

## RUNNING AWAY TO SEA.

NOT very long ago a little chap ran away from school to go to sea. I chance to know almost exactly how he felt, and all that happened to him; so I can give a true, as well as a full and particular account of his adventures. But as it might hurt his feelings if I were to give his right name, we will call him Jack Sprat.

Jack's notion was that all sailors were jolly fellows, who led very jolly lives. They might have dangers to encounter, but, if they were wrecked, they were almost sure to get back to England somehow, or if they didn't, to have beautiful desert islands waiting for them, which was even better. And then their life was so unlike school—so free-and-easy. There were such chances in it, too. You might begin as cabin-boy in a merchantman (hadn't Captain Cook, and Sir Cloudesley Shovel, and ever so many of the famous fellows, been cabin-boys either in the merchant-service or the navy?), but then you might be the first of a crew of twenty gallant British tars to board a pirate, and haul down the black flag with its death's-head and cross-bones, the said pirate being manned by three hundred bearded ruffians, black, brown, and renegade-white, and carrying thirty long brass guns, which your ship had fought for five hours, muzzle to muzzle, with a rusty little bit of an iron cannon, suddenly remembered and dragged out from under the longboat; and then, before you could say Jack Robinson, you might find yourself, cadet,—midshipman,—first lieutenant,—captain, of a dashing frigate, sink or capture two French first-rates, and half-a-dozen corvettes in single combat, and take no end of American clippers. How the Portsmouth bells would ring when it was known that the "flying, fighting *Arethusa*" had anchored at Spithead with a kite-tail of fresh prizes under her stern! The Mayor and corporation would come down to welcome her heroic young captain, when he landed, for the first time during his brief but eventful life at sea, upon his native soil. Mamma would not be sorry then that he had run away from school; and wouldn't "the girls"—sisters, and cousins, and all the rest of them that you used to lark with under the mistletoe—envy the one that had hold of your sound arm (one arm, of course, would be in a sling, but sure to get quite well the week after next), when you walked to church the first Sunday after you got home, in your cocked hat, and blue coat, and white trowsers,

and with your gold epaulettes, and sword (hacked like a saw), and a baker's dozen of medals on?

Not a hundred miles from one of the suburbs of London, there used to be—perhaps there is still, and so I cannot give its whereabouts more plainly—a Boys' School, which Jack declares to have been "the beastliest hole that ever called itself a school." Outside its wall, from week's end to week's end, the little chaps were scarcely ever allowed to go, except on Sundays; when the school was marched, two and two, like Noah's ark beasts and birds, to church. Now this confinement was one thing which Jack did not relish; and, for another thing, he had not been accustomed to be knocked about at other people's pleasure. Accordingly, to secure liberty, the sagacious Jack made up his mind to turn cabin-boy.

He resisted the blandishments of the basket-woman, and saved up two weeks' pocket-money. The eventful morning came at length, and Jack woke early in the autumn moonlight. All the other fellows in the long dormitory were sound asleep. He felt rather scared, but as he was, he said his prayers before he crept out of the room. Perhaps he hurried them over rather, and, perhaps, he did not feel quite sure that boys who were running away had any business to say prayers; but still he *did* say them, partly from habit, and partly because he felt that people who were going to sea could not make sure for a moment what would happen to them. Then he went out of the room on tiptoe, carrying the shoes which he had smuggled up to bed the night before, instead of pushing them into his pigeon-hole in the shoe-rack to be cleaned; and stole almost as silently as a shadow down the stairs. Boards would creak, though, when he was passing the bedroom doors he dreaded most; and he had to make a rush past the tall old clock on the last landing. "Tick-tick, tick-tick," it said. "I'm awake—I've been awake all night. I know what's going on, if every one else is asleep."

In the hall Jack put on his shoes, and prepared to tackle the front door. There were two bolts to shoot back, and a bar to take down, and a chain to unsnack, and then a huge key to turn. Jack almost tumbled off the tottering scaffolding of hall-chairs, &c. he constructed to reach the top bolt; but all the obstacles except the lock were overcome at last. The key for a time