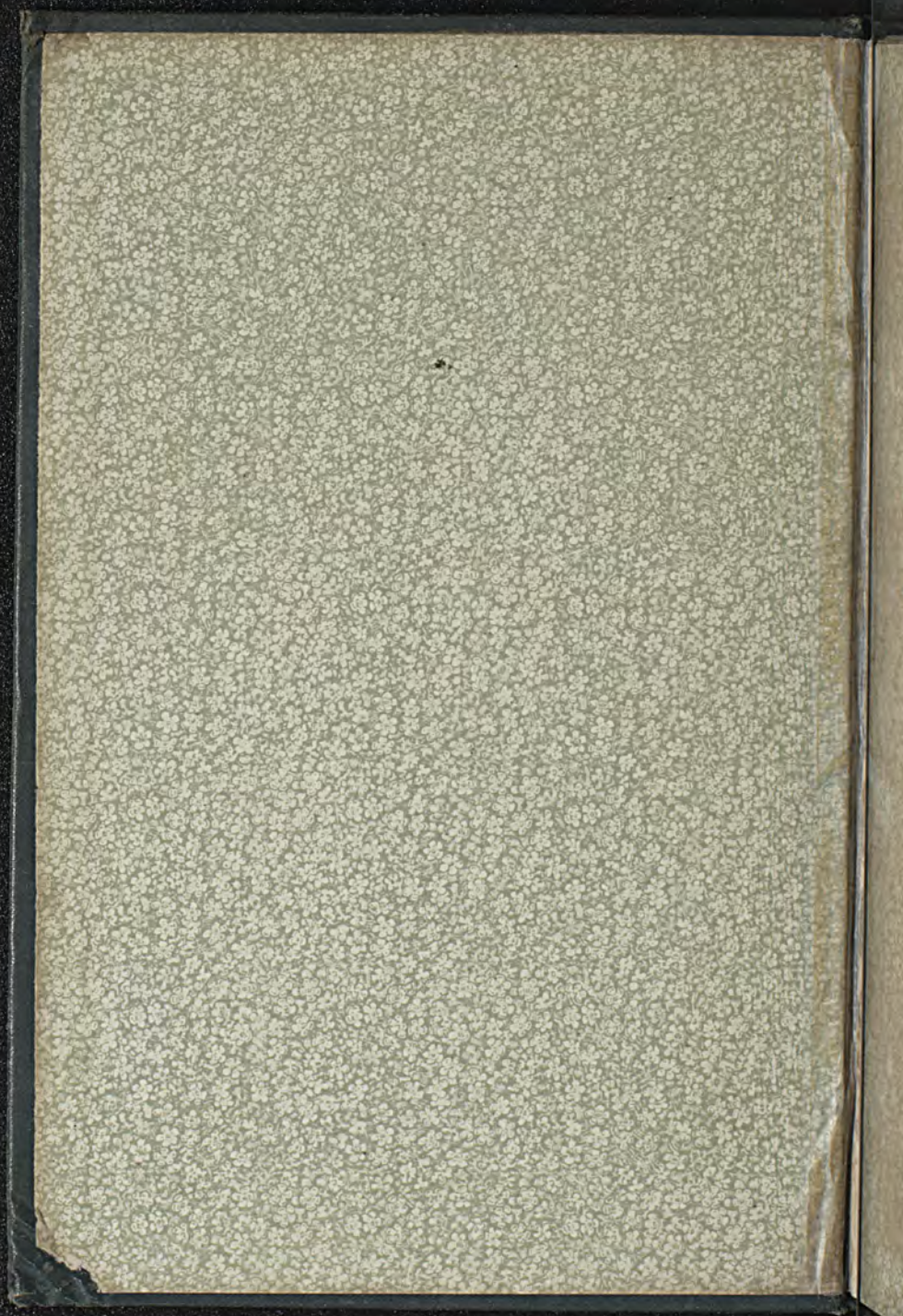
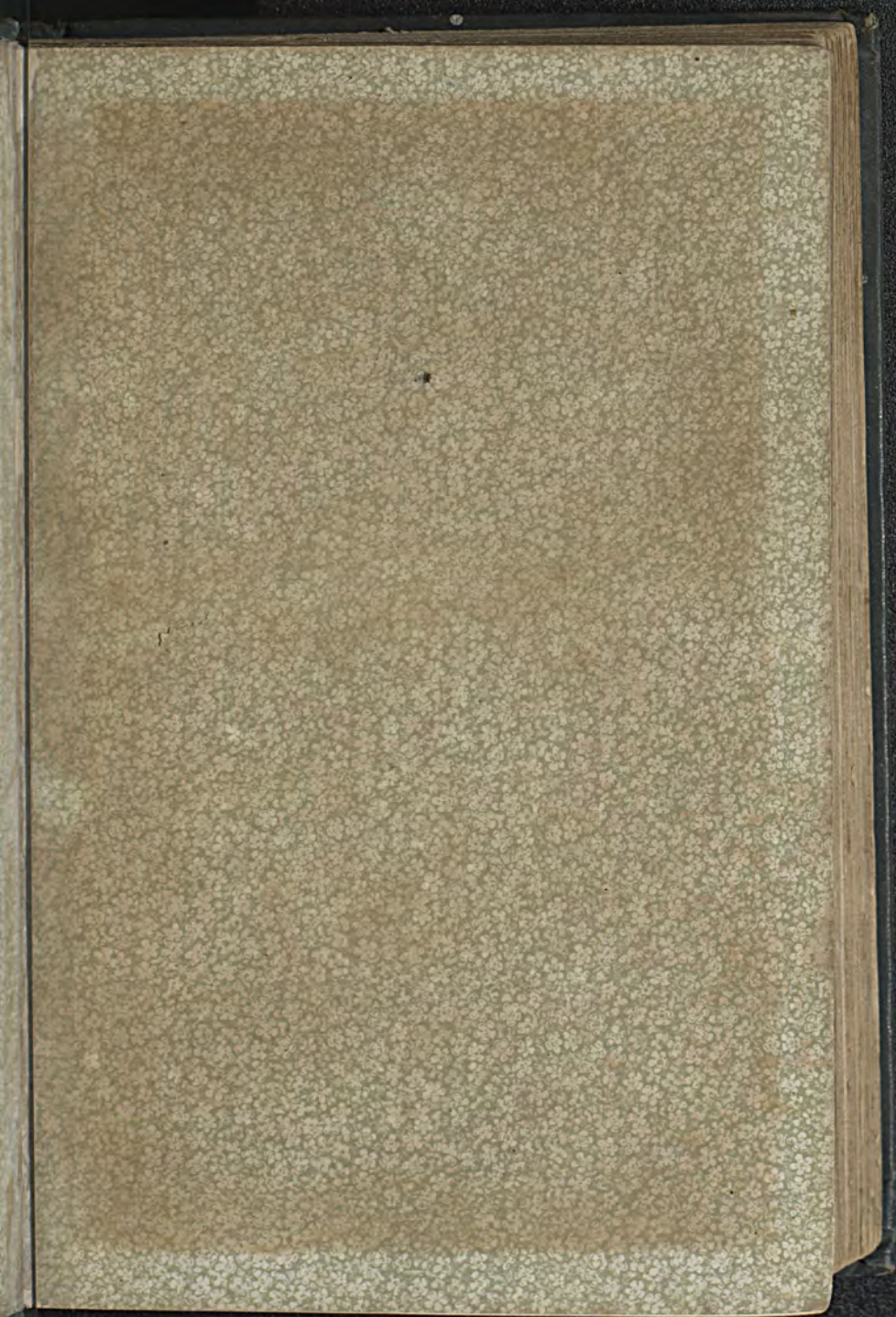
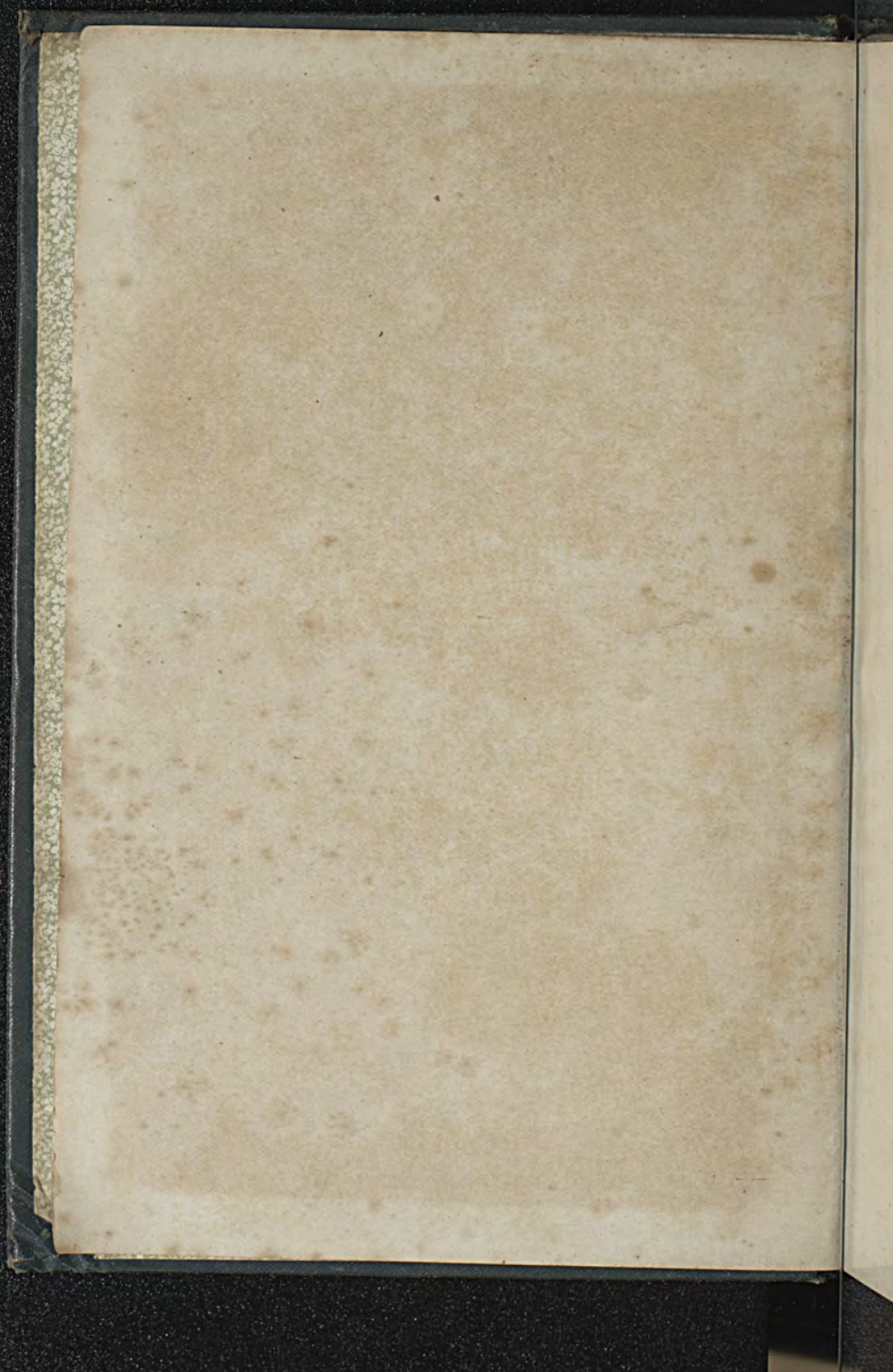
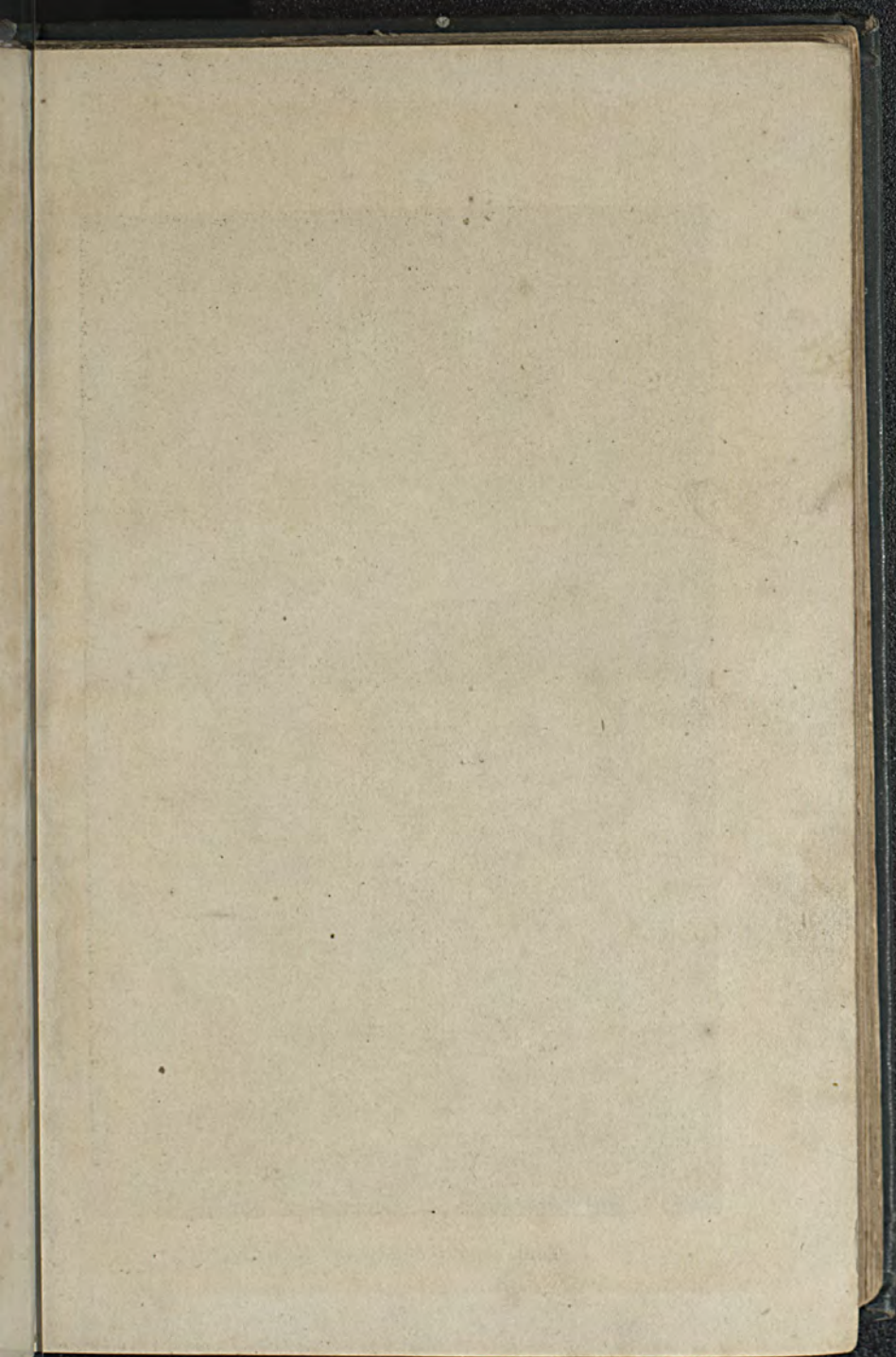












THEY DRIFTED OUT TO THE NIGHT.

