, Señor, if, after forty years of utter solitude, I shrink at first from the conversation of human beings, and forget, in the habitual shyness of a recluse, the duties of a hospitable gentleman of Spain. My garden, and all which it produces, is at your service. Only let me entreat that these poor Indians shall have their share; for heathens though they be, Christ died for them; and I cannot but cherish in my soul some secret hope that He did not die in vain."

"God forbid!" said Brimblecombe. "They are no worse than we, for aught I see, whatsoever their fathers may have been; and they have fared no worse than we since they have been with us, nor will, I promise you."

The good fellow did not tell that he had been starving himself for the last three days to cram the children with

his own rations; and that the sailors, and even Amyas, had been going out of their way every five minutes, to get fruit for their new pets.

A camp was soon formed; and that evening the old hermit asked Amyas, Cary and Brimblecombe to come up into his cavern.

They went; and after the accustomed compliments had passed, sat down on mats upon the ground, while the old man stood, leaning against a slab of stone surmounted by a rude wooden cross, which evidently served him as a place of prayer. He seemed restless and anxious, as if he waited for them to begin the conversation; while they, in their turn, waited for him. At last, when courtesy would not allow him to be silent any longer, he began with a faltering voice,—

"You may be equally surprised, Señors, at my presence in such a spot, and at my asking you to become my guests even for one evening, while I have no better hospitality to offer you."

"It is superfluous, Señor, to offer us food in your own habitation when you have already put all that you possess at our command."

"True, Señors: and my motive for inviting you was, perhaps, somewhat of a selfish one. I am possessed by a longing to unburthen my heart of a tale which I never yet told to man; and which I fear can give to you nothing but pain: and yet I will entreat you, of your courtesy, to hear of that which you cannot amend, simply in mercy to a man who feels that he must confess to some one, or die as miserable as he has lived. And I believe my confidence will not be misplaced, when it is bestowed upon you. I have been a cavalier, even as you are; and, strange as it may seem, that which I have to tell I would sooner impart to the ears of a soldier than of a priest, because it will then sink into souls which can at least sympathize, though they cannot absolve. And you, cavaliers, I perceive to be noble, from your very looks; to be valiant, by your mere presence in this hostile land; and to be gentle, courteous and prudent, by your conduct this day to me and to your captives. Will you, then, hear an old man's tale? I am, as you see, full of words; for speech, from long disuse, is difficult to me, and I fear at every sentence lest my stiffened tongue should play the traitor to my worn-out brain: but if my request seems impertinent, you have only



to bid me talk as a host should, of matters which concern his guests, and not himself."

The three young men, equally surprised and interested by this exordium, could only entreat their host to "use their ears as those of his slaves," on which, after fresh apologies, he began—

"Know, then, victorious cavaliers, that I, whom you now see here as a poor hermit, was formerly one of the foremost of that terrible band who went with Pizarro to the conquest of Peru. Eighty years old am I this day, unless the calendar which I have carved upon yonder tree deceives me; and twenty years old was I when I sailed with that fierce man from Panama, to do that deed with which all earth and heaven, and hell itself, I fear, has rung. How we endured, suffered and triumphed; how, mad with success, and glutted with blood, we turned our swords against each other, I need not tell to you. For what gentleman of Europe knows not our glory and our shame?"

His hearers bowed assent.

"Yes; you have heard of our prowess: for glorious we were awhile in the sight of God and man. But I will not speak of our glory, for it is tarnished; nor of our wealth, for it was our poison; nor of the sins of my comrades, for they have expiated them; but of my own sins, Señors, which are more in number than the hairs of my head, and a burden too great to bear. Miserere Domine!"

And smiting on his breast, the old warrior went on—

"As I said, we were mad with blood; and none more mad than I. Surely it is no fable that men are possessed, even in this latter age, by devils. Why else did I rejoice in slaying? Why else was I, the son of a noble and truthful cavalier of Castile, among the foremost to urge upon my general the murder of the Inca? Why did I rejoice over his dying agonies? Why, when Don Ferdinando de Soto returned and upbraided us with our villainy, did I, instead of confessing the sin which that noble cavalier set before us withstand him to his face, ay, and would have drawn the sword on him, but that he refused to fight a liar, as he said that I was?"

