

TWICE-A-MONTH

# Sea Stories Magazine

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After a sufficient period of service it gets in one's blood, and the instances are very rare where a man can escape the lure of navy life. Frequently, as in Gammon's case, a fancied or even real grievance will cause a seaman to rebel, but in the emergency they very seldom fail the flag of their country and the service which, deep down in their hearts, they have grown to love.

FROM behind a great chunk of convoluted coral rock, gray with age and splotted with crimson lichen, Tim Gammon peered with lessening anxiety at a smart navy cutter sweeping rhythmically across the glassy blue of the lagoon. The last trace of worry vanished from his rugged face and made place for a self-satisfied grin as the boat sheered alongside the gunboat *Flamingo*, tossed oars, and was hooked on to the dangling tackles, while from the ship's forecastle head clattered the harsh protest of a taut chain cable around the windlass.

White foam spread across the blue under the gunboat's stern, her bows swung to seaward, and the blazing sunlight made jewels of her port glasses and polished brasswork, as she pointed her quarter fair at the beach; her flag made a stab of vivid color against the shimmering background of sea and sky, bringing an involuntary choke into Tim's throat which he smothered with a curse.

Half an hour more Tim lingered behind his boulder, until the *Flamingo* had dwindled to a fairylike toy of ivory and gold on the deep-breathing bosom of the Pacific; then he stood erect, peered sharply under his hand along the white, level beach at the solitary hut nestling in a group of palms on the southern bluff, and became feverishly busy.

His cap he had already lost. Now he tore off his uniform savagely, with a gritted oath for every button and fastening.

"Drill and polish and look smart!" he growled, and bundled his jumper around a slimed rock, dropping it into a cavity in the rock pile.

"Jump to a bos'n's pipe, and salute yer bloomin' orficers!" And leggins and boots and trousers followed the jumper.

"And 'ten days in 'the rattle,' says the snipe of a perishin' loot'nant, cos I leaves the boat for five minutes just to take a handk'chi'f full o' hard-tack to

the little brown gal as had fed me with fruit for more'n a week! Navy! Jail! Me for the simple life now—that's the finish!"

The finish was Tim's cutlass and belt, which he picked up and poised preparatory to pitching it far out into deep water. Of all his equipment, he had kept only his neckerchief and sufficient material from his shirt to make a loin cloth, in which he now stood clothed. The rest he had parted with without a qualm, unless it was a slight regret that he could not keep the cloth for barter; knowing the danger of such scraps of navy goods becoming awkward clews to his whereabouts, he had cast aside regret and clothes at once. But his beloved old cutlass! It seemed to stick to his hand; the belt twisted about his arm as if imbued with life, making its dumb protest, and Tim's hand sank back to his side. He drew the spotless blade from the scabbard, and his eyes burned as he regarded it. Many pictures were evolved out of the mist that suddenly swam before his vision: homely as well as lurid pictures; pictures of savage, seething conflict and a dripping blade; pictures of loving care applied, with rotten stone and canvas, to the refurbishing and cleansing after the fighting was done.

A blinding flash was reflected from the steel, as it turned in the sun, and Tim came back to earth. He started in momentary fright at the thought of the far-carrying powers of such a flash: a heliograph was not a surer signal. Then the soft, rolling "Kr-r-r-r" of a parrakeet in the bush behind him reminded him that he had friends at hand—that parrakeet's cry came from a dusky maiden's throat—and he wrapped the belt around the cutlass with a vicious twist. With set lips, and without a second look, he hurled the weapon into the darkest patch of blue water in reach; and before the ripples from the splash lipped the rocky marge, his flash-

ing white skin was hidden by the cool, breeze-stirred foliage.

The broad leaves had barely settled back into place after Tim's passage through them, when, far along the dazzling beach, a white-clad figure emerged from a lonely hut and started at a rapid walk toward the spot the seaman had just vacated. As he neared the rocks, the man paused, gazing hard after the receding ship, as if to gauge the possibility of recalling her. He shook his head hopelessly, and proceeded to the spot to which the flash of Tim's cutlass had attracted him.

This white man was good to look upon. Dressed comfortably and coolly in white drill, his figure revealed in its every movement the virility of clean manhood. His face glowed in the sunlight like the mask of a bronze god; eyes and chin and the line of the mouth all were as chapters in the story of a strong man in whom power was equally divided with human kindness.