AN OCEAN DREAM.

THE HAUNTED STATION

AND OTHER STORIES.

BY
HUME NISBET,

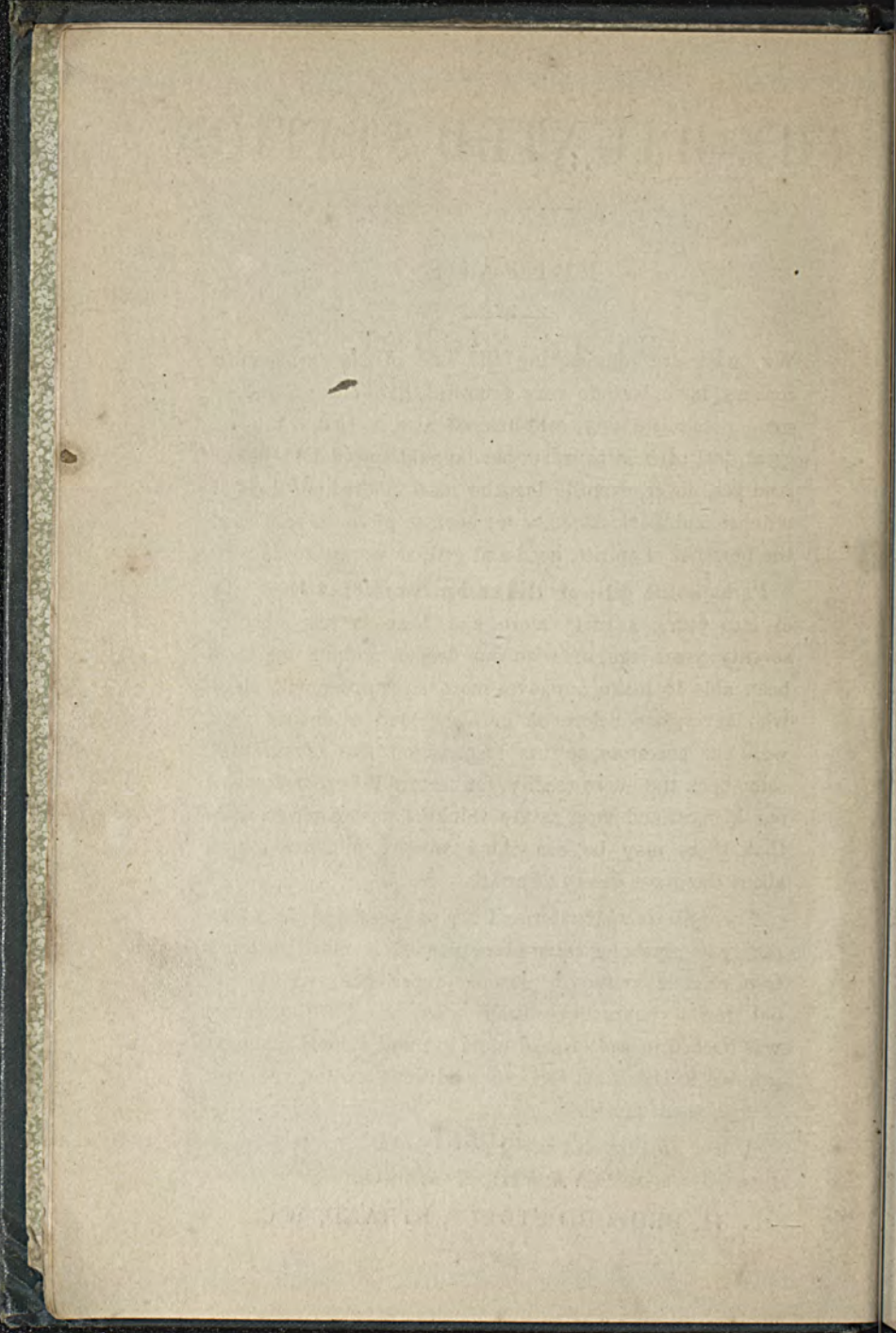
AUTHOR OF
"BAIL UP!" "THE DIVERS," "THE BUSHRANGER'S SWEETHEART,"
"THE JOLLY ROGER," "THE SAVAGE QUEEN," &c., &c.

With Illustrations by the Author.



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PREFACE.

WE, who are approaching the end of the nineteenth century, have become very practical, hard-headed, and, as some pessimists aver, cold-hearted also, so that it takes a great deal of heat to warm our languid and chilled blood. And yet, never, even during the most flourishing days of witches and warlocks, have we been so prone to believe in the presence of spirits, good and evil, as we are to-day.

Perhaps the gate of the unseen world has been left, of late years, a little more ajar than it was sixty or seventy years ago, or with our deeper probing we have been able to make ourselves more *en rapport* with those who have gone before us into the land of shades than were our ancestors, so that responsive to our asking they come back the more readily, for certain it is that some of our keenest and most astute thinkers have come to allow that there may be something worthy of investigation about the ghost theory after all.

These *fin du siècle* stories I beg to present to the reader purely as psychological studies, gleaned in most instances from reliable sources or personal experience, and thought out during hours of solitude when the bustling world was hushed in well-earned slumber, and solemn midnight granted to the mind the true conditions for the reception of the occult mysteries.

I have to express my grateful thanks to Mr. W. T. Stead for some startling warnings concerning malignant

influences, more awful in their consequences to poor humanity than were the life-sucking vampires of olden times; these influences I have attempted to define in such sketches as "The Haunted Station," "Delphine," "The Demon Spell," "Marie St. Pierre," and "The Phantom Model."

I have also to thank Messrs. Samuel Plimsoll, the Sailors' Friend, and J. H. Wilson, M.P., of the Seamen and Firemen's Union, for much valuable information concerning "Coffin Ships," as well as technical hints and corrections while I was writing my story, "A Deadly Voyage."

With these acknowledgments and explanations I leave my impressions to the kindly consideration of the readers, trusting that they may be interested, even if they cannot go the length of believing.

HUME NISBET.

HOGARTH CLUB,
36, Dover Street, Piccadilly,
London, W.

1st November, 1893.

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DEDICATION.

WITH AFFECTIONATE REGARDS AND WARM
ADMIRATION FOR HIS POETIC GIFTS, I BEG TO DEDICATE
THESE STORIES
TO MY DEAR FRIEND,
THE HON. RODEN NOEL.

THE HAUNTED STATION AND OTHER STORIES.

The Haunted Station.

It looked as if a curse rested upon it, even under that glorious southern morn which transformed all that it touched into old oak and silver-bronze.

I use the term silver-bronze, because I can think of no other combination to express that peculiar bronzy tarnish, like silver that has lain covered for a time, which the moonlight in the tropics gives to the near objects upon which it falls—tarnished silver surfaces and deep sepia-tinted shadows.

I felt the weird influence of that curse even as I crawled into the gully that led to it; a shiver ran over me as one feels when they say some stranger is passing over your future grave; a chill gripped at my vitals as I glanced about me apprehensively, expectant of something ghoulish and unnatural to come upon me from the sepulchral gloom and mystery of the overhanging boulders under which I was dragging my wearied limbs. A deathly silence brooded within this rut-like and treeless gully

that formed the only passage from the arid desert over which I had struggled, famishing and desperate; where it led to I neither knew nor cared, so that it did not end in a *cul-de-sac*.

At last I came to what I least expected to see in that part, a house of two storeys, with the double gables facing me, as it stood on a mound in front of a water-hole, the mellow full moon behind the shingly roof, and glittering whitely as it repeated itself in the still water against the inky blackness of the reflections cast by the denser masses of the house and vegetation about it.

It seemed to be a wooden erection, such as squatters first raise for their homesteads after they have decided to stay; the intermediate kind of station, which takes the place of the temporary shanty while the proprietor's bank account is rapidly swelling, and his children are being educated in the city boarding schools to know their own social importance. By and bye, when he is out of the mortgagee's hands, he may discard this comfortable house, as he has done his shanty, and go in for stateliness and stone-work, but to the tramp or the bushranger, the present house is the most welcome sight, for it promises to be the one shelter, and to the other a prospect of loot.

There was a verandah round the basement that stood clear above the earth on piles, with a broad ladder stair leading down to the garden walk which terminated at the edge of the pool

or water-hole; under the iron roofing of the verandah I could make out the vague indications of French doors that led to the reception rooms, etc., while above them were bedroom windows, all dark with the exception of one of the upper windows, the second one from the end gable, through which a pale greenish light streamed faintly.

Behind the house, or rather from the centre of it, as I afterwards found out, projected a gigantic and lifeless gum tree, which spread its fantastic limbs and branches wildly over the roof, and behind that again a mass of chaotic and planted greenery, all softened and generalized in the thin silvery mist which emanated from the pool and hovered over the ground.

At the first glance it appeared to be the abode of a romantic owner, who had fixed upon a picturesque site, and afterwards devoted himself to making it comfortable as well as beautiful. He had planted creepers and trained them over the walls, passion-fruit and vines clung closely to the posts and trellis work and broke the square outlines of windows and angles, a wild tangle of shrubs and flowers covered the mound in front and trailed into the water without much order, so that it looked like the abode of an imaginative poet rather than the station of a practical, money-grubbing squatter.

As I quitted the desolate and rock-bound gully and entered upon this romantic domain, I could not help admiring the artful manner in which the owner had left Nature alone where he

could do so ; the gum trees which he had found there were still left as they must have been for ages, great trees shooting up hundreds of feet into the air, some of them gaunt and bald with time, others with their leafage still in a flourishing condition, while the more youthful trees were springing out of the fertile soil in all directions, giving the approach the appearance of an English park, particularly with the heavy night-dew that glistened over them.

But the chill was still upon me that had gripped me at the entrance of the gully, and the same lifeless silence brooded over the house, garden, pool and forest which had awed me amongst the boulders, so that as I paused at the edge of the water and regarded the house, I again shuddered as if spectres were round me, and murmured to myself, "Yes, it looks like a place upon which has fallen a curse."

* * * * *

Two years before this night, I had been tried and condemned to death for murder, the murder of the one I loved best on earth, but, through the energy of the press and the intercession of a number of influential friends, my sentence had been *mercifully* commuted to transportation for life in Western Australia.

The victim, whom I was proved by circumstantial evidence to have murdered, was my young wife, to whom I had been married only six months before ; ours was a love match, and until I saw her lying stark before me, those six months had been an uninterrupted honey-

moon, without a cloud to cross it, a brief term of heaven, which accentuated the after misery.

I was a medical practitioner in a small country village which I need not name, as my supposed crime rang through England. My practice was new but growing, so that, although not too well off, we were fairly comfortable as to position, and, as my wife was modest in her desires, we were more than contented with our lot.

I suppose the evidence was strong enough to place my guilt beyond a doubt to those who could not read my heart and the heart of the woman I loved more than life. She had not been very well of late, yet, as it was nothing serious, I attended her myself; then the end came with appalling suddenness, a post-mortem examination proved that she had been poisoned, and that the drug had been taken from my surgery, by whom or for what reason is still a mystery to me, for I do not think that I had an enemy in the world, nor do I think my poor darling had one either.

At the time of my sentence, I had only one wish, and that was to join the victim of this mysterious crime, so that I saw the judge put on the fatal black cap with a feeling of pleasure, but when afterwards I heard it was to be transportation instead, then I flung myself down in my cell and hurled imprecations on those officious friends who had given me slavery and misery instead of release. Where was the mercy

in letting me have life, since all had been taken from it which made it worth holding?—the woman who had lain in my arms while together we built up glowing pictures of an impossible future, my good name lost, my place amongst men destroyed; henceforward I would be only recognised by a number, my companions the vilest, my days dragged out in chains, until the degradation of my lot encrusted over that previous memory of tenderness and fidelity, and I grew to be like the other numbered felons, a mindless and emotionless animal.

Fortunately, at this point of my sufferings, oblivion came in the form of delirium, so that the weeks passed in a dream, during which my lost wife lived once more with me as we had been in the past, and by the time the ship's doctor pronounced me recovered, we were within a few days of our dreary destination. Then my wife went from me to her own place, and I woke up to find that I had made some friends amongst my fellow-convicts, who had taken care of me during my insanity.