"Then Don de Soto was against the murder? So his own grandson told me. But I had heard of him only as a tyrant and a butcher."

"Señor, he was compact of good and evil, as are other

men; he has paid dearly for his sin; let us hope that he has been paid in turn for his righteousness."

John Brimblecombe shook his head at this doctrine, but did not speak.

"So you know his grandson? I trust he is a noble cavalier?"

Amyas was silent; the old gentleman saw that he had touched some sore point, and continued—

"And why, again, Señors, did I after that day give myself up to cruelty as to a sport; yea, thought that I did God service by destroying the creatures whom He had made; I who now dare not destroy a gnat, lest I harm a being more righteous than myself? Was I mad? If I was, how then was I all that while as prudent as I am this day? But I am not here to argue, Señors, but to confess. In a word there was no deed of blood done for the next few years in which I had not my share, if it were but within my reach. When Chalcuchima was burned, I was consenting; when that fair girl, the wife of Inca Manco, was tortured to death, I smiled at the agonies at which she too smiled, and taunted on the soldiers, to try if I could wring one groan from her before she died. You know what followed, the pillage, the violence, the indignities offered to the virgins of the Sun. Señors, I will not pollute your chaste ears with what was done. But, Señors, I had a brother."

And the old man paused awhile.

"A brother—whether better or worse than me, God knows, before whom he has appeared ere now. At least he did not, as I did, end as a rebel to his king! There was a maiden in one of those convents, Señors, more beautiful than day: and (I blush to tell it) the two brothers of whom I spoke quarreled for the possession of her. They struck each other, Señors! Who struck first, I know not; but swords were drawn, and—. The cavaliers round parted them, crying shame. And one of those two brothers—the one who speaks to you now—crying, 'If I cannot have her, no man shall!' turned the sword which was aimed at his brother, against that hapless maiden—and—hear me out, Señors, before you flee from my presence as from that of a monster!—stabbed her to the heart. And as she died—one moment more, Señors, that I may confess all!—she looked up in my face with a smile as of heaven, and



thanked me for having rid her once and for all from Christians and their villainy."

The old man paused.

"God forgive you, Señor!" said Jack Brimblecombe softly.

"You do not, then, turn from me? Do not curse me? Then I will try you farther still, Señors. I will know from human lips, whether man can do such deeds as I have done, and yet be pitied by his kind; that so I may have some hope, that where man has mercy, God may have mercy also. Do you think that I repented at those awful words? Nothing less, Señors all. No more than I did when De Soto (on whose soul God have mercy) called me—me a liar! I knew myself a sinner, and for that very reason I was determined to sin. I would go on that I might prove myself right to myself, by showing that I could go on, and not be struck dead from heaven. Out of mere pride, Señors, and self-will, I would fill up the cup of my iniquity; and I filled it.

"You know, doubtless, Señors, how, after the death of old Almagro, his son's party conspired against Pizarro. Now my brother remained faithful to his old commander; and for that very reason, if you will believe it, did I join the opposite party, and gave myself up body and soul to do Almagro's work. It was enough for me that the brother who had struck me thought a man right, for me to think that man a devil. What Almagro's work was, you know. He slew Pizarro. Murdered him, Señors, like a dog, or rather, like an old lion."

"He deserved his doom," said Amyas.

"Let God judge him, Señor, not we; and least of all of us I, who drew the first blood, and perhaps the last, that day. I, Señors, it was who treacherously stabbed Francisco de Chanes on the staircase, and so opened the door which else had foiled us all; and I—but I am speaking to men of honor, not to butchers. Suffice it that the old man died like a lion, and that we pulled him down, young as we were, like curs.