Nickalls was nominally a trader, though none of the infrequent visitors to the little island of Ulua had ever succeeded in discovering how he made a living. Freight came to him, that was certain; but it was for the greater part provisions and clothing; and the quantity was surely no more than would suffice for his own needs. The trade to be picked up in exchange was little more than enough to pay for the imports.

Other traders had tried to get a footing on Ulua; they had usually found it convenient to leave after a brief stay. Yet few men could be found in the wide Pacific who would speak other than good of Nickalls, though in traders' circles he was damned good-humoredly. To get rich quickly in the islands, a trader must as a rule judiciously mingle quite a good proportion of alcohol in with his other goods; and under the influence of Nickalls, Ulua was free from that doubtful blessing: the people, against the will of some of

the younger, were in consequence healthy, clean, and upstanding.

Even the missionaries, after some trifling demur, had long been content to leave the morals and uplift of Ulua in Nickalls' capable hands, without visible detriment to the well-being of the islanders. And the gunboat, whose duty it was to show the flag in those far-flung footholds of humanity, never passed within a day's sail of the trader's lonely hut without altering her course a trifle to pay him a visit.

Nickalls gave the rock pile a swift, comprehensive scrutiny, found nothing, and, with a harassed expression, swung about and plunged into the bush in the direction taken by the deserting seaman. His errand was as fruitless as had been his search of the rocks, and an hour later he was retracing his steps, with bowed head, along the hard strand toward his hut.

"I'll dig him out—they must give him up," he muttered fiercely, clenching his brown fists until the knuckles shone white. "Between runaway sailors and rascally gin peddlers lies disaster for any native community!"

He strode along in silence for some moments; then, striking fist on palm with almost savage fervor, he gritted:

"Why in thunder can't people leave me alone to work out my own redemption! Why can't I be permitted to preserve this tiny patch of the universe at least as clean and sweet as the Creator made it?"

During his stay on the island, Nickalls had, in the early days, often been inflicted with the presence of wastrel seamen from trading vessels, for Ulua was a tiny paradise, and its soft-voiced people were very primitive. At times he was forced to match his own physical prowess against that of the beach comber; sometimes a little straight-out argument would suffice; but in every case he had succeeded in ridding his brown people of the threatened danger

to their peace. It was the same at first with the traders themselves. But one man, Punally, the Malay, who by devious methods had somehow obtained command of a Sydney schooner, still remained a thorn in his side; he was never sure that the *Kestrel*, Punally's vessel, was not dodging about somewhere near, watching for the departure of the gunboat to make one of his swift descents on the blind side of the island with his filthy, square-faced trade gin.

Luckily, it had never yet happened that the Malay swooped down at the precise time when a runaway sailor was loose on the island; but now, with a disgruntled navy man to put profane thoughts into the islanders' receptive minds, Nickalls was shrewd enough to foresee trouble unless he managed to unearth the sailor before the *Kestrel's* next appearance.

For the next few days the trader assiduously sought for the runaway. To all his inquiries, the natives replied with furtive, but negative, gestures. They knew nothing of any white sailor, they told him. But Molo, the brown-skinned Adonis, who looked after Nickalls' hut, knew better. He slept in the village with his people, and knew that, though the sailor kept aloof during the day, he always passed the night in the chief's hut.

Nickalls took the chief aside one morning, and charged him with harboring a deserter, a crime for which there must certainly come a penalty. The vehemence with which the charge was denied, and the shifty leer in the chief's eyes, brought a thought to Nickalls that made his kindly face darken with apprehension. He left the chief with a reiterated warning, and hurried to the crest of the bluff behind his hut. Here, on the highest spot on the island, he kept his private lookout station in a tall palm, fitted with a good naval telescope.

It was near noon, and the sun, al-

most at its zenith, blazed down upon a rippleless ocean that glowed like a blue-steel shield. There were signs of a coming breeze, but now sea and sky were motionless as the land. At the southern sea rim, vague to any but a seaman's trained vision, a silvery sliver of glancing light, poised upon the dazzling, metallic horizon, was plainly revealed by the long glass as a becalmed sailing vessel.

"If that's the *Kestrel*, I've got a fight on hand!" muttered Nickalls, climbing down and entering his hut. "If that fool sailor was just an island roustabout, I'd go after him and scare him off; but he's a navy man—a man who's perhaps fought under the old flag—and I can't let him——"

He broke off in his musing suddenly, and hailed Molo.