We landed at Fremantle, and began our life, road-making; that is, each morning we were driven out of the prison like cattle, chained together in groups, and kept in the open until sundown, when we were once more driven back to sleep.

For fourteen months this dull monotony of eating, working and sleeping went on without variation, and then the chance came that I had been hungering for all along; not that liberty

was likely to do me much good, only that the hope of accomplishing it kept me alive.

Three of us made a run for it one afternoon, just before the gun sounded for our recall, while the rest of the gang, being in our confidence, covered our escape until we had got beyond gun-shot distance. We had managed to file through the chain which linked us together, and we ran towards the bush with the broken pieces in our hands as weapons of defence.

My two comrades were desperate criminals, who, like myself, had been sentenced for life, and, as they confessed themselves, were ready to commit any atrocity rather than be caught and taken back.

That night and the next day we walked in a straight line about forty miles through the bush, and then, being hungry and tired, and considering ourselves fairly safe, we lay down to sleep without any thought of keeping watch.

But we had reckoned too confidently upon our escape, for about daybreak the next morning we were roused up by the sound of galloping horses, and, springing to our feet and climbing a gum tree, we saw a dozen of mounted police, led by two black trackers, coming straight in our direction. Under the circumstances there were but two things left for us to do, either to wait until they came and caught us, or run for it until we were beaten or shot down.

One of my companions decided to wait and

be taken back, in spite of his bravado the night before; an empty stomach demoralizes most men; the other one made up his mind, as I did, to run as long as we could. We started in different directions, leaving our mate sitting under the gum tree, he promising to keep them off our track as long as possible.

The fact of him being there when the police arrived gave us a good start. I put all my speed out, and dashed along until I had covered, I daresay, about a couple of miles, when all at once the scrub came to an end, and before me I saw an open space, with another stretch of bush about half a mile distant, and no shelter between me and it.

As I stood for a few minutes to recover my breath, I heard two or three shots fired to the right, the direction my companion had taken, and on looking that way I saw that he also had gained the open, and was followed by one of the trackers and a couple of the police. He was still running, but I could see that he was wounded from the way he went.

Another shot was sent after him, that went straight to its mark, for all at once he threw up his arms and fell prone upon his face, then, hearing the sounds of pursuit in my direction, I waited no longer, but bounded full into the morning sunlight, hoping, as I ran, that I might be as lucky as he had been, and get a bullet between my shoulders and so end my troubles.

I knew that they had seen me, and were after

me almost as soon as I had left the cover, for I could hear them shouting for me to stop, as well as the clatter of their horses' hoofs on the hard soil, but still I kept to my course, waiting upon the shots to sound which would terminate my wretched existence, my back-nerves quivering in anticipation and my teeth meeting in my under-lip.

One!

Two!!

Two reports sounded in my ears; a second after the bullets had whistled past my head; and then, before the third and fourth reports came, something like hot iron touched me above my left elbow, while the other bullet whirred past me with a singing wail, cooling my cheek with the wind it raised, and then I saw it ricochet in front of me on the hill side, for I was going up a slight rise at the time.

I had no pain in my arm, although I knew that my humerus was splintered by that third last shot, but I put on a final spurt in order to tempt them to fire again.

What were they doing? I glanced over my shoulder as I rushed, and saw that they were spreading out, fan-like, and riding like fury, while they hurriedly reloaded. Once more they were taking aim at me, and then I looked again in front.

Before me yawned a gulf, the depth of which I could not estimate, yet in width it was over a hundred feet. My pursuers had seen this impediment also, for they were reining up their

horses, while they shouted to me, more frantically than ever, to stop.

Why should I stop? flashed the thought across my mind as I neared the edge. Since their bullets had denied me the death I courted, why should I pause at the death spread out for me so opportunely?

As the question flashed through me, I answered it by making the leap, and as I went down I could hear the reports of the rifles above me.

Down into shadow from the sun-glare I dropped, the outer branches of a tree breaking with me as I fell through them. Another obstacle caught me a little lower, and gave way under my weight, and then with an awful wrench, that nearly stunned me, I felt myself hanging by the remnant of the chain which was still rivetted to my waist-band, about ten feet from the surface, and with a hundred and fifty feet of a drop below me before I could reach the bottom. The chain had somehow got entangled in a fork of the last tree through which I had broken.

Although that sudden wrench was excruciating, the exigency of my position compelled me to collect my faculties without loss of time. Perhaps my months of serfdom and intercourse with felons had blunted my sensibility, and rendered me more callous to danger and bodily pain than I had been in my former and happier days, or the excitement of that terrible chase was still surging within me, for without more

than a second's pause, and an almost indifferent glance downwards to those distant boulders, I made a wild clutch with my unwounded arm at the branch which had caught me, and with an effort drew myself up to it, so that the next instant I was astride it, or rather crouching, where my loose chain had caught. Then, once more secure, I looked upwards to where I expected my hunters to appear.

When I think upon it now, it was a marvel how I ever got to be placed where I was, for I was under the shelving ledge from which I had leapt, that is, it spread over me like a roof, therefore I must conclude that the first tier of branches must have bent inwards, and so landed me on to the second tree at a slant. At least, this is the only way in which I can account for my position.

The tree on which I sat grew from a crevice on the side of the precipice, and from the top could not be seen by those above, neither could I see them, although they looked down after me, but I could hear them plainly enough and what they said.

"That fellow has gone right enough, Jack, although I don't see his remains below; shall we try to get down and make sure?" I heard one say, while another replied:

"What's the good of wasting time, he's as dead as the other chap, after that drop, and they will both be picked clean enough, so let us get back to Fremantle with the living one, and report the other two as wiped out;

we have a long enough journey before us, sergeant."

"Yes, I suppose so," answered the sergeant. "Well, boys, we may say that there are two promising bushrangers the less for this colony to support, so right about, home's the word."

I heard their horses wheel round and go off at a canter after this final speech, and then I was left alone on my airy perch, to plan out how best I was to get down with my broken arm, for it was impossible to get up, and also what I was likely to do with my liberty in that desolate region.

Desperate men are not very particular about the risks they run, and I ran not a few before I finally reached the bottom of that gulch, risky drops from one ledge to another, frantic clutchings at branches and tree roots; sufficient that I did reach the level ground at last more nearly dead than alive, so that I was fain to lie under the shadow of a boulder for hours without making an effort to rise and continue my journey.

Then, as night was approaching, I dragged myself along until I came to some water, where, after drinking and bracing up my broken arm with a few gum-trunk shards, and binding them round with some native grasses, while I made my supper of the young leaves of the eucalyptus bushes, I went on.

On, on, on for weeks, until I had lost all count of time, I wandered, carrying my broken fetters with me, and my broken arm gradually

mending of its own accord. Sometimes I killed a snake or an iguana during the day with the branch I used for a stick, or a 'possum or wild cat at night, which I devoured raw. Often I existed for days on grass roots or the leaves of the gum-tree, for anything was good enough to fill up the gap.

My convict garb was in tatters and my feet bootless by this time, and my hair and beard hung over my shoulders and chest, while often I went for days in a semi-conscious state, for the fierce sun seemed to wither up my blood and set fire to my brain.

Where I was going I could not tell, and still, with all the privation and misery, the love of life was once again stronger in me than it had been since I had lost my place amongst civilised men, for I was at liberty and alone to indulge in fancy.

And yet it did not seem altogether fancy that my lost wife was with me on that journey. At first she came only when I lay down to sleep, but after a time she walked with me hand in hand during the day as well as in my dreams.

Dora was her name, and soon I forgot that she had been dead, for she was living and beautiful as ever as we went along together, day after day, speaking to each other like lovers as we used to speak, and she did not seem to mind my ragged, degraded costume, or my dirty, tangled beard, but caressed me with the same tenderness as of yore.

Through the bush, down lonely gullies, over

bitter deserts and salt marshes, we passed as happy and affectionate as fond lovers could be who are newly married, and whom the world cannot part, my broken chain rattling as I staggered onwards while she smiled as if pleased with the music, because it was the chain which I was wearing for her dear sake.

Let me think for a moment—was she with me through that last desert before I came to that gloomy gully? I cannot be quite sure of that, but this I do know that she was not with me after the chill shadows of the boulders drew me into them, and I was quite alone when I stood by the water-hole looking upon that strange and silent house.

* * * *

It was singular that the house should be here at all in this far-off and as yet unnamed portion of Western Australia, for I naturally supposed that I had walked hundreds of miles since leaving the convict settlement, and as I had encountered no one, not even a single tribe of wandering blacks, it seemed impossible to believe that I was not the first white man who had penetrated so far, and yet there it loomed before me, substantial-looking in its masses, with painted weather-boards, shingles, iron-sheeting, carved posts and trellis-work, French windows, and the signs of cultivation about it, although bearing the traces of late neglect.

Was it inhabited? I next asked myself as I looked steadily at that dimly-illuminated window; seemingly it was, for as I mentally asked the

question, a darkness blotted out the light for a few moments and then moved slowly aside, while the faint pallor once more shone out; it appeared to be from the distance a window with a pale green blind drawn down, behind which a lamp turned low was burning, possibly for some invalid who was restlessly walking about, while the rest of the household slept.

Would it be well to rouse them up at this hour of the night? I next queried as I paused, watching the chimney tops from which no wreath of smoke came, for although it did not seem late, judging from the height of the moon, yet it was only natural to suppose that in this isolated place the people would retire early. Perhaps it would be better to wait where I was till morning and see what they were like before I ventured to ask hospitality from them, in my ragged yet unmistakably convict dress. I would rather go on as I was than run the risk of being dragged back to prison.

How chilly the night vapours were which rose from this large pool, for it was more like the moat from some ancient ruin than an ordinary Australian water-hole. How ominous the shadows that gathered over this dwelling, and which even the great and lustrous moon, now clear of the gable end, seemed unable to dissipate, and what a dismal effect that dimly-burning lamp behind the pale green blind gave to it.

I turned my eyes from the window to the pond from which the ghostly vapours were

steaming upwards in such strange shapes ; they crossed the reflections like grey shadows and floated over the white glitter which the moon cast down, like spectres following each other in a stately procession, curling upwards interlaced, while the gaunt trees behind them altered their shapes and looked demoniac in their fantastic outlines, shadows passing along and sending back doleful sighs, which I tried with all my might to think was the night breeze but without succeeding.

Hush ! was that a laugh that wafted from the house, a low, but blood-curdling cachinnation such as an exultant devil might utter who had witnessed his fell mischief accomplished, followed by the wail of a woman, intermixed with the cry of a child !

Ah ! what a fool I was to forget the cry of the Australian king-fisher ; of course that was it, of course, of course, but——

The shapes are thickening over that mirror-like pool, and as I look I see a woman with a chalk-white face and eyes distended in horror, with a child in her hands—a little girl—and beside them the form of a man whose face changes into two different men, one the face of death, and the other like that of a demon with glaring eyeballs, while he points from the woman and child to the sleeping pool.

What is the devil-spectre pointing at, as he laughs once more while the woman and child shrink with affright ?

The face that he himself wore a moment ago,

the face of the dead man whom I can see floating amongst that silver lustre.

* * * *

I must have fainted at the weird visions of the night before, or else I may have fallen asleep and dreamt them, for when I opened my eyes again, the morning sun was pouring over the landscape and all appeared changed.

The pool was still there but it looked like a natural Australian water-hole which had been deepened and lengthened, and artificially arranged by a tasteful proprietor to beautify his estate; water-lilies grew round the edges and spread themselves in graceful patches about; it was only in the centre portion, where the moon-light had glinted and the other reflections cast themselves, that the water was clear of weeds, and there it still lay inky and dangerous-like in its depth.

Over the building itself clustered a perfect tangle of vegetable parasites, Star-of-Bethlehem, Maiden-blush roses, and Gloire-de-Dijon, passion-flowers and convolvulus, intermingling with a large grape-laden vine going to waste, and hanging about in half-wild, neglected festoons; a woman's hand had planted these tendrils, as well as the garden in front, for I could see that flowers predominated.

As for the house itself, it still stood silent and deserted-looking, the weather-boards had shrunk a good deal with the heat of many suns beating upon them, while the paint, once tasteful in its varied tints, was bleached into dry powder; the

trellis-work also on the verandah had in many places been torn away by the weight of the clinging vines, and between the window-frames and the windows yawned wide fissures where they had shrunk from each other.

I looked round at the landscape, but could see no trace of sheep, cattle, nor humanity; it spread out a sun-lit solitude where Nature, for a little while trained to order, had once more asserted her independent lavishness.

A little of my former awe came upon me as I stood for a few moments hesitating to advance, but at the sight of those luscious-looking bunches of grapes, which seemed to promise some fare more substantial inside, the dormant cravings for food which I had so long subdued came upon me with tenfold force, and, without more than a slight tremor of superstitious dread, I hurriedly crushed my way through the tangle of vegetation, and made for the verandah and open door of the hall.

Delicious grapes they were, as I found when, after tearing off a huge bunch, and eating them greedily, I entered the silent hall and began my exploration.

The dust and fine sand of many "*brickfielders*," *i.e.*, sand storms, lay thickly on every object inside, so that as I walked I left my footprints behind me as plainly as if I had been walking over snow. In the hall I found a handsome stand and carved table with chairs, a hat and riding-whip lay on the table, while on the rack I saw two or three coats and hats hanging,

with sticks and umbrellas beneath, all white with dust.

The dining-room door stood ajar, and as I entered I could see that it also had been undisturbed for months, if not for years. It had been handsomely furnished, with artistic hangings and stuffed leather chairs and couches, while on the elaborately carved cheffonier was a plentiful supply of spirit and wine decanters, with cut glasses standing ready for use. On the table stood a bottle of Three-star brandy, half-emptied, and by its side a water-filter and glass as they had been left by the last user.