"Well, I followed Almagro's fortunes. I helped to slay Alvarado. Call that my third murder, if you will, for if he was traitor to a traitor, I was traitor to a true man. Then to the war; you know how Vaca de Castro was sent from Spain to bring order and justice where was nought but chaos, and the dance of all devils. We met him on the

hills of Chupas. Peter of Candia, the Venetian villain, pointed our guns false, and Almagro stabbed him to the heart. We charged with our lances, man against man, horse against horse. All fights I ever fought" (and the old man's eyes flashed out the ancient fire) "were child's play to that day. Our lances shivered like reeds, and we fell on with battle-axe and mace. None asked for quarter, and none gave it; friend to friend, cousin to cousin—no, nor brother, oh God! to brother. We were the better armed: but numbers were on their side. Fat Carbajal charged our cannon like an elephant, and took them; but Holguin was shot down. I was with Almagro, and we swept all before us, inch by inch, but surely, till the night fell. Then Vaca de Castro, the licentiate, the clerk, the schoolman, the man of books, came down on us with his reserve like a whirlwind. Oh! cavaliers, did not God fight against us, when He let us, the men of iron, us, the heroes of Cuzco and Vilcacongá, be foiled by a scholar in a black gown, with a pen behind his ear? We were beaten. Some ran; some did not run, Señors; and I did not. Geronimo de Alvarado shouted to me, 'We slew Pizarro! We killed the tyrant!' and we rushed upon the conqueror's lances, to die like cavaliers. There was a gallant gentleman in front of me. His lance struck me in the crest, and bore me over my horse's croup: but mine, Señors, struck him full in the vizor. We both went to the ground together, and the battle galloped over us.

"I know not how long I lay, for I was stunned: but after awhile I lifted myself. My lance was still clenched in my hand, broken but not parted. The point of it was in my foeman's brain. I crawled to him, weary and wounded, and saw that he was a noble cavalier. He lay on his back, his arms spread wide. I knew that he was dead: but there came over me the strangest longing to see that dead man's face. Perhaps I knew him. At least I could set my foot upon it, and say, 'Vanquished as I am, there lies a foe!' I caught hold of the rivets, and tore his helmet off. The moon shone bright, Señors, as bright as she shines now—the glaring, ghastly, tell-tale moon, which shows man all the sins which he tries to hide; and by that moonlight, Señors, I beheld the dead man's face. And it was the face of my brother!

"Did you ever guess, most noble cavaliers, what Cain's curse might be like? Look on me, and know!



"I tore off my armor and fled, as Cain fled—northward ever, till I should reach a land where the name of Spaniard, yea, and the name of Christian, which the Spaniard has caused to be blasphemed from east to west, should never come. I sank fainting, and waked beneath this rock, this tree, forty-four years ago, and I have never left them since, save once to obtain seeds from Indians, who knew not that I was a Spanish Conquistador. And may God have mercy on my soul!"

The old man ceased; and his young hearers, deeply affected by his tale, sat silent for a few minutes. Then John Brimblecombe spoke—

"You are old, sir, and I am young; and perhaps it is not my place to counsel you. Moreover, sir, in spite of this strange dress of mine, I am neither more nor less than an English priest; and I suppose you will not be willing to listen to a heretic."

"I have seen Catholics, Señor, commit too many abominations even with the name of God upon their lips, to shrink from a heretic if he speak wisely and well. At least, you are a man; and after all, my heart yearns more and more, the longer I sit among you, for the speech of beings of my own race. Say what you will, in God's name."

"I hold, sir," said Jack modestly, "according to holy Scripture, that whosoever repents from his heart, as God knows you seem to have done, is forgiven there and then; and though his sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, for the sake of Him who died for all."

"Amen! Amen!" said the old man, looking lovingly at his little crucifix. "I hope and pray—His name is Love. I know it now; who better? But, sir, even if He have forgiven me, how can I forgive myself? In honor, sir, I must be just, and sternly just to myself, even if God be indulgent; as He has been to me, who has left me here in peace for forty years, instead of giving me a prey to the first puma or jaguar which howls round me every night. He has given me time to work out my own salvation; but have I done it? That doubt maddens me at whiles. When I look upon that crucifix, I float on boundless hope; but if I take my eyes from it for a moment, faith fails, and all is blank, and dark and dreadful, till the devil whispers me to plunge into yon stream, and once and forever wake to certainty, even though it be in hell."

What was Jack to answer? He himself knew not at first. More was wanted than the mere repetition of free pardon.

"Heretic as I am, sir, you will not believe me when I tell you, as a priest, that God accepts your penitence."

"My heart tells me so already, at moments. But how know I that it does not lie?"