"Here, you Molo; you go one-time over by those rocks"—indicating the place where Tim Gammon had hidden—"and make good look-see. Search the rocks, dive if you have to, but try to find that white fellow's clothes. You bring me what you find. Then, to-morrow morning, before you come here, you find out where the white fellow goes in the daytime, and follow him."

"All can-do, Missey Nicklas," said Molo, and his white teeth showed in a wide grin. "S'pose I find um, I bring um along?"

"No. I'll get this one myself, Molo. Just find out where he lib, that's all."

The sun hung like a crimson ball, two diameters above the western horizon, when Molo returned from his search. But he brought results. Wrapped in a bundle of tapa cloth, he carried every item of Tim Gammon's equipment, except the hat and one boot. From a longer parcel he unwrapped the short service cutlass, the parting with which had caused Tim his one qualm. Every article oozed moisture. About the bundles hung the tang of ocean, the reek of weed-slimed rock; a tiny

barnacle had already attached itself to the cutlass hilt, and a frantic little crab dropped from the unrolled jumper and scuttled from the doorway toward the whispering sea.

Nickalls handled the cutlass with something approaching reverence. When Tim flung it into the sea, the blade had jarred loose from the scabbard, and the salt water had entered; and rust was already forming on the steel. On the point of ordering Molo to clean it, Nickalls refrained, and bade the native carry out the other part of his instructions. He stood the cutlass in a corner; he would scour it himself.

With the sunset, the breeze struck down; and with the rising of a full moon the sea shimmered as it leaped, spattered with a thousand gleaming foam crests, to fling its frolicking wavelets in musical thunder on the glistening beach. Nickalls left the cutlass for another time, and betook himself again to his lookout palm. The moon flung the light of an arc lamp athwart the windward ocean, rendering that section of tumbling waters as clear as day; and, after a short delay for focusing, the glass picked out a black shape, touched with silver, that flashed and became obscured again and again. A vessel swinging along to the spanking breeze it was, stealing a radiance from the moonlight as she rolled.

Nickalls was not surprised to learn from Molo in the morning that the *Kestrel* had anchored in a small harbor on the leeward side of the island. The item of news, not altogether unexpected, but feared, that worried him was that the Malay had brought with him a strong crew of white men, in place of his usual complement of Kanakas. It told him in unmistakable terms that Punally was determined to add Ulua to his list of trading ports; and what that meant to the population Nickalls well knew, from the *Kestrel's*

unsavory reputation the wide seas over.

But Molo had found the lair of the runaway, and all other matters were swept from the trader's mind by the information that Tim Gammon was ensconced in a snug retreat in the least likely place he would be looked for: within a hundred fathoms of the hut, in a dry, well-hidden cave, under the rear of the bluff. There he was being supplied with food by the laughing brown maiden for whom he had deserted his ship. Molo added that the chief intended to make use of his guest as a sort of moral support when Punally came to open trade. Some of the young bloods of the village had set the yeast of mischief to working, and the elders were half persuaded already that a trial of the Malay's square-face might prove a welcome change from the humdrum respectability of Nickalls' kindly sway.

The trader went alone to the cave. It was empty. Coming to a swift decision, Nickalls strode across the island, a bracing morning walk over a sparsely timbered, hogback hill, the northern spur of which terminated in a precipitous cliff. In it a deep cleft formed a snug, deep-water harbor for any craft less than a hundred tons' burden. And from the vantage point of the crest the trader verified his fears. The white skin of the runaway gleamed pink in the sun, showing already the first effects of a tropical scorching which must have convinced him of the manifold advantages of clothing. Standing on the ledge of rock at the cliff base, Tim Gammon was deep in conversation with the Malay skipper of the *Kestrel*, swinging to her anchor in the glassy pool, and near by a square wooden case, with a board ripped off the lid, revealed the familiar square bottles of the villainous gin of trade.

Frizzy, black heads bobbed into sight above a clump of buginillæas, and

Nickalls realized the magnitude of his task. Ulua was one of a thousand tiny islets that came under a sort of general beneficent protectorate of the powers. No great nation had thought it worth while to formally hoist the flag and annex the island; all seemed to rest content to play policeman for morality's sake. Hitherto, since he had taken up his abode there, Nickalls had experienced little difficulty in reconciling the islanders to the absence of the average trader's temptations. They looked upon him as a being apart, but one who seemed always able to cure any little ills which might visit them. His small medicine chest was kept replenished for just that purpose, and, in consequence, the island was free from coral sores and most of the other petty ailments that accompany primitive island life. The daily fishing, too, had been rendered doubtly productive, and just half as laborious, since Nickalls had applied good, hard-headed northern methods to it.