I smelt the bottle, and found that the contents were mellow and good, and when, after dusting the top, I put it to my mouth, I discovered that the bouquet was delicious; then, invigorated by that sip, I continued my voyage of discovery.

The cheffonier was not locked, and inside I discovered rows of sealed bottles, which satisfied me that I was not likely to run short of refreshments in the liquid form at any rate, so, content with this pleasant prospect, I ventured into the other apartments.

The drawing-room was like the room I had left, a picture of comfort and elegance, when once the accumulation of dust and sand had been removed.

The library or study came next, which I found in perfect order, although I left the details for a more leisurely examination.

I next penetrated the kitchen, which I saw was comfortable, roomy and well-provided,

although in more disorder than the other rooms ; pans stood rusting in the fire-place, dishes lay dirty and in an accumulated pile on the table, as if the servants had left in a hurry and the owners had been forced to make what shifts they could during their absence.

Yet there was no lack of such provisions as an up-country station would be sure to lay in ; the pantry I found stored like a provision shop, with flitches of bacon, hams sewn in canvas, tinned meats and soups of all kinds, with barrels and bags and boxes of flour, sugar, tea and other sundries, enough to keep me going for years if I was lucky enough to be in possession.

I next went upstairs to the bedrooms, up a thickly-carpeted staircase, with the white linen overcloth still upon it. In the first room I found the bed with the bed-clothes tumbled about as if the sleeper had lately left it ; the master of the house I supposed, as I examined the wardrobe and found it well stocked with male apparel. At last I could cast aside my degrading rags, and fit myself out like a free man, after I had visited the workshop and filed my fetters from me.

Another door attracted me on the opposite side of the lobby, and this I opened with some considerable trepidation because it led into the room which I had seen lighted up the night before.

It seemed untenanted, as I looked in cautiously, and like the other bed-room was in a tumble of confusion, a woman's room, for the

dresses and underclothing were lying about, a bed-room which had been occupied by a woman and a child, for a crib stood in one corner, and on a chair lay the frock and other articles belonging to a little girl of about five or six years of age.

I looked at the window, it had venetian blinds upon it, and they were drawn up, so that my surmise had been wrong about the pale green blind, but on the end side of the room was another window with the blinds also drawn up, and thus satisfied I walked in boldly; what I had thought to be a light, had only been the moonlight streaming from the one window to the other, while the momentary blackening of the light had been caused, doubtless, by the branches of the trees outside, moved forward by the night breeze. Yes, that must have been the cause, so that I had nothing to fear, the house was deserted, and my own property, for the time at least.

There was a strange and musty odour in this bed-room, which blended with the perfume that the owner had used, and made me for a moment almost giddy, so the first thing I did was to open both windows and let in the morning air, after which I looked over to the unmade bed, and then I staggered back with a cry of horror.

There amongst the tumble of bed-clothes lay the skeletons of what had been two human beings, clad in embroidered night-dresses. One glance was enough to convince me, with my

medical knowledge, that the gleaming bones were those of a woman and a child, the original wearers of those dresses which lay scattered about.

What awful tragedy had taken place in this richly furnished but accursed house? Recovering myself, I examined the remains more particularly, but could find no clue, they were lying reposefully enough, with arms interlacing as if they had died or been done to death in their sleep, while those tiny anatomists, the ants, had found their way in, and cleaned the bones completely, as they very soon do in this country.

With a sick sensation at my heart, I continued my investigations throughout the other portions of the station. In the servants' quarters I learnt the cause of the unwashed dishes; three skeletons lay on the floor in different positions as they had fallen, while their shattered skulls proved the cause of their end, even if the empty revolver that I picked up from the floor had not been evidence enough. Some one must have entered their rooms and woke them rudely from their sleep in the night time, for they lay also in their blood-stained night-dresses, and beside them, on the boards, were dried-up markings which were unmistakable.

The rest of the house was as it had been left by the murderer or murderers. Three domestics, with their mistress and child, had been slaughtered, and then the guilty wretches had fled without disturbing anything else.

* * * * *

It was once again night, and I was still in the house which my first impulse had been to leave with all haste after the gruesome discoveries that I had made.

But several potent reasons restrained me from yielding to that impulse. I had been wandering for months, and living like a wild beast, while here I had everything to my hand which I needed to recruit my exhausted system. My curiosity was roused, so that I wanted to penetrate the strange mystery if I could, by hunting after and reading all the letters and papers that I might be able to find, and to do this required leisure; thirdly, as a medical practitioner who had passed through the anatomical schools, the presence of five skeletons did not have much effect upon me, and lastly, before sun-down the weather had broken, and one of those fierce storms of rain, wind, thunder and lightning had come on, which utterly prevented any one who had the chance of a roof to shelter him from turning out to the dangers of the night.

These were some of my reasons for staying where I was, at least the reasons that I explained to myself, but there was another and a more subtle motive which I could not logically explain, and which yet influenced me more than any of the others. *I could not leave the house, now that I had taken possession of it, or rather, if I may say it, now that the house had taken possession of me.*

I had lifted the bucket from the kitchen, and found my way to the draw-well in the back-

garden, with the uncomfortable feeling that some unseen force was compelling me to stay here. I discovered a large file and freed myself from my fetters, and then, throwing my rags from me with disgust, I clad myself in one of the suits that I found in the wardrobe upstairs, then I set to work dusting and sweeping out the dining-room, after which I lit a fire, retrimmed the lamps, and cooked a substantial meal for myself, then the storm coming on decided me, so that I spent the remainder of the afternoon making the place comfortable, and when darkness did come, I had drawn the blinds down and secured the shutters, and with a lighted lamp, a bottle of good wine, and a box of first-class cigars which I also found in the cheffonier, with a few volumes that I had taken from the book shelves at random, and an album of photographs that I picked up from the drawing-room table, I felt a different man from what I had been the night previous, particularly with that glowing log fire in the grate.

I left the half-emptied bottle of brandy where I had found it, on the table, with the used glass and water filter untouched, as I did also the chair that had been beside them. I had a repugnance to those articles which I could not overcome; the murderer had used them last, possibly as a reviver after his crimes, for by this time I had reasoned out that one hand only had been at the work, and that man's the owner of the suit which I was then wearing and which fitted me so exactly, otherwise why

should the house have been left in the condition that it was?

As I sat at the end of the table and smoked the cigar, I rebuilt the whole tragedy, although as yet the motive was not so clear, and as I thought the matter out, I turned over the leaves of the album and looked at the photographs.

Before me, on the walls, hung three oil portraits, enlargements they were, and as works of art vile things, yet doubtless they were faithful enough likenesses. In the album, I found three cabinet portraits from which the paintings had been enlarged.

They were the portraits of a woman of about twenty-six, a girl of five years, and a man of about thirty-two.

The woman was good-looking, with fresh colour, blue eyes and golden-brown hair. The girl—evidently her daughter—for the likeness was marked between the two, had one of those seraphic expressions which some delicate children have who are marked out for early death, that places them above the plane of grosser humanity. She looked, as she hung between the two portraits, with her glory of golden hair, like the guardian angel of the woman who was smiling so contentedly and consciously from her gilded frame.

The man was pallid-faced and dark, clean-shaven, all except the small black moustache, with lips which, except the artist had grossly exaggerated the colour, were excessively and

disagreeably vivid. His eyes were deep set, and glowing as if with the glitter of a fever.

"These would be the likenesses of the woman and child whose skeletons lay unburied upstairs, and that pallid-faced, feverish-eyed ghoul, the fiend who had murdered them, his wife and child," I murmured to myself as I watched the last portrait with morbid interest.

"Right and wrong, Doctor, as you medical men mostly are," answered a deep voice from the other end of the table.

I started with amazement, and looked from the painting to the vacant chair beside the brandy bottle, which was now occupied by what appeared to be the original of the picture I had been looking at, face, hair, vivid scarlet lips were identical, and the same deep-set fiery eyes, which were fixed upon me intently and mockingly.

How had he entered without my observing him? By the window? No, for that I had firmly closed and secured myself, and as I glanced at it I saw that it still remained the same. By the door? Perhaps so, although he must have closed it again after he had entered without my hearing him, as he might easily have done during one of the claps of thunder which were now almost incessant, as were the vivid flashes of wild fire or lightning that darted about, while the rain lashed against the shutters outside.

He was dripping wet, as I could see, so that he must have come from that deluge, bare-

headed and dripping, with his hair and moustache dragging over his glistening, ashy cheeks and bluish chin, as if he had been submerged in water, while weeds and slime hung about his saturated garments; a gruesome sight for a man who fancied himself alone to see start up all of a sudden, and no wonder that it paralyzed me and prevented me from finding the words I wanted at the moment. Had he lain hidden somewhere watching me take possession of his premises, and being, as solitary men sometimes are, fond of dramatic effect, slipped in while my back was turned from the door to give me a surprise? If so he had succeeded, for I never before felt so craven-spirited or horror-stricken, my flesh was creeping and my hair bristling, while my blood grew to ice within me. The very lamp seemed to turn dim, and the fire smouldered down on the hearth, while the air was chill as a charnel vault, as I sat with shivering limbs and chattering teeth before this evil visitor.

Outside, the warring elements raged and fought, shaking the wooden walls, while the forked flames darted between us, lighting up his face with a ghastly effect. He must have seen my horror, for he once more laughed that low, malicious chuckle that I had heard the night before, as he again spoke.

"Make yourself at home, Doctor, and try some of this cognac instead of that washy stuff you are drinking. I am only sorry that I cannot join you in it, but I cannot *just yet*."

I found words at last and asked him questions, which seemed impertinent in the extreme, considering where I was.

"Who are you? Where do you come from? What do you want?"

Again that hateful chuckle, as he fixed his burning eyes upon me with a regard which fascinated me in spite of myself.

"Who am I, do you ask? Well, before you took possession of this place I was its owner. Where do I come from? From out of there last."

He pointed backwards towards the window, which burst open as he uttered the words, while through the driving rain a flash of lightning seemed to dart from his outstretched finger and disappear into the centre of the lake, then after that hurried glimpse, the shutters clashed together again and we were as before.

"What do I want? You, for lack of a better."

"What do you want with me?" I gasped.

"To make you myself."

"I do not understand you, what are you?"

"At present nothing, yet with your help, I shall be a man once more, while you shall be free and rich, for you shall have more gold than you ever could dream of."

"What can I do for you?"

"Listen to my story and you will see. Ten years ago I was a successful gold finder, the trusting husband of that woman, and the fond father of that girl. I had likewise a friend

whom I trusted, and took to live with me as a partner. We lived here together, my friend, myself, my wife and my daughter, for I was romantic and had raised this house to be close to the mine which I had discovered, and which I will show you if you consent to my terms.

"One night my friend murdered me and pitched my body into that water-hole, where the bones still lie. He did this because he coveted my wife and my share of the money."

I was calm now, but watchful, for it appeared that I had to deal with a madman.

"In my lifetime I had been a trusting and guileless simpleton, but no sooner was my spirit set free than vengeance transformed its nature. I hovered about the place where all my affections had been centred, watching him beguile the woman who had been mine until he won her. She waited three years for me to return, and then she believed his story that I had been killed by the natives, and married him. They travelled to where you came from, to be married, and I followed them closely, for that was the chance I waited upon. The union of those two once accomplished he was in my power for ever, for this had established the link that was needed for me to take forcible possession of him."

"And where was his spirit meantime?" I asked, to humour the maniac.

"In my grasp also, a spirit rendered impotent by murder and ingratitude; a spirit which I

could do with as I pleased, so long as the wish I had was evil. I took possession of his body, the mirage of which you see now, and from that moment until the hour that our daughter rescued her from his clutches, he made the life of my former wife a hell on earth. I prompted his murder-embued spirit to madness, leaving him only long enough to himself after I had braced him up to do the deed of vengeance."

"How did the daughter save the mother?"

"By dying with her, and by her own purity tearing the freed spirit from my clutches. I did not intend the animal to do all that he did, for I wanted the mother only, but once the murder lust was on him, I found that he was beyond my influence. He slew the two by poison, as he had done me, then, frenzied, he murdered the servants, and finally exterminated himself by flinging himself into the pool. That was why I said that I came last from out of there, where both my own remains and his lie together."

"Yes, and what is my share in this business?"

"To look on me passively for a few moments, as you are at present doing, that is all I require."

I did not believe his story about his being only a mirage or spectre, for he appeared at this moment corporal enough to do me a considerable amount of bodily harm, and therefore to humour him, until I could plan a way to over-

power him, I fixed my eyes upon his steadfastly, as he desired.

Was I falling asleep, or being mesmerized by this homicidal lunatic? As he glared at me with those fiery orbs and an evil contortion curling the blood-red lips, while the forked lightning played around him, I became helpless. He was creeping slowly towards me as a cat might steal upon a mouse, and I was unable to move, or take my eyes from his eyes which seemed to be charming my life-blood from me, when suddenly I heard the distant sound of music, through a lull of the tempest, the rippling of a piano from the drawing-room with the mingling of a child's silvery voice as it sang its evening hymn, and at the sound his eyes shifted while he fell back a step or two, with an agonized spasm crossing his ghastly and dripping wet face.

Then the hurricane broke loose once more, with a resistless fury, while the door and window burst open, and the shutters were dashed into the room.

I leapt to my feet in a paroxysm of horror, and sprang towards the open door with that demon, or maniac, behind me.

Merciful heavens! the drawing-room was brilliantly lighted up, and there, seated at the open piano, was the woman whose bones I had seen bleaching upstairs, with the seraphic-faced child singing her hymn.

Out to the tempest I rushed madly, and heedless of where I went, so that I escaped from

that accursed and haunted house, on, past the water-hole and into the glade, where I turned my head back instinctively, as I heard a wilder roar of thunder and the crash as if a tree had been struck.