"Señor," said Jack, "the best way to punish oneself for doing ill, seems to me to go and do good; and the best way to find out whether God means you well, is to find out whether He will help you to do well. If you have wronged Indians in time past, see whether you cannot right them now. If you can, you are safe. For the Lord will not send the devil's servants to do His work."

The old man held down his head.

"Right the Indians? Alas! what is done, is done!"

"Not altogether, Señor," said Amyas, "as long as an Indian remains alive in New Granada."

"Señor, shall I confess my weakness? A voice within me has bid me a hundred times to go forth and labor for those oppressed wretches, but I dare not obey. I dare not look them in the face. I should fancy that they knew my story; that the very birds upon the trees would reveal my crime, and bid them turn from me with horror."

"Señor," said Amyas, "these are but the sick fancies of a noble spirit, feeding on itself in solitude. You have but to try to conquer."

"And look now," said Jack, "if you dare not go forth to help the Indians, see now how God has brought the Indians to your own door. Oh, excellent sir——"

"Call me not excellent," said the old man, smiting his breast.

"I do, and shall, sir, while I see in you an excellent repentance, an excellent humility, and an excellent justice," said Jack. "But oh, sir, look upon these forty souls, whom we must leave behind, like sheep which have no shepherd. Could you not teach them to fear God and to love each other, to live like rational men, perhaps to die like Christians? They would obey you as a dog obeys his master. You might be their king, their father, yea, their pope, if you would."

"You do not speak like a Lutheran."

"I am not a Lutheran, but an Englishman; but,



Protestant as I am, God knows I had sooner see these poor souls of your creed, than of none."

"But I am no priest."

"When they are ready," said Jack, "the Lord will send a priest. If you begin the good work, you may trust to Him to finish it."

"God help me!" said the old warrior.

The talk lasted long into the night, but Amyas was up long before daybreak, felling the trees; and as he and Cary walked back to breakfast, the first thing which they saw was the old man in his garden with four or five Indian children around him, talking smilingly to them.

"The old man's heart is sound still," said Will. "No man is lost who still is fond of little children."

"Ah, Señors!" said the hermit as they came up, "you see that I have begun already to act upon your advice."

"And you have begun at the right end," quoth Amyas; "if you win the children, you win the mothers."

"And if you win the mothers," quoth Will, "the poor fathers must needs obey their wives, and follow in the wake."

The old man only sighed. "The prattle of these little ones softens my hard heart, Señors, with a new pleasure; but it saddens me, when I recollect that there may be children of mine now in the world—children who have never known a father's love—never known ought but a master's threats—"

"God has taken care of these little ones. Trust that He has taken care of yours."

That day Amyas assembled the Indians, and told them that they must obey the hermit as their king, and settle there as best they could: for if they broke up and wandered away, nothing was left for them but to fall one by one into the hands of the Spaniards. They heard him with their usual melancholy and stupid acquiescence, and went and came as they were bid, like animated machines; but the Negroes were of a different temper; and four or five stout fellows gave Amyas to understand that they had been warriors in their own country, and that warriors they would be still; and nothing should keep them from Spaniard-hunting. Amyas saw that the presence of these desperadoes in the new colony would both endanger the authority of the hermit, and bring the Spaniards down upon it in a few weeks; so, making a virtue of necessity, he asked them whether they would go Spaniard-hunting with him.

This was just what the bold Coromantees wished for; they grinned and shouted their delight at serving under so great a warrior, and then set to work most gallantly, getting through more in the day than any ten Indians, and indeed than any two Englishmen.

So went on several days, during which the trees were felled, and the process of digging them out began; while Ayacanora, silent and moody, wandered into the woods all day with her blowgun, and brought home at evening a load of parrots, monkeys and curassows; two or three old hands were sent out to hunt likewise; so that, what with the game and the fish of the river, which seemed inexhaustible, and the fruit of the neighboring palm-trees, there was no lack of food in the camp. But what to do with Ayacanora weighed heavily on the mind of Amyas. He opened his heart on the matter to the old hermit, and asked him whether he would take charge of her. The latter smiled, and shook his head at the notion. "If your report of her be true, I may as well take in hand to tame a jaguar." However, he promised to try; and one evening, as they were all standing together before the mouth of the cave, Ayacanora came up smiling with the fruit of her day's sport; and Amyas, thinking this a fit opportunity, began a carefully-prepared harangue to her, which he intended to be altogether soothing, and even pathetic,—to the effect that the maiden, having no parents, was to look upon this good old man as her father; that he would instruct her in the white man's religion (at which promise Yeo, as a good Protestant, winced a good deal), and teach her how to be happy and good, and so forth; and that, in fine, she was to remain there with the hermit.

She heard him quietly, her great dark eyes opening wider and wider, her bosom swelling, her stature seeming to grow taller every moment, as she clenched her weapons firmly in both her hands. Beautiful as she always was, she had never looked so beautiful before; and as Amyas spoke of parting with her, it was like throwing away a lovely toy; but it must be done, for her sake, for his, perhaps for that of all the crew.

The last words had hardly passed his lips, when, with a shriek of mingled scorn, rage, and fear, she dashed through the astonished group.

"Stop her!" was Amyas' first words; but his next was, "Let her go!" for, springing like a deer through the little



garden, and over the flower-fence, she turned, menacing with her blowgun the sailors, who had already started in her pursuit.

"Let her alone, for Heaven's sake!" shouted Amyas, who, he scarce knew why, shrank from the thought of seeing those graceful limbs struggling in the seamen's grasp.

She turned again, and in another minute her gaudy plumes had vanished among the dark forest stems, as swiftly as if she had been a passing bird.

All stood thunderstruck at this unexpected end to the conference. At last Amyas spoke—

"There's no use in standing here idle, gentlemen. Staring after her won't bring her back. After all, I'm glad she's gone."

But the tone of his voice belied his words. Now he had lost her, he wanted her back; and perhaps every one present, except he, guessed why.

But Ayacanora did not return; and ten days more went on in continual toil at the canoes without any news of her from the hunters. Amyas, by the by, had strictly bidden these last not to follow the girl, not even to speak to her, if they came across her in their wanderings. He was shrewd enough to guess that the only way to cure her sulkiness was to outstare her; but there was no sign of her presence in any direction; and the canoes being finished at last, the gold, and such provisions as they could collect, were placed on board, and one evening the party prepared for their fresh voyage. They determined to travel as much as possible by night, for fear of discovery, especially in the neighborhood of the few Spanish settlements which were then scattered along the banks of the main stream. These, however, the negroes knew, so that there was no fear of coming on them unawares; and as for falling asleep in their night journeys, "Nobody," the negroes said, "ever slept on the Magdalena; the mosquitoes took too good care of that." Which fact Amyas and his crew verified afterwards as thoroughly as wretched men could do.

The sun had sunk; the night had all but fallen; the men were all on board; Amyas in command of one canoe, Cary of the other. The Indians were grouped on the bank, watching the party with their listless stare, and with them the young guide, who preferred remaining among the Indians, and was made supremely happy by the present of a Spanish sword and an English axe; while in the midst,

the old hermit, with tears in his eyes, prayed God's blessing on them.

"I owe to you, noble cavaliers, new peace, new labor, I may say, new life. May God be with you, and teach you to use your gold and your swords better than I used mine."

The adventurers waved their hands to him.

"Give way, men," cried Amyas; and as he spoke the paddles dashed into the water, to a right English hurrah! which sent the birds fluttering from their roosts, and was answered by the yell of a hundred monkeys, and the distant roar of the jaguar.

About twenty yards below, a wooded rock, some ten feet high, hung over the stream. The river was not there more than fifteen yards broad; deep near the rock, shallow on the farther side; and Amyas' canoe led the way, within ten feet of the stone.

As he passed, a dark figure leapt from the bushes on the edge and plunged heavily into the water close to the boat. All started. A jaguar? No; he would not have missed so short a spring. What, then? A human being?

A head rose panting to the surface, and with a few strong strokes, the swimmer had clutched the gunwale. It was Ayacanora!

"Go back!" shouted Amyas. "Go back, girl!"

She uttered the same wild cry with which she had fled into the forest.

"I will die, then!" and she threw up her arms. Another moment, and she had sunk.

To see her perish before his eyes! who could bear that? Her hands alone were above the surface. Amyas caught convulsively at her in the darkness, and seized her wrist.

A yell rose from the negroes: a roar from the crew as from a cage of lions. There was a rush and a swirl along the surface of the stream; and "Caiman! caiman!" shouted twenty voices.

Now, or never, for the strong arm! "To larboard, men, or over we go!" cried Amyas, and with one huge heave, he lifted the slender body upon the gunwale. Her lower limbs were still in the water, when, within arm's length, rose above the stream a huge muzzle. The lower jaw lay flat, the upper reached as high as Amyas' head. He could see the long fangs gleam white in the moonshine; he could see for one moment, full down the monstrous depths of that great gape, which would have crushed



a buffalo. Three inches, and no more, from that soft side, the snout surged up—

There was the gleam of an axe from above, a sharp ringing blow, and the jaws came together with a clash which rang from bank to bank. He had missed her! Swerving beneath the blow, his snout had passed beneath her body, and smashed up against the side of the canoe, as the striker overbalanced, fell headlong overboard upon the monster's back.

"Who is it?"

"Yeo!" shouted a dozen.

Man and beast went down together, and where they sank, the moonlight shone on a great swirling eddy, while all held their breaths, and Ayacanora cowered down into the bottom of the canoe, her proud spirit utterly broken, for the first time, by the terror of that great need, and by a bitter loss. For in the struggle, the holy trumpet, companion of all her wanderings, had fallen from her bosom; and her fond hope of bringing magic prosperity to her English friends had sunk with it to the bottom of the stream.

None heeded her; not even Amyas, round whose knees she clung, fawning like a spaniel dog: for where was Yeo?

Another swirl; a shout from the canoe abreast of them, and Yeo rose, having dived clean under his own boat, and risen between the two.

"Safe as yet, lads! Heave me a line, or he'll have me after all."

But ere the brute reappeared, the old man was safe on board.

"The Lord has stood by me," panted he, as he shot the water from his ears. "We went down together: I knew the Indian trick, and being uppermost, had my thumbs in his eyes before he could turn: but he carried me down to the very mud. My breath was nigh gone, so I left go, and struck up: but my toes tingled as I rose again, I'll warrant. There the beggar is, looking for me, I declare!"

And, true enough, there was the huge brute swimming slowly round and round, in search of his lost victim. It was too dark to put an arrow into his eye; so they paddled on, while Ayacanora crouched silently at Amyas' feet.

"Yeo!" asked he, in a low voice, "what shall we do with her?"

"Why ask me, sir?" said the old man, as he had a very good right to ask.

"Because, when one don't know oneself, one had best inquire of one's elders. Besides you saved her life at the risk of your own, and have a right to a voice in the matter, if any one has, old friend."

"Then, my dear young captain, if the Lord puts a precious soul under your care, don't you refuse to bear the burden He lays on you."

Amyas was silent awhile; while Ayacanora, who was evidently utterly exhausted by the night's adventure, and probably by long wanderings, watchings and weepings which had gone before it, sank with her head against his knee, fell fast asleep, and breathed as gently as a child.

At last he rose in the canoe, and called Cary alongside.

"Listen to me, gentlemen, and sailors all. You know that we have a maiden on board here, by no choice of our own. Whether she will be a blessing to us, God alone can tell: but she may turn to the greatest curse which has befallen us ever since we came out over Bar three years ago. Promise me one thing, or I put her ashore the next beach; and that is, that you will treat her as if she were your own sister; and make an agreement here and now, that if the maid comes to harm among us, the man that is guilty shall hang for it by the neck till he's dead, even though he be I, Captain Leigh, who speak to you. I'll hang you, as I am a Christian; and I give you free leave to hang me."

"A very fair bargain," quoth Cary, "and I for one will see it kept to. Lads, we'll twine a double strong halter for the captain as we go down along."

"I am not jesting, Will."

"I know it, good old lad," said Cary, stretching out his own hand to him across the water through the darkness, and giving him a hearty shake. "I know it; and listen, men! So help me God! but I'll be the first to back the Captain in being as good as his word, as I trust he never will need to be."

"Amen!" said Brimblecombe. "Amen!" said Yeo; and many an honest voice joined in that honest compact, and kept it, too, like men.