Most traders making a call had seen the quiet, unobtrusive good that was being done, and gracefully left the self-appointed guardian angel to his peaceful labors. But Punally was of a different breed: he coveted the little island of Ulua; its possibilities of trade were good, and its young men were stalwart and strong. Nickalls knew now that, with the aid of this runaway sailor, who had got close to the chief's heart by taking up his abode with him, instead of holding aloof, as Nickalls himself had done, Punally was likely to insert the thin edge of a wedge that would split into splinters the peaceful contentment of his little flock.

He saw two brown islanders steal from the bush to the sailor's side, and, at a gesture, take up the case between them and bear it off toward the village. The Malay remained a while longer in earnest talk with Tim, and Nickalls took another snap decision. He hurried

across the ridge, and, plunging into the pathless undergrowth, got ahead of the two natives and reached the village first.

Here he found the chief looking much like a small boy caught filching apples. The young men standing about were obviously on thorns of expectancy, and tried hard to show the trader an insolent face. He coolly ignored them, going straight into a quiet, earnest remonstrance with the chief, who wriggled in discomfort between deep-rooted respect for the white man to whom his people owed so much, and a sneaking, mouth-watering itch to taste just once the dissipations hinted at so alluringly by his new friend Tim.

The chief was wavering when the two natives arrived with their burden, and his eyes snapped at sight of the bottled balloon juice. His mouth opened and stayed open, his eyes rounded out like the night orbs of an ancient owl, at Nickalls' next move. The trader stepped up to the bearer of Punally's gift.

"Pick that up again, boys, and carry it down to my hut," he said firmly. The men stared at him in amazement, and from him to the chief. From the young bloods standing by rose a sullen muttering.

"Pick it up. Up with it. That stuff kills brown men. Come!"

The natives stood as if stupefied. The chief grinned sheepishly; he could not avoid hearing the low growling of his young men, but neither could he avoid the cold eyes of the trader. He hesitated to either back up the order or to forbid his men to obey.

Nickalls solved the problem in characteristic fashion. Thrusting aside the bearers with gentle force, he stooped, swung the case to his own broad shoulders, and marched off to his hut, deaf to the howl of rage that now went up unrestrained.

Arriving at his small home, Nickalls dumped the case of square-face into the

storeroom, and smoked a pipe the while he pondered upon the situation. He knew he would speedily receive a visit, either from the chief and his men, or the Malay, or possibly Tim. The last possibility he hoped would eventuate, for he wanted to talk navy to the delinquent seaman before it was too late.

One thing was very certain: if it came to actual encounter with the *Kestrel's* people, Nickalls would be over-matched. In keeping with his general mode of living, serene and tending toward good works, he possessed no weapon of any kind. He had seen the more-than-ample boat equipment of the *Kestrel*, and knew from long experience that an island schooner with a crew of twelve men and boats for fifty almost invariably counted a well-supplied arms chest among her other equipment.

He looked up at the slender pole erected before the hut, which he had rigged as a signal mast for communicating with passing craft that did not stop, but which were ever willing to exchange a friendly greeting with a lonely white man. His one resource was obvious, and he passed into the hut and opened his camphorwood chest. When he came out, he bore a rolled-up flag which he handled lovingly as he bent it on to the halyards and left it, still bundled up, hanging clear of the ground.

Molo had disappeared upon some business of his own, and was still absent. He had, therefore, not seen Nickalls deposit the case of gin in the storeroom. Yet when, an hour later, he turned up in company with Tim Gammon, who wore an aggressive air and little else, he evinced signs of incipient imbecility indisputably due to alcoholic indulgence. The Kanaka slunk around the hut, ashamed to meet the trader; but Tim was there with a purpose, and stated it belligerently.

"See here, mister, you swiped some goods o' mine. I want 'em," announced

the sailor, planting himself squarely before Nickalls, and staring into his face with fiery eyes.

"Swiped is hardly the word, Gammon," responded the trader gently. "Recovered, is better. I'm glad you've come to your senses."

The sailor started at hearing his name spoken. Some of the bold aggressiveness faded from his face as he stammered:

"Who told you my name's Gammon, mister? And wot d'you mean by comin' to my senses, eh? I come arter that square-face."

Nickalls forced the sailor to lower his gaze by the cool persistence of his own, and replied in a tone which Tim had more than once heard from the quarter-deck:

"All the square-face that comes into Ulua goes out with the tide, as long as I remain here, Gammon. But come inside. I've got other things of yours inside, which told me your name, and which you'll be glad to have again. You're a white man, Tim; you'll never make a good nigger; you brown too suddenly," he added, with a smile at the sailor's scorched cuticle. Tim was painfully aware of the coloring process he was undergoing.

Entering the cool, dim hut, Nickalls called loudly for Molo. The Kanaka did not respond, and the trader said quietly:

"You see the first effects of square-face, Tim. Molo has lived with me in absolute contentment for three years, and for the first time he's ashamed to come before me. I saw he was half stupefied, so I suppose I failed to get all your stock."

"You got all mine, all right, mister. Before I tasted it, too. Besides, it wasn't all mine; I was to divvy up with the chief. Your boy got his from one o' the *Kestrel's* boats, and you can't stop the rest getting theirs in the same way. But what have you got o' mine?"

"This—you may as well put it on," returned Nickalls, taking down a sea-stained seaman's uniform from a peg. "I can find a man's job for you here."

"Not by a dam' sight!" swore Tim, furious at sight of the hated uniform he had discarded. "I dunno how you got it, but you can burn it or bury it as soon as you like. I served ten years in that convict's rig, and I ain't keen on wearing it again. I'd a sight ruther go to jail outright."

Tim stalked outside, forgetting his original errand in the wave of resentment that surged over him. Nickalls followed him, and went to the foot of the flagstaff. The trader dropped the subject of the uniform for the moment, but while bending over the rolled-up flag on the halyards, he asked:

"After ten years' service in an honorable profession, aren't you acting a bit childish in throwing off a decent uniform and enlisting on the side of a traveling rotgut peddler, who would poison half the people of an island like this to carry the other half away into slavery?"

"Honorable profession! Decent uniform! Say, mister, you ain't never had to run yer legs off at the orders of a cub loot'nant as was swingin' on a gate arter you'd learnt a ship frum knight-heads to taffrail. You ain't never been clapped in the rattle arter standin' a double wheel in a sneezer, cos you forgot to say 'sir' to the pink-faced swab as asked yer why you wusn't on watch. Honorable profession—hell!"

Nickalls smiled softly at the sailor's heat. He leisurely cast off the turns of the flag halyards from the cleat, and remarked:

"I used to think something like that, Gammon, and with, perhaps, more reason than you have. I, too, have served under the old flag. I behaved like a raw youth when I thought promotion went by favor, and that I was discriminated against. And yet I had only been rated



lieutenant two years when I got so disgusted as to let myself go. I didn't do just what you have done; it was booze with me; and before I could chuck off my duds and get out, I was fired out.

"But I know now that I was a fool, and I'm paying for my folly." Nickalls straightened up and slowly commenced to hoist the flag, the sailor's eyes following the bundle up to the truck in vague wonder. "I have kept this little island sweet and wholesome as part of the price, Tim; and the only man who refuses to leave me alone with my task is the Malay who gave you that square-face. I'm alone, and have never found it necessary to keep an arsenal at hand; but now that the *Kestrel* has turned up again, manned with unwholesome-looking whites, it looks like trouble, and I'm up against it. I've got to make a grand-stand play, and"—the speaker paused for an instant, twitched the lower part of the halyards, breaking out the big flag at the masthead—"I think you're too good a man to refuse to chip in. The island is annexed.

"Tim Gammon, I call on you to support that flag!"

The sailor flushed hotly from forehead to feet, shifting uneasily and casting shamefaced glances aloft, where the folds of the old flag blazed against the azure of the zenith. Nickalls paid no further attention to him, but fetched out from the hut Tim's uniform and the rusty cutlass, laying them down on the sand. Then, procuring a stout cane from the veranda, he turned inland, remarking as he started:

"I happen to know the *Kestrel's* game, Tim. He's a blackbirder of the worst sort; and if he can manage to fill the chief and the older men with his villainous liquor, he'll have the young men aboard his ship and bound for Queensland before sunup to-morrow. I'm going over to try to stop him, and when you're dressed, you can come down to the little harbor."

The trader strode away, and, turning before the hut was quite out of sight, laughed confidently to himself at the little picture on the beach. At the foot of the flagstaff stood Tim. In one hand he trailed a bundle of sea-stained clothes; in the other, his brawny right fist, he gripped his beloved old cutlass, and his bronzed face was a-work with battling emotions as he switched his gaze from weapon to flag, and back again. Then he dropped the point of his cutlass to the ground, and leaned upon the hilt, the while he stared hard and long out upon the heaving breast of the sea.

"I'll count on Tim," smiled Nickalls, and strode with lighter step toward the village.

The trader's task with the chief was rendered easier than he had expected. Since taking away the case of gin, no more had yet been received, and he had only expectancy to combat. He was helped still more by the discovery of Molo, whom he forthwith proceeded to treat to a sound thrashing with his cane. Poor Molo did not need the castigation. As he was hauled to his feet, dragged into the light of day before all the old men of the village, the powerful and unaccustomed liquor he had absorbed got in its deadly work, and he presented a doleful object lesson to his fellows that added great weight to the trader's words.

Nickalls speedily discovered the method to be used by Punally. The boat that was to bring supplies to the chief for the evening's debauch of the elders was to carry aboard the *Kestrel* all the young men, who were now looking forward eagerly to a night of unrestrained license and feasting at the white men's expense.

With the example of Molo to back him up, Nickalls used all his persuasive eloquence with the old men; he soon convinced them of the peril hanging

over their peaceful island. Most of them had heard of other islands being ravished of their young men by slavers operating under the name of labor recruiters. All of them had seen the blessings and advantages that had come to them during Nickalls' residence on Ulua.

"Tim he say all right—velly fine ship. Why he say so? Why he stopalong us, s'pose ship he no good, eh? Where Tim go now, eh?" The expression of doubt came from a wavering relative of the chief, who wanted to stay at home, certainly, but still hankered after the white man's gloom dispeller. Nickalls briefly indicated the grooping Molo, doubled up in the throes of a rebellious stomach unused to trade gin, and replied:

"Tim belong war canoe my country. He stopalong you to catch this captain who wants to carry your young men away. Bimeby Tim come down by schooner, then you see."

The chief at last returned to his old allegiance, promising to support Nickalls if matters turned out as he said, and Tim showed himself arrayed against the schooner's people. With that promise the trader went down to the head of the little harbor, and paced openly up and down the tiny beach, swinging his cane and calling unconcerned greetings to the many young men who lurked among the trees waiting for the boat to come ashore. It was the young men whom he half feared. If Tim failed him, after all, he knew his efforts to prevent these young savages from throwing themselves into bondage would be futile.

The afternoon was far gone when a boat put off from the *Kestrel* and pulled ashore. She was manned by four husky white sailors, and in the stern sheets another big white sat beside Punally, the Malay. Nickalls sent an anxious glance along the ridge, where he expected Tim to appear, and,

seeing no sign of him, turned to meet the boat. The Malay wasted no words, but hailed the trader in sharp terms, capable of no misunderstanding.

"Better get back home, Nickalls," he shouted. "I warn you to keep your hands off my business!"

"Stay right where you are, Punally," retorted the trader. "You land no square-face here, nor will you take one man away. Keep off; you're trespassing."

A roar of grim merriment peeled from the boat, which dashed in to the beach. Nickalls looked again for Tim; the ridge was still bare. On the bluff, a hundred yards to his left, three tall cocos nodded above the thick bush, and there was a faint, though visible, movement going on at the foot of the palms. But Tim was not expected in that direction; it was probably more of the young men, bent on seeing everything that happened.

The boat's keel grated on the sand, and her crew sprang into the water to run her up. Nickalls advanced imperturbably and laid his hand upon her stem.

"No farther!" he warned, thrusting back the boat a foot. "I advise you to get out. This island has been annexed to——"

A howl of rage burst from the white man beside Punally, and he stood up with outstretched hand, pointing up at the three cocos. The trader looked, and his whole being surged with relief.

From one of the palms, flung out to the warm breeze, fluttered the flag; and from the bush around him Nickalls caught the deep-breathed "Oh's" and "Ah's" of the hidden natives, as a stalwart seaman in sea-stained uniform, lacking one boot and a hat, came leaping like a goat down the side of the bluff, headed for the boat.

A snarl of rage broke from the Malay, and he plunged from the boat, whipped out a murderous creese, and

darted upon Nickalls. The trader, unarmed save for his stout cane, sprang back to harder ground, and received the onslaught with a muttered hope that Tim would not break his neck coming down.

A sailor in the boat snatched up a rifle and started to the Malay's assistance, but did no more than start. A sharp coral rock whizzed past Nickalls, took the sailor between the eyes, and dropped him, rifle and all, over the side of the boat. Reassured thus of his safety by his own natives, the trader faced his attacker.

A fine swordsman in his service days, Nickalls still found himself hard pressed to ward off that licking creese with his cane. With thudding feet, the two men circled each other, the trader using all his skill to turn Punally's blade without losing his own weapon. He saw an opening, and darted in swiftly, giving the point of his cane rapier fashion. A sneering grin wreathed the Malay's swart face as he caught the stick in his free hand, wrenched the trader nearer, and whirled aloft his wave-bladed weapon for a lethal stroke.

"Get out o' that!" roared Tim Gammon, covering the last ten feet of distance with a jump, and hurling Nickalls headlong out of the way.

"Now, yuh black-faced slaver!" he shouted, brandishing his old cutlass, streaked with rust. "Watch yer left ear!"

Tim's sworsmanship was weird and effective. His heavy blade rose and fell with a strength and swiftness that gave the Malay little time to attack; a shade of fear came into the lowering, savage eyes as the creese slithered again and again against Tim's sturdy guard.

The *Kestrel's* men drew nearer, growling deep in their throats, seeking to render aid to their chief. Their advance brought a shower of clipping, bruising rocks that seemed to fly without human agency, from so many di-

rections did they come. Nickalls had picked himself up from the sand, where Tim's timely charge had hurled him, and called to the chief and his men to appear. He wished at all costs to avoid further conflict, if without it he could make Punally realize that it was to his advantage to pull out.

The chief responded, and advanced from the bush, followed by his more substantial men, now wholly won round to Nickalls' side. But they came too late to save Punally. A shout of triumph burst from Tim's leathern lungs as steel clashed upon steel with an ominous ring.

A flickering flash passed through the air between the combatants, and the howl of mortal terror the Malay gave tongue to froze all hands to a standstill. A lightning glance showed Nickalls that the Malay was disarmed, and he shouted to Tim to hold his hand. With the stroke that had hurled the creese from Punally's tiring hand the seaman stepped back; he had no murderous intent toward a defenseless adversary; but the end was out of his hands entirely.

The creeze whizzed straight into the air, turned as it started to fall, and, as the Malay cringed back with upstretched arm, the wicked blade plunged to the hilt in the hollow between throat and breast, ending the blackbirder's career right there.

In the evening, when the *Kestrel* had towed out in silence, taking her fallen skipper with her to give him sea burial, Nickalls and Tim Gammon sat outside the trader's hut, smoking a soothing pipe and watching Molo break bottles and pour a libation of trade gin to the land crabs on the beach.

Tim was gloomy, in spite of Nickalls' efforts to enliven his spirits. He was a deserter, from whichever angle he regarded the matter, and that was the burden of his complaint.

"I'll get clapped into the rattle as

soon as I get aboard, Mister Nickalls," he grumbled, "and when they get me home, they'll shove me in jail properly. I'd ruther stop here with you."

"But, man, dear, after this affair, when I tell your skipper about it next time he calls, you'll be right in line for promotion. You can't make me believe you've got no love for the old service! That stunt you pulled off of hoisting the flag where it could be seen from the *Kestrel* perhaps saved a dozen lives. Only for that the whole boat crew would have piled in, and never mind a few rocks. It was the old flag that made 'em half-hearted about backing up their skipper.

"You're navy from the boots up, Tim; and you could have warrant rank in no time. You'll go back aboard the

*Flamingo* next time she puts in here, and I promise you I have enough pull with the skipper to smooth over your little fault in running away. Besides, Tim, I owe you something for chipping in this afternoon, and I hate to think of you as a beach comber. You're too good a man to go to the dogs. What's the answer?"

Tim puffed furiously at his pipe, and rested his eyes in a long look seaward. His dreams of an island kingdom were shattered; but another vision had taken form—that of advancement in the service—the service he really loved, in spite of its fancied ill treatment of him.

"All right, sir," he replied quietly, rising from the sand. "I'll get a bit o' canvas; this sand's fine to polish the old cutlass with."