What a flash that was which lighted up the scene and showed me the house collapsing as an erection of cards. It went down like an avalanche before that zig-zag flame, which seemed to lick round it for a moment, and then disappear into the earth.

Next instant I was thrown off my feet by the earthquake that shook the ground under me, while, as I still looked on where the house had been, I saw that the ruin had caught fire, and was blazing up in spite of the torrents that still poured down, and as it burned, I saw the mound sink slowly out of sight, while the reddened smoke eddied about in the same strange shapes which the vapours had assumed the night before, scarlet ghosts of the demon and his victims.

* * * * *

Two months after this, I woke up to find myself in a Queensland back-country station. They had found me wandering in a delirious condition over one of their distant runs six weeks before my return to consciousness, and as they could not believe that a pedestrian, without provisions, could get over that unknown stretch of country from Fremantle, they paid no attention to my ravings about being an escaped convict, particularly as the rags I had

on could never have been prison made. Learning, however, that I had medical knowledge, by the simple method of putting it to the test, my good rescuers set me up in my old profession, where I still remain—a Queensland back-country doctor.

The Odic Touch.

I HAD been working hard, too hard, to keep up with the fierce competition of modern times, striving to advance in my art, do something better than my last effort, and keep at bay the many enemies which a man unconsciously makes who is climbing up the hill of life and I felt wearied with the struggle and almost inclined to sit down and let who liked reach the summit before me, when I received an invitation to spend Christmas with my old friend Dr. Grignor at his place in North Wales.

Dr. Grignor had, twenty years before, introduced himself to me in rather a peculiar fashion, and since then, although we had not met often, we had kept up a pretty constant communication in which, as far as the obligations of friendship are concerned, I was entirely his debtor; for as he began by serving, so he continued to help, advise and warn me whenever I required either of those services the most, without ever giving me an opportunity of repaying one of those favours, but this I did not mind, because ours was the kind of friendship which sometimes exists between the strong and the weak, and which is of too fraternal a character to count favours received as a burden, for it is only when we begin to consider equivalents that our affection has become a limited emotion.

It was in Auckland, New Zealand, that we first met. I had landed there some weeks before, almost penniless and without much of an aim in life, when one night as I was sitting on the wharf, looking broodingly upon the moonlit waves and wondering for what purpose Fate had driven me here, suddenly I felt a light touch on my knee, and on looking to that side saw a grave-looking man of about thirty-five, who had placed himself close to me, with his hand resting lightly and as if accidentally on my knee.

In my morose state of mind I might have resented this liberty from any one else, only as the delicate hand touched me I seemed to have found the clue I had been so long and vainly in search of. Auckland disappeared with its troubles and I was tracing a probable future out of the silver ripples that danced before me; I also seemed to see the folly of my past and present life, with the unreality of those friendships which had led me astray. It was as if my soul had woke up for the first time, and was looking out of windows which had hitherto been closely blinded.

A momentary panorama swept before me of the past, present, and future while that hand rested upon my knee, then it was withdrawn, while I came back to my normal condition with a purpose added to my experience, and began to study my stranger companion with a sudden interest.

He was a thin, sallow-faced man, with black

eyes, and clean-shaven, and when he spoke, his voice sounded gentle and soft.

"Yes, you have been wasting your time here, for although Nature is bountiful to all men it is only the workers who can enjoy her gifts; you must leave to-morrow."

"I don't know you, sir," I replied, thinking about the impossibility of me leaving New Zealand without a cent to pay my passage anywhere.

"My name is Grignor, Dr. Grignor, and your friend if you will permit me to be so, John Gray, or rather I am your friend already; go on board that vessel to-night, which is loaded and ready to sail for England; you are expected on board as a passenger."

"But I have no money and only the clothes I sit in, Dr. Grignor."

"You will find all that you require when you get on board; mention your name, and the steward will show you your cabin and trunks."

It was like a page out of the "Arabian Nights" to me, the homeless, penniless and almost starving outcast, to hear that my desires had been accomplished without an effort on my part, and in a dazed way I looked towards the ship which he pointed out, forgetting to utter a word of thanks or enquiry as to how he knew me and his reasons for helping me in this extremity.

It was a fine clipper, moored alongside of the wharf and a little way from me, and after taking in her proportions I turned once more to my new

friend, to discover the place vacant ; he had left me silently while my gaze had been concentrated on the vessel, and although the wharf was a long one and at this hour almost deserted, I was astonished that he could have disappeared so quickly, and rose with an eerie feeling as if I had been conversing with a spirit.

It was not without a tremor of doubt that I crossed the gangway and made my way toward the cabin, at the companion of which I saw a figure smoking a cigar. It seemed ridiculous for me to be there, and I paused to think how I would announce myself, when the smoker, who turned out to be the steward, saved me the trouble by addressing me instead.

"Are you our passenger, Mr. Gray, sir?"

"Yes," I replied, my doubts beginning to give way to amazement.

"The captain is expecting you to-night, as we start early in the morning ; you will find him below."

"And my luggage?" I stammered.

"Is all in your berth," answered the steward.

"Thanks."

I found the captain enjoying a late supper with his mates and one or two friends who had come to wish him *bon voyage* ; my seat had been kept empty for me and they welcomed me with respect for I was the only passenger he had on this homeward passage.

Seeing my name on a card by the side of my plate, I did not trouble myself with any uncomfortable surmises, but murmuring a private

prayer of thanks to God and my unknown benefactor, I fell to, with the appetite of a starving young man who had not encountered such a supper for many days.

Upon retiring that night the steward handed to me a sealed packet which had been left for me by my beneficent friend, Dr. Grignor, which, when I opened, I found to contain a purse with fifty sovereigns and a bunch of keys (the keys of the three travelling trunks which were ranged out for my inspection), and the receipt for my passage to London; so that I had no further need to bother my head about the position I was to hold on board ship, or the first months after I landed.

Perhaps it would have been better had this friend not acted kind Providence quite so completely, better for my independence I mean, yet I had done so little with my past freedom, that the change was a decidedly pleasant one to what my former uncertainty had been.

We had a fairly good voyage, take it all in all, with the tempests, doldrums, and calms, and at last I found myself with three well-stocked trunks in the great city where men come to carve their fortunes, which holds everything that a man can desire, which seems everything to him at the distance, and which swallows and wipes out so many hopes and visions.

With the fifty pounds which I possessed I fancied that nothing was impossible to me, and therefore I plunged recklessly into the battle; recklessly and with as much wisdom as a child

might possess who has been left on a doorstep by his unfeeling or desperate mother.

I was once more alone, or fancied that I was, and with my own fate in my hands; the fifty pounds did not last long, although I was wonderfully penurious over the spending of it, yet it melted away while I tried to open door after door without success, until I came once again to the position that I had been in in New Zealand, with the River Thames to sit and watch instead of Auckland Bay. I was a failure.

One day, I was in the National Gallery, trying to comfort myself with the glories of Turner in lieu of breakfast and dinner, when I felt once more the odic touch on my arm, and, on looking round, I encountered the deep, earnest eyes of my friend, Dr. Grignor.

"You require me once more, John Gray, therefore I have come to you."

"What is the use of it, Dr. Grignor?" I replied. "I have tried and failed."

"Not so, my friend, you have only begun, you have mastered a little of life, but you do not know your own powers yet, but that knowledge will come in time."

As he spoke, the blinds were once more lifted from the windows behind which sat my soul, so that I saw where I had gone wrong; I had been frantically pushing and crushing behind a crowd, all eager as I was to get into a narrow space, as we may see any day on Westminster or Blackfriars Bridges, the mass striving to get

a half-penny omnibus, forty people seeking to get into the place which can only hold ten, and not one with the wisdom to stand aside and wait his chance or walk on. It was my selfishness and imitation which had made my efforts failures.

"Yes, the best way over the bridge is the way you make for yourself, without crushing over your neighbour; it looks the longest and most laborious, yet it is your own; take that, and you will reach the other side in plenty of time."

That was nearly twenty years before the day of my invitation, but I tried to follow the track which was then pointed out by my friend, and wait patiently, while I worked steadily in the profession that I had chosen.

I never knew Dr. Grignor more intimately than on our first and second interviews; he came to me without warning at some serious crises of my life, and set me right after I had tried my own methods without success; until at last I grew to expect the quiet presence, and perhaps owned his supremacy by praying or unconsciously wishing for him at the desperate moment. I had experienced his wonderful gifts and beneficent mind so often, that at last I grew to depend entirely upon his help at the critical pause, and went forward with the boldness of a blind man under the guidance of one who sees ahead for him, without questioning why the guide is taking all this trouble for one so incapable.

Slowly, and through innumerable difficulties,

I had made my way, hopelessly stumbling on, under the impression that I was doing nothing all these long and weary years, that the world knew me not, and only at occasional times, when my friend came to me and with his touch made me see, for a brief second, the real progress which I had made.

At last my hour had come, and the world that did not know anything about these many years of gnawing disappointments and delays, said that John Gray had risen with startling rapidity. My work was recognised at last, while it needed no lifting of the blinds to see the future now. I was a lucky fellow, people remarked, and friends gathered round me in shoals with smiling lips and congratulating words, yet with eyes which looked watchfully and strangely upon me, and at this point my friend came to me once more.

"You have reached the most dangerous period of your life, John Gray; the time when you must take your choice either to sit down contented with your prison walls and shaded windows, or else sit on the ruins and see all round you. Which will you have, contented illusion or relentless vision?"

"Which is the best for me, my friend?"

"Reality is always the best, although it does not give content."

"Then let me have reality," I answered promptly.

Dr. Grignor was a man of vast learning and occult power, and I could not but regard my-

self as entirely his creation; he had watched over me for long years, enveloping me with his influence; without attempting to bias me in any way, he left me free to follow my own bent and only pointed out a fresh direction after the path which I had pursued had become hopelessly blocked up.

Time appeared to be no object to him, as far as I was concerned, and he was always ready to congratulate me upon my failures; indeed he seemed to be better pleased with these results than with the evanescent successes which served to flatter my vanity and cloud my vision.

I had no knowledge of the amount of his fortune, or from whence he obtained his money; it was only when the lack of money meant annihilation to my hopes, that he came to my rescue, and he never gave me more than just enough to cross the gap which yawned before me, for all the rest I was left to my own exertions; also until this Christmas which I speak about, he had not told me where or how he lived.

He left me after this conversation, pleased, I think, at my resolve to grasp knowledge rather than slavish contentment, and I went on with my work, satisfied that when I was ready he would fulfil his promise.

Men said I was lucky, and I felt myself to be so, not because I was beginning to be recognised, but because I had one so powerful at my back; true my talents were my own, but it was

the proud consciousness of this secret power and supporter that imparted to me the patience which was so needful to ultimate success.

It might have been the fruit of long experience or some strange force which passed from my friend to me, but as I moved about nothing escaped my observation, and my instinct was almost infallible when I trusted to it alone. At this stage I could read the envy of those watchful eyes, and the hatred of those smiling lips which greeted me at every turn; I had only to touch the arms of the ones who were protesting, and they at once began to tell me their real intentions towards me, my rivals and enemies revealed their plots against me, and told me what misfortunes had overtaken them since they began to work me evil. I was now walking through a world where men and women were ranged about me with crystal bodies, through which I could read their motives at a glance.

I had this power as long as I remained inactive and uninterested towards them, but with my passionate inclinations I had also the power of making this crystal opaque, so that I could not penetrate past the surface of those I flung my friendship over, and as I could not live without affection I found myself continually trying to crush my instinct and glean comfort from the affections, also continually being betrayed and frustrated and misunderstood. I would not look at the man whom I had made up my mind to like, until I had drawn over him

the cloak of my affection, and therefore when he betrayed me I was enraged, whereas I need not have been; but it felt so lonely to be always reading minds and recoiling from them, that I preferred the after agony for the hour or two of comfort.

It was at the hour of my deepest dejection that this invitation came from my one friend, Dr. Grignor. I had been clinging long to one of these opaqued crystals, a man who had a winning manner and a truthful mask, but who every hour unconsciously bared his falseness for my inspection; all round me I saw his accomplices and tools, as transparent as I could have wished, and while counteracting their conspiracies, which originated from him, I persisted in my affection and trust for him, making all sorts of excuses and going out of my way to change the semblance of affection into reality.

In vain I tried, out of pity, when I had no longer trust, to warm up the ice of that opaque crystal, and when, at last, I had to abandon him to the curse of his malice, for I had drawn from him, by my contact, all his powers of hurting me, I felt overcome with the struggle and isolation. He was doomed, I knew, as others had been before him, who had pitted themselves against me with this supernatural influence which had been about me since that night in Auckland. I had only to abandon him to his fate, and disaster would overtake him, which neither of us could stop after the fiat had gone forth.

A profound sorrow for the fate of this doomed

man crushed upon me, as I took my place in the train bound for Wales, something akin to the grief which burdened the days of the Wandering Jew, when he left his unwilling curse behind him, a gloom of desolation in my heart, which was in harmony with the wintry day outside.

Through a landscape, beautiful in summer time, but now veiled by the swirling snow-storm, we swept as fast as steam could drive us, with the carriage shaking and swaying as the wild blasts, flake-laden, dashed against the windows, and covered them up with that white density.

Two men and one woman occupied the same carriage, and as I looked at the shivering objects through that obscurity, their actual features disappeared and I could see their spirits sitting nude before me, while they told me all their intentions and past actions.

The woman was going home to comfort the hearts of her aged parents, and dazzle their eyes with her rich costumes and ladylike appearance, gained at such a fearful sacrifice; she had left her native village a servant-girl and was going back decked like a duchess, with a pack of lies which would send them to their graves happy and proud that they had such a daughter. As I looked at this poor, wrecked soul, preparing itself for the ordeal of deceit, it appeared to grow luminous with the brightness of its motives, and to warm with its unselfish affection that chill atmosphere.

One of the men was young, and had appeared good-looking at the first glance at his features, but as they disappeared I saw the spirit sitting within him, old and shrivelled; he also was bent on a mission of deceit to his home circle, but there was no brightness about him.

The other was a sailor coming home from a long voyage, his spirit was that of a child without a care. I bent my head before the woman, and turned from the young old man, to play with the soul of the sailor.

At the station my friend met me with a dog-cart, and together we drove through a wild country with the tempest of snow-flakes dancing round like white elves. His house was a lonely one, perched half-way up the sides of a mountain with the windows all to the front, while the back portion had been excavated into the hill, it was a long house of one storey and stood alone in the midst of a forest of pine and birch trees, just the kind of site which I would suppose a man like Dr. Grignor would fix upon as a retreat.

We were received by an Indian when we arrived, and after my friend had seen to the horse's comfort, we sat down to supper, still waited upon by the same dark-hued servant, who appeared to be the only other inhabitant of this singular household.

I knew that my friend had brought me for a special purpose to this place and therefore I waited anxiously to learn what he would say and do, thinking little about my surroundings

or of what we were partaking. As soon as I had finished eating, he said as he rose :

"Now come with me, my friend, to my study."

I followed him passively to a room at the back of the house which was rounded like a cave, with no windows ; over the doorway by which we entered fell a thick carpet of oriental stuff, while in the centre stood a brazier containing live charcoal.

"Sit there, my friend," said Dr. Grignor, pointing to a stone chair near the brazier.

I sat down as he desired me, while he stood in front of me, as the Indian who had followed us threw something into the brazier which flamed up with a rosy light and filled the room or cave with a strange perfume.

"I have given you the gift of seeing things as they are, my friend, also the power to influence the lives of those who come in contact with you, for good or evil ; hitherto it has been good to those who have befriended you, and evil to those who have wronged you ; this is the natural plane of humanity, but you have now come to a point, where you can control these destinies as you may desire at a sacrifice to yourself. Look at both sides of the picture, and decide for yourself which gift you shall take, the gift of power or the gift of sacrifice."

As the Doctor spoke, the Indian threw some fresh powder on the fire, and as I watched the flames rising and the perfumed smoke curling round like a silver frame, I saw a picture of my false friend destitute and in rags, with his

starving children around him, while I sat crowned with success and surrounded with wealth.

"That is power and revenge," whispered my friend, while a thrill of triumph shot through me at the pleasant prospect, tempered with a feeling of commiseration for my overthrown enemy.

The Indian flung another powder into the flames and another picture rose up inside the silver-smoke-frame, my false friend surrounded by luxury and myself in rags watching his exalted state from the outside.

"That is sacrifice and abnegation," whispered my guide as the picture vanished, "Take your choice, John Gray."

Was it his presence which saved me, with the touch of his hand as it clasped mine after a moment of hesitation on my part, while my passions surged up, and ambition, with anger, gripped at my heart like the talons of a vulture, or had my twenty years of struggle prepared me for this test moment? As I made my choice the features of Dr. Grignor grew luminous with a divine light ere he disappeared in that silver mist.

An Ocean Dream.

CHAPTER I.

THE TEMPEST.

"The streets were frozen hard, and they cut the naked hand,
The decks were like a slide where a seaman scarce could
stand!"

"Christmas at Sea. (Ballads.)"—By R. C. STEVENSON.

SHE was nearing Cape Horn, that is, the good old Aberdonian clipper *Christiana*, which carried as passengers Ralf Grimshaw and a little French officer from the convict colony of Cayenne, coming home on sick leave, who had occupied most of his time trying to master English with the aid of a dictionary and Sir Walter Scott's romance "Waverley."

Ralf Grimshaw, artist, age twenty-two, means uncertain, hopes infinite and blood considerably thinned by mosquito bites and a lengthened sojourn in tropical countries, in figure also he was elongated and fragile, so that as the wind freshened day by day it took him most of his time to keep himself from being blown overboard whenever he ventured on deck.

It had been hot summer when he left Sydney, and gradually he had put on shirt after shirt, and suit over suit of his light colonial clothing, in the vain effort to keep out the cold, increasing

with such fearful rapidity and intensity as they ploughed through the antarctic waters.

He had been abroad for nine years, and during that time had not seen ice thicker than a sixpence, but he is both seeing and feeling it now with a vengeance; the seamen come down from the rigging hanging masses of icicles, the briny waves, as they break over the gunwales, crack and shiver into pieces like glass sheets upon the deck, the foam rattles down like masses of coral, and the spray strikes like hail against the smarting cheeks as it dashes against them.

Ralf Grimshaw is utterly demoralized by this unaccustomed cold; he courts the black cook assiduously, and almost lives in his galley, and will not be driven out by that functionary in spite of his African taunts and American curses—even the roasted cayenne pepper only sends him choking away for a little while—that glowing stove has too great a fascination for him to be able to resist its vicinity.

Day after day the wind blows harder and colder as they drive south, until even the captain admits that they are in for a furious gale; the waves rise in too dense masses any longer to freeze, they deluge the decks and drown the fires in the galley—thus misery sets in unutterable.

"I say, Grimshaw, come down and help me to draw the rum from the store, it's warmer down there than anywhere." This from the third mate, who is passing with his measure at

the moment Ralf emerges from, or rather gets washed out of the cook's premises.

They stagger along the slippery deck, with their clothing stiff as paste-boards, and for a moment feel like getting into Paradise as they leave the cutting blast outside and breathe the warm if damp and musty atmosphere of the dark provision store between decks.

"Take a good swig while you're at it, Grimshaw, there's nothing like rum for curing the cold."

Ralf follows the advice of his friend the young mate and purser, and drinks in until he has forgotten the present, and now he has managed to get under his crackling blankets in the cabin, sleeping heavily and dreaming that he is once again in sunny Australia, while the ship rolls and groans wearily under him and the waves rise savagely as the hours pass on.

All at once he wakes up, choking with salt water and slushy ice paste; a wild struggle, the flinging up of arms aimlessly, and then the water rushes from his head and he gasps for life.

The waves are pouring along the passage into the saloon, breaking in the doors, tossing the harmonium of the captain like an orange from end to end, until the sides part and the keys float loosely amongst other flotsam going to waste.

Ralf Grimshaw and the other passenger—the French officer—make up portion of that waste, and as they toss aimlessly about with the drift, mixing with the mashed potatoes and dissolving

flour from the steward's pantry, while plates, cruet-stands, salt-cellars and glasses are transformed into animation and rush recklessly to their destruction.

Then, after a while, the half-drowned passengers manage to clear the soup-like mess from their smarting eyes and see dimly, as through a dark glass, their surroundings.

Ralf Grimshaw hangs on like grim despair to the burst-in door, and swings about, as it does, to every roll of the ship; the steward still floats about, making frantic clutches at the legs of the table as he passes; the second mate has jammed himself against the sides of the passage with the water waist-high rushing past him, while the little French officer, having climbed upon the table—as the doomed races choose the highest mountains in the time of the great deluge—clings, like a half-drowned rat, dripping to the brass rods of the ceiling, a soaking cigarette between his chattering teeth and the infinite misery of a hopeless despair making his claret-tinted visage purple as a ripe plum.

Then down the companion steps from the deck rolls the swarthy old skipper, and as he looks at the severed keyboard and floating pieces of his pet instrument, with which he was wont to beguile a spare hour, he snorts heavily like a bull-walrus, and says, wearily:

"Pick up the bits, lad, as carefully as you can; and as for you, Grimshaw, if you can face the open air, come up on deck if you want to see a real Cape Horn wave!"

As the planks were for the moment quiet enough to permit Ralf Grimshaw to leave his anchorage, he stumbled after the captain to the top of the companion way, where he could get a sight of the ocean, while before him were three sailors, clinging to, rather than controlling, the wheel.

Behind them reared a dense black precipice of water, butting cliffs that rose far above the lower yards and toppled over their heads, solid and straight as a wall, rushing after them with the deadly speed of an express train, growing every instant bigger: bending every instant further over them, casting its great shadow—the dark shadow of death—along the poop, main deck and portions of the forecastle, and leaving only the straining, ice-clogged sheets and bulging sails at the bow glittering like snow in that ghastly sunshine.

The vessel is head-reaching, and running a stern race with death; all their hopes are centred in the torn narrow strips of bulging dark canvas on the upper yards, and the two glittering ribbons at the jibs, if they are blown away, then farewell to hope and England, for ten thousand solid tons will fall upon them, and in an instant dash them to atoms without a whole plank left to tell of their dismal doom in that icy, antarctic ocean.

They are sliding gradually down the sides of a steep mountain as they drive along, a mountain which races under as they fly over it, with fearful velocity—a mountain as smooth

as glass, with the surge steadfast on its breast, and the ice-lumps and frozen spike ends pointing as if stationary towards the base, never swerving from their lightning course towards the gulf, the weather worn hull are reflected over the lumps, and with the darkness far down to that gulf of whirling and boiling spume.

In front of them rears another great wall of water, spreading out triangularly and solid as that wall closing in behind, only instead of being black with shadow, it glitters greenly with the glare of the white, mid-day sun, while the sky above it is flashing like a polished steel shield, clear, coldly blue, gloating in sunshine and pitiless.

The three men at the wheel keep staring upon the compass-box in front of them, their oilskins close up to their throats and their sou'westers tied down over their ears, their teeth firmly clenched beneath their tangled and frozen moustaches and their dusky cheeks pallid with the intense cold.

And through all this ominous stillness, for they cannot hear the wind which swells out the canvas, the hardy old skipper never utters a word, but stands in front of them and motions with his arm the direction they have to give to the wheel. He stands facing them and the black enemy behind, with his grey eyes fixed sternly upon the three forward bent heads, and a brace of pistols in his hands, ready to blow out the brains of the first who may be tempted to look behind him on what rushes after them,

and so become nerveless and loosen his grasp of the spokes.

"You've been here about long enough," hoarsely roared the captain into Ralf Grimshaw's ear, after a moment on deck. "Get below while you have time—before we have reached the trough of this wave."

Ralf turns to obey the order of the skipper, but he is spared the trouble, for the vessel has reached the foot of the billow, and is now amongst the boiling fury of the spume, and rushing butt at the greeny-white wall that wedges them in. A savage yell of torn-up waters rings through his brains as he is caught up and flung head first down the companion steps, an ocean avalanche about and after him.

The steward, poor fellow, had found his legs and been moved by the natural curiosity of the landsman to have a look also at the great wave, and at the precise instant of that hasty descent, had been slowly climbing the steps.

Unfortunate curiosity for him, although providential for the more lucky Ralf Grimshaw, for the head of the one met the mouth of the other with such resistless force, that while Ralf was half-stunned by the concussion, three of the front teeth of the steward were knocked out as swiftly as if they had been a false set, as they both shot downwards into the confusion of the crowded saloon, amongst the remnants of flour dishes and harmonium, where, along with the little French officer from Cayenne, and the

general rubbish, they wallowed and danced about from end to end.

And after them broke wave behind wave like an ocean being emptied out, covering them all up, and filling the saloon to the ceiling, while they choked and fought madly for breath, swallowing quarts of brine before they finally gave it up.

CHAPTER II.

THE CATASTROPHE.

"Now, mark you, Jack, even a sailor is but flesh and blood."

—R. BUCHANAN.

WHEN life came back, or rather the consciousness of their misery, the vessel had passed through that valley of death and left in her rear those three great mountains of waves now dashed into pieces.

The dauntless old skipper having completed his most trying task, had resigned his post to the first mate, and was now again in the saloon toiling his way waist deep in water to his comfortless cabin.

For the past two days that the gale had raged he had watched on deck, drinking every half hour a pint of champagne, a habit of his when on extra duty, and he had now completed his long vigil with this most daring and splendid strategy of seamanship, cutting literally through

the deadly wedge, and guessing the tiniest wave by instinct, as being the only way out of the awful trap, so that while the passengers and steward were struggling for breath in the saloon, the vessel had been driving through the midst of the ocean propelled only by the impetus of her former speed.

Now, once again caught up by the terrific blast, she was flying over the lessening waves at a rate which could hardly be calculated.

A very few seconds had done all this, although it seemed long enough to the sufferers, and while they were still trying to find out which was the warmest under the water or out of it, a hoarse call from above startled them all into sudden activity, a cry appalling to every ear that heard it.

“Man overboard.”

In an instant the saloon was deserted and the freezing deck occupied by a little crowd of excited men, the sense of feeling cold banished from every nerve in that tingling thrill of sickened horror.

There he was already miles behind them, striking out bravely, although weighed down with his oilskins and heavy sea-boots, in full sight of every one on deck, while they could only watch his vain efforts and see him sink, as the vessel, like a startled swallow, darted from him along the ocean, one of the three brave fellows who had been at the wheel.

On she flew, and he became a dark brown spot amidst that waste of steel-blue waters ; onwards

she flew, while those who watched, waited with the gloom of death upon them and their hearts' yearnings in their eyes; onwards, without the power to stop, although forty thousand souls depended upon it instead of one; with the sunny blue sky overhead, and the seething masses of tumbling billows around and scurrying after them

Onward, onward, and the dusky spot has become a hazy purple speck in the clear distance; and onward, onward, and the purple speck has become blue and microscopic; onward, and the blue-purple point has vanished into the general cold blue of the heaving, ice-charged waves.

"Who was it?" asked the skipper, as he drew his wet hand across his blurred eyes, when the last had been seen of the doomed sailor.

"Charley the Swede," replied the boatswain huskily.

"Poor fellow!"

"Ay, sir. He was to have been spliced this time if he had reached home, but I know'd that he would never see home."

"How could you know, boatswain?"

"'Cos I dreamt it thrice running, and he carried the marks of it on him."

"Tut, man, that kind of nonsense is exploded long since," growled the captain.

"Perhaps so, sir; only that it was so."

"Hush, man, it's downright blasphemy at such a time. Say, rather, that the Almighty

had fore-ordained it, and His will be done, Amen."

"Amen be it, sir. I ain't agoing to say that the Almighty hadn't His fingers in the pie, only I will stick to it that I knowed about it also."

"And, if so, why did you not warn the young man?"

"I did, sir, last time I dreamt it, I told the lads there all about it as well, as they can back me up if so be as they likes."

"Ay, ay, sir. The boatswain is right in his yarn. He told us all that Charley would never see his sweetheart again," cried two or three of the men in a chorus.

"It's very strange, but there are strange things happen at sea that do not happen ashore. But come, lads, who are not on watch, into the cabin, and let us read a verse for the poor lad's soul."

Then all who were not wanted on deck followed the old skipper, and with the reverence which sailors are proverbial for, they listened, with uncovered heads, while the master read over the service for the dead, muttering the responses when they came to them, while the wind howled around them, and the planks creaked and groaned dismally.

They all listened as he read and prayed, with the cold water rolling over their boots, as the ship lurched heavily from side to side; prayed, with chattering teeth and hearts heavy as lead, each mourner moved more there, in that swamped cabin, than ever cathedral service,

with its mighty organ, could have moved them, for the music of this service was the wailing of waters, half-spent with their late fury, waters wailing over the destruction they had wrought in their insanity, accompanied by the mournful shrieking of that dying blast.

After they had finished, each went forth in silence, the sailors to their forecabin to think it out, the second and third mates into the captain's cabin to consult, and the two passengers to their ice-starched blankets.

We must all sleep, whether we are miserable, or whether we are happy, or else we would go mad. We lie down and toss about, or sit up and shiver, thinking that sleep has left us. Then, even as we are thinking or wishing for it, we merge into slumber as we do into death, without the consciousness of how it comes upon us.

That evening, as the daylight faded from the sky, and the waves heaved lumpy and black, the conditions were about as unfavourable for sleep as they could possibly have been. Ralf Grimshaw was drenched to the skin, or would have been if his clothes had not frozen stiff upon him. So also were his bed, box, and all it contained, drenched and ice-locked, so that there was no inducement for him to attempt to undress had it been possible, yet so fagged out was he with the excitement and dangers and discomfort, that no sooner had he laid his head down, than he forgot it all and felt warm, for he was asleep.

CHAPTER III.

A STRANGE DREAM.

"They came and passed, and backward flew,
Like floods of blossoms gliding on."

RALF GRIMSHAW had a very strange dream on this night after the tempest. He dreamt that the third mate came into his cabin and called upon him to get up as quickly as he could.

As he rose and looked back at the bunk which he had left, he saw his body still lying there as if asleep.

His fellow passenger's cabin was opposite to his and as he passed the open door he glanced in and saw the little Frenchman lying on his back, yet when he entered the saloon, he found him standing there with one or two of the sailors as if waiting on the mate and him.

They were all ghastly pale, and upon him remarking this and enquiring what was the matter, the mate told him to look at his own face, which he did in the panel mirror nearest to him, when he discerned that he was like the others, white as chalk and bloodless.

"Make haste," cried the mate impatiently and at the words they all passed on to the deck. Ralf did not ask why they were to make haste, or where they were going, with his last question his curiosity seemed to be at rest, or rather as if he knew all about it.

From the deck, they drifted into the night ; he noticed, as they passed along, that the half moon was lying on its back, wallowing amongst dark clouds as the vessel behind them lay wallowing in heaving masses of dark waters, a very faint glitter fell down the sides of the waves, and danced under their feet.

The vessel was out of sight, when from the glittering line of moon-lustre rose the drowned sailor and joined their ranks without a word of explanation on his part, or surprise on theirs, and so in company they went along.

The half moon was still behind them, but now the stars were coming out, more and more luminous from a cloudless sky, while the waves were settling into repose until they only rose and fell with gentle murmurings.

Suddenly a glare of light fell over the waters and faded out again, and then Ralf knew where they were.

The white fringe of surf against the black shadow of the beetling cliffs as they entered Sydney Heads, and then the countless gas jets of the city flashing and rippling over the harbour greeted him like old friends.

After this, he neither looked to right nor left, but passed eagerly on, each familiar street or building being noticed. He no longer saw any of his shipmates, but felt alone amongst the crowds of pedestrians, the cabs on the street, and the brilliantly-lighted shop windows, still open, for he saw from a clock over a watch-maker's door that it was quite early.

When he reached the house where he had last lived, he did not knock at or open the door, but went in as he had gone over the waves, easily and unconsciously.

He was once more near to those friends whom he had left not so many weeks before, and as he hurried from room to room, memory became active, and from the sight of trifling objects, acted over again hours of pain and pleasure—pain for the pleasure gone, for the pains of the past are pleasures when contrasted with the present joys.

The gleam of sunshine is not nearly so bright when it is falling upon the details at our feet as it appears to be on the broad hillside away in the distance.

The house was not occupied, yet he felt no surprise at this, but lingered over the familiar objects, trying to touch books that he could not feel, for his fingers seemed impalpable.

Then he went into another house, where he knew his friends would most likely be passing the evening, and there he found them all assembled as on the night he had left them.

He entered easily, and stood amongst them, listening to their conversation and trying to join in also, but without success; they were talking about him and wondering where he was, while he stood with them unnoticed.

He could hear their voices and see them quite distinctly as he heard his own voice and saw himself, but he was invisible and his voice had no sound to them; then, for the first time

in his life, he began to comprehend the wild yearnings which disembodied spirits may feel if they ever revisit earth.

He tried to touch them, but they were impalpable to him as he was invisible to them, bodies and objects solid enough to look at, but through which his hands passed as if they were pictures cast by a magic lantern upon a vapour cloud—were they only mirages or was he?—he could not decide which.

One young lady friend sat at the piano and sang, accompanying herself—it was a song which they had often joined in together during the past, so now he passed over to her side to take part with her and turn the music; alas! her fingers passed through his as she carelessly tossed the page over.

He stood upright, for there was no object of furniture in that room, full of realities, upon which he could sit, or against which he could lean, and as he stood amongst them he tried to analyze his emotions of the moment, which predominated—the pain of being there and unable to communicate with them in any way, or the pleasure of being there and seeing them all around him.

So he stood watching and listening to them while he pondered, until a slight touch at his elbow and a word in his ear made him turn about quickly to see his ship companions waiting for him.

In the room? No, that had faded, so had the gas-lit streets of Sydney with the shimmering

lights over the harbour and the revolving glare of the South Head lighthouse.

They were speeding high up amongst the sparkling stars with the boundless ocean below them, as Ariel sped.

Passing over ships which ploughed the surge sluggishly and drifted behind like water-logged wrecks, while the mate told their nationality and criticised their build as sailors will.

"That's a Dutchman down there." The bulky craft was swaying gently under the faint radiance of the crescent moon. "Let's see what they are doing aboard."

At the word they all alighted on to the deck of the Dutchman, near to where the heavily built skipper was keeping his watch, and stood directly in his way, a compact mass, and joining hands allowed him no room to get past.

Nearer he tramped on, all unconscious of the impediment, steadily he passed through the chain and back again, yet they felt no sensation as he broke through them.

"Come, boys, let's make haste, or we shall be late," cried the mate, and once more they were off.

It was a glorious passage, seeming to stand still while the world flew round; at one point Charley the drowned sailor left them, or rather he seemed to drop behind, and after that they altered their course, making towards the land.

There it loomed up sterile and cold, jagged peaks upstarting from the furious waves and

yeasty froth, steep black walls at parts, with rugged outlines of snow-covered mountains behind as they skimmed above that long winding strait, and then they were once more aboard of the *Christiana*.

Ralf Grimshaw and the French officer went in together and arm in arm through the saloon towards their cabin, then at the Frenchman's door they parted, and while he entered and approached his sleeping body, Ralf waited to see the result of this meeting of the doubles.

There it lay with its double bending over it for a moment, and becoming merged into one before the young fellow could see how the union had taken place.

"I must watch myself more carefully," he muttered as he went over to his own berth.

Everything was perfectly distinct and as he had left them, the sloppery passages, the closed-in hatches, his box which had broken from its moorings, and still lay on its side half open, with the stiffened contents bulging out in all sorts of odd shapes, his own body peacefully lying in the bunk face upwards, and himself bending over it, wondering which was the best way to get in.

He meant to experiment upon this body, and so had no intention to hurry matters, try the effect of a hand or foot upon the corresponding member before committing himself altogether, as a bather might try the temperature of the ocean before risking a header, and so he very carefully lifted his left leg and letting it down very gently

towards the left leg of the prostrate figure—
awoke.

Awoke, to find the steward with his broken front teeth standing beside him with a pannikin of steaming black coffee; the cook had at last managed to light the galley fire, and this was the first hot meal for the past thirty hours.

After warming himself with the coffee he went in search of the captain, whom he found in his cabin with his charts and log book beside him, looking gloomy enough and trying to divert himself by work; as he was a favourite with the old man he was made welcome, and very soon unburdened his mind of this strange dream.

"Could you give me some description of the landmarks of that place you passed through before joining the ship?" asked the captain with sudden interest, after he had concluded his story.

"Yes, or better I will sketch it for you, captain," replied Ralf, tearing a leaf out of his damp pocket book, and with his pencil making a few rugged sketches of some points which had impressed him most strongly.

"Very strange," muttered the captain, looking over the sketches with a moody eye. "Have you ever been in this part of the world before?"

"Never, why do you ask?"

"Because, young man, that is Magellan Straits which you have sketched out, and which I ought to know, having gone through it seven times."

“But why should we take Magellan Straits on our way back from Sydney, seeing that you did not think of taking it this voyage?”

“Because it is the most direct course from Sydney if you wanted to reach the vessel where she now lies, if the weather had been favourable enough, for we have now rounded Cape Horn.”

A Queensland Iliad.

OVERHEAD the sun was glaring fiercely from a bleached-out whitey-grey dome upon a plain as boundless seemingly as the ocean, and almost as monotonous in colour as the intense span above it.

It was Midsummer on a sheep-run, in an up-country, back station of North Queensland! In the foreground stood a slab hut, with fence-bound paddock in front of it, and, stretching away as far as the eye could follow, immense herds of lanky sheep, grubbing like pigs amongst the burnt-up soil, for the dried roots of the long-ago extinct vegetation. It is wonderful upon how little Australian cattle and sheep may exist between the rain seasons.

These close ranks of grey-coated grubbers gave the monotonous appearance to the landscape, otherwise it would have looked black as a freshly ploughed field. Between the nearest groups you could see the dark-tinted soil, as they staggered, and panted and fainted with the fierce heat and lack of sustenance—that heat which hung over them in gaseous haze, and created mirages in every direction, making the flocks at a little distance off appear as if submerged in glistening pools, and the thinly-clad gum-trees which dotted the plains to be growing in the midst of swamps.

As the eye wandered from the detached masses of woolly skeletons to those portions of the distance whence the mirage had shifted, it looked like a mud-mixed snow field, solid miles of sheep, with their coats beginning to grow again since the last shearing, a vast army of patient sufferers waiting for the uncertain rain-pour, still much ahead, and hanging on to life with a tenacity which is amazing, considering how easy it would have been to lie down and die.

Through the day they waited, choking and starving for the welcome night, when the heavy dew would fall and soak them through, while it moistened the dry "tack" which kept them in pain. They waited for the night, thirsting, and did not heed whether it brought the dingoes, so long as it brought the dew.

A little distance from the hut stood a "ringed" and dead gum-tree, with a rough ladder placed against its white trunk, and reaching up to the first fork, this was the outlook of the shepherd where he spent most of his time from daybreak to sunset counting his almost countless charges, and reckoning up how much he had lost from his "screw" since the beginning of the dry season, for, beyond a certain number allowed for casualties, the excess lost was deducted from his wages at the end of the season.

A melancholy man this shepherd was, who had been a pupil-teacher at one time, before the drink drove him from civilization. His strong

point had been calculation in those days ; now it is his sole occupation as well as amusement to sit on that gum-tree fork and keep counting his flock from morning till night, without cessation, day after day surveying the horizon with his blood-shot eyes and counting the number, while he calculated on his losses, and made notches with his knife on the hard wood. This had gone on for three months already, and would go on for the next three or four months, without the sight of a human white face, or the sound of an English voice to break upon that awful brain-sapping monotony, until the messenger rode up with his next six months' supply of provisions, or he went raving mad and imagined himself to be a successful general with a victorious army under him whom he had to number and direct. This is the life and almost certain fate of a North Queensland back-station shepherd, a little different from that of James Hogg on the "dowie dens of Yarrow."

He had no dogs to help him or keep him company, and no other companions excepting a magpie or two who occasionally visited him, for what would be the use of a dog or a dozen dogs in that vast extent of plain amongst this legion of sheep?—and where is the woman who would have wasted her life looking after a dreary-looking counting-machine like him in the centre of such a hopeless waste? When he lifted his wages after two or three years of reckoning up, he would hardly have enough for a full week's drinking, and no woman alive

could stand that, at least not a Colonial woman. He was doomed to live and die amongst his silent and long-suffering companions—the sheep—with the occasional look-in of those perky and mischievous visitors, the magpies.

At night he lay on his blanket and conned over the number at which he had left off when the sun went down, while the dingoes prowled outside and worried the flock unmolested. And when at last he fell asleep he dreamt he was still at it, counting up from hundreds to thousands, tens of thousands, hundreds of thousands, millions; singing out the accumulating numbers in that dreary drone, while he groaned over the one or two short from the number of the day before.

He had started his hermit-life with a horse, but that had died after the grass gave out a month, and now it was lying where it fell, an ant-picked skeleton as clean and glittering as polished ivory; and he would not be allowed another until after the carrier had gone back to the station to report progress. Then the shearers might bring him up a mount, if they remembered, to carry him down to the station shanty, two hundred miles away from where he now rotted, or if it was found needful, carry him on further to the lunatic asylum.

Perhaps he might have gone mad before the time of this history, for he had been at his present post for the past year and a quarter without a spell away, and the most cast-iron intellect cannot stand two years of that sort of

arithmetic straight off without giving way; only that within the past twelve weeks he had experienced quite an unusual interruption. A tribe of hostile blacks had paid him a visit, and for one long night had broken through his calculations and kept him occupied with their doings; indeed, on this occasion, he had two long nights' distraction from his everlasting sheep-counting, the second night's experience making it extremely improbable whether he would ever again be able to tell up his reckoning to his own complete satisfaction after that untimely, yet perhaps, providential break.

He was lying on his back, composing himself for sleep, with the final suck from his well-blackened stump of a clay, when the infernal din took place outside, which banished sleep, and forced him to leap over to his gun, in the middle of the ninth and tenth hundred thousand, and there he let the figures go for the time; and putting his eye to the space between the shrunken slab of his outer window shutter, he looked out upon the moonlit plain.

It was a splendid night, as every night mostly is in Australia. When the moon is not out, the stars and planets do their very utmost in the way of effulgency, particularly in Northern or Central Queensland, blazing and flashing down upon the dew-drenched earth like electric lamps; and when the moon does shine up with its warm, tarnished-silver lustre over everything, there is no comparison between it and

any other kind of light, for it catches at the soul and draws it right away from the sun-fagged body—right away to regions where Oberon and Titania, with their merry court, play amongst the marguerites and mushrooms.

This night the moon was shining at her strongest, and in the distance, the mirages had become lakes of flame.

Over the gum-tree, whereon he was wont to perch, with its glaring white trunk and skeleton-like branches—over the sheep all huddled away from that foreground and crushing against each other as they strove to make room for the invaders upon their domain, streamed the overpowering lustre of that great silver moon—over as fierce a picture of battle and death as ever blind Homer built up on the lighted walls of his inner vision.

About two hundred natives had chosen the fenced-in paddock as their field of contest, and himself to be the spectator.

The preliminaries had either been all arranged beforehand, or else it was only the uproar of the actual battle which had roused him. There they were, writhing, leaping, clutching, felling with their waddies, using their boomerangs as swords, stabbing with their spears, and raising such a terrific din with their yelling, that not even the most absent-minded of mathematicians could have been able to continue his calculations after that began.

The shepherd for the first time in two years forgot his sheep, and felt the blood trickling

within his half-dried veins. Something like the shadow of the spirit which had been in him in early manhood began to revive, so that as he watched, keenly clutching his loaded rifle, he had the natural inclination to rush out and join in the fight. A rash impulse, from which his months of sun-scorching and mental arithmetic restrained him—he was no longer youthful or fiery. The heroes outside were both enemies of his, however they might regard each other at present, so that he could afford to hang on until the victory was declared and then his chance would come to defend himself and his hut.

He was too old a resident of the wilds, not to know exactly how the encounter had come to pass. Two rival tribes, creeping up to his hut from opposite directions, to take him by surprise, had suddenly caught sight of each other, and, forgetting for the moment the white fellow and loot, the old feud fired up, and without a second thought they had rushed forward into the open and set to work.

And they were working with an energy and a steadfastness worthy of even old Trojan and Greek. The moon lit up their dusky skins and shone upon the glaring whites of their eyes and gleaming teeth, as they grinned at each other and swung their arms about, making fantastic shadow-shapes on the frosted ground. The moon also shone with a sinister glister, as it might on ink-pools, or gliding snakes, over gaping gashes and rivulets of hot blood, as they ran down naked limbs and soaked into the

thirsty earth. There were no mirages, or fictitious glistening about these rivulets and pools, over which the watcher saw the moon-beams glide and glitter.

All through the night they fought, some dropping, and crawling languidly away out of the circle of his vision; others lying still and allowing themselves to be trampled upon without protest, while the yells grew huskier and the strokes weaker as the shadows became less black and the chill indefiniteness of coming day plucked the courage from them, one and all.

At last the dawn broke over the distant plain and showed him the vanquished and the victors slinking away from one another, and trailing their dead after them. Scarcely one carried away a whole skin, while some of them showed such gashes on their uncovered bodies, that the watcher wondered how they could even creep; they had got their fill of fighting for one day, and were going back to their women to be doctored up against the next affair of honour, or looting raid.

It was such a picture of savage warfare that the sun lighted up, as made our exile feel for a time almost contented with his solitude. Men carrying away wounds, each one like a gaping gate through which the soul of any white man must surely have rushed, only these black fellows' souls seem to hold on firmer to the bones than ours do. As the shepherd watched them going and then regarded the trail they were leaving behind he knew that he had but a

few hours to prepare his house for their coming again; the vanquished would go back to their own country with as many of his outlying sheep as they could drive before them or carry with them, but the victors would be down upon him with a double thirst.

He went to work methodically, according to his usual fashion, for he had all day before him to get things ready, and first of all he lit his fire and put on his billy for his breakfast.

While the billy was heating, he strolled over to his usual out-look and climbed the ladder mechanically, beginning to count once more the tens and hundreds of thousands.

There seemed to be no difference in the flock since the day before, as they clustered over the vast plain, but the shepherd knew in that first rapid survey, that he was poorer by a couple of hundred than he had been when he went indoors at nightfall. He could see with his accustomed eye where dozens of mangled carcasses lay with their feet up amongst that distant billow of dirty white.

He was almost as patient and long-suffering as the sheep around him, so that he did not even curse as he descended from his perch and moved over, gun in hand, to where the nearest victim lay, hoping as he went that there would be at least a chop left on the defunct, for this was how he tried to make up his nightly losses, taking what the wasteful marauders left him in the shape of fresh provisions.

Yes; they had left him plenty and to spare;

so placing his rifle beside him, he drew out his sharp knife and began in a tradesman-like manner to strip the roughly-butchered animal, and was pretty well through with his task, when he was disturbed by a series of shrill screams over by a line of trees in front of where he knelt.

To quit his task and spring to his rifle was his first natural instinct—his second was to look for the cause of the disturbance.

There, in front of him, and moving towards the bush, he saw a naked black fellow dragging along a young lubra by the only available part left to catch hold of—her hair; she was protesting vehemently and loudly, which was not surprising to the shepherd, when he saw how the black ruffian was laying on to her with his waddy while he dragged her along; it was clearly his purpose to get her out of the white fellow's range as quickly as possible.

Not having tasted whisky for the past three months, and then only a very moderate dose, the arm was like a rock as it raised the rifle, and the eye sure as it brought the sight to bear on the ravisher.

“Crack!”

Then he ran over to where the pair still were, the girl hiding her face in her hands, and the savage looking with stupid amazement on his broken wrist.

“What for you take that girl?” he cried, as he stood up to the man.

"She my girl, you leave her alone, white fellow."

"No! white fellow me lubra; no belong 'o him; he kill my people, and steal me," broke in the girl, recovering herself. The English wasn't quite so clear as I give it, but it was plain enough for the shepherd to understand.

The white and black men looked for a moment at each other, and then the savage, with a heavy scowl, took his departure, still looking at his wrist as if he couldn't understand the accident.

Half-an-hour afterwards, the young lubra was making herself at home in that lonely hut, drinking the shepherd's tea and eating his damper and mutton, also dressed, for decorum sake, in his spare flannel shirt, which, as he was a tall man, and she quite a little girl, made a very respectable robe for her, and with its dingy red colour, suiting her dusky complexion very well.

She wasn't a bad-looking girl, for a Queensland native. Some of the very young ones are not; her eyes were large and bright, and her teeth white as milk—not much over twelve years of age; and, as soon as she had recovered from her fright, and her awe of her host, she became as vivacious and as active as a young monkey.

She informed him, while she dodged about the hut and into his pockets, confiscating little articles, that her tribe had been defeated, but that she knew where to find them, and being a

shy man, and not used to entertain ladies, he was only half sorry when she announced her intention to take her immediate departure, much as she had enlivened his solitude during the hour of her visit.

His friends the magpies screamed jeeringly at them both, as shouldering his reloaded rifle, he went with her part of her way and saw her safely into the bush at the far end of the first plain. He dare not go too far from his own hut, knowing, as he did, that the black fellows would be on the watch. A strange thrill passed over him as the artful little lubra left a kiss on his beard, in exchange for his clasp-knife, tin tobacco box, and his spare red flannel shirt, which he had only washed the day before. How even young savage lubras learn these cunning tricks, it is hard to say, but as he watched the glimmer and flutter of that red garment between the white gum trunks, he wished that he could have gone with her a little further—gone with her the whole way—and left the “blooming” sheep to look after themselves.

The thrill of that parting salute made him indifferent to the losses he had sustained. Most likely the uncles, aunts, and cousins of the young lady were at that moment feasting from one of the sheep he would have to account for, while the other muttons were waiting for a like fate.

She was gone, taking with her his spare shirt and his tobacco-box and knife, so that for

the next three months he would have to do the best he could with the shirt he was at present wearing, and use his wood hatchet for the shredding down of his tobacco-cake. It would be lumpy and so last longer in the pipe, a reflection he consoled himself with, and as for the shirt—wasn't that hour-and-a-half of sociality worth it? while as for the parting kiss!—why, that would last him for years.

When had he been kissed last? He was an ugly and a cadaverous man, whom women could not take to naturally. As he thought back, he had to own that it was the first kiss which had ever been *given* him. Once in a bold moment of semi-intoxication he had attempted to snatch a kiss from a barmaid, but she had evaded it, and promptly punished him for his audacity by laying his cheek open with a glass—yes! the mark was there still, to remind him when he liked to put his hand up, of that abortive effort. Perhaps his mother had kissed him when he was a baby; yet, as she had died before he could remember, that he could not say for certain.

But the lubra had kissed him of her own free will, and that kiss still lingered, and thrilled over him curiously. She had also promised to come again and get some more presents from him.

“When Jack comes up next with the provisions,” he murmured, “I’ll get him to send up a rig-out for that daring young lubra, and when next I see her I shan’t let her go

again in a hurry. I'll rig-out the little cuss instead of going down for a spree when my time comes."

He mounted the outlook no more that day, but set himself diligently to get ready for the night, when he came back to the hut, drawing up his barrellful of water from the nearly dry sunk well, getting the shutters nailed and the door secure; then he sat down with his rifle and ammunition beside him, for the first time in his life forgetting his dinner and supper. He did not forget to fill and light his pipe however; this done, he waited, smoking inside his darkened hut for what he knew was certain to come after the sun went down.

An unusual moisture seemed to be in his brain that night as he waited and listened; he never counted once during his vigil, for before him he saw the young girl as he had parted with her in the morning, and she seemed to be listening along with him in the dark, and touching his ragged grey beard with her little brown hand.

"Little cuss! little cuss!" he murmured softly as he waited on the coming of the treacherous enemy.

He did not think much about the danger of his present position, as he sat with his back against the wall and puffed quietly at his pipe in the dark; he had been too long used to danger of this kind not to take it all as a part of the year's work, like the watching, the counting, and the shooting of dingoes. Blacks were like dingoes

to him, only that the blacks caused ever so much more trouble when they showed up; fortunately, they were not often his way; the last visit had been about sixteen months before, and that tribe he had been able to warn off the ground without any waste of shot.

This time, however, with their blood warmed by victory, the result might be different. There was a bigger crowd of them, and if that fellow with the broken wrist had any authority over them, it meant a long and a stern struggle, and the keeping of his eyes open for the hundred different dirty tricks they would indulge in towards him.

He had poured as much water over his shingles and slabs as he could spare, the last thing before daylight faded, so that they mightn't succeed in firing his shelter; and the dews would keep it moist until sunrise, by which time he trusted to have beaten them off. From former experience he could stand a good deal of smoking-out before he caved in. He had now done all he could think of in the way of preparation. He sat and indulged his half-crazed brain with that strange fancy about the proximity of the young lubra in his red shirt; he could not see her, of course, for he knew that she must be miles on her way by that time, yet in the intensity of the darkness and stillness around him his beard shook with the vibration of the touch she had left upon it.

Outside nothing stirred except the soft rubbing of some of the sheep against the wet

slabs ; there was no use looking out yet from between the planks, because nothing could be seen ; and he would know when the moon rose by the shafts of light which would then be thrown in upon him, while he didn't expect the savages before moon-rise, for they are mostly afraid of utter darkness, so that he had nothing to disturb his pipe and his peculiar fancy about the absent girl being present and sitting close to him.

After a time his pipe wanted filling, therefore he got out his cake and tore off the shreds with his hand, breaking them up as small as possible, and stuffing them amongst the old tobacco ; then he carelessly struck a match, and for an instant illuminated the rough interior.

Two bright dark eyes seemed to flash from the darkness, and fade before the light as he held it up, and the next instant he had dropped the match without using it, but with a sharp cry of pain, for a native spear had pierced the fleshy portion of his upraised arm, while a dozen more sharp points were sticking between the slab joins ; his match had revealed his locality to his watchful besiegers.

With a subdued oath he plucked the spear from his arm, and shifted his position to another part of the room ; for until the moon got up he could only wait and listen intently, with the sensation of a crowd of eyes on every side of him trying to penetrate the blackness.

He could hear them now breathing and moving about ; there were some on the roof

tugging gently at the shingles to get in to him that way. He could make out exactly where they were, and, pointing his rifle upwards, waited patiently for the hole to be made so that he should run no risk of losing a shot.

At last the white spark of a star darts down, and is blanked out by a body, which covers it; then a sharp ping, and a loud yell is heard as the flash bursts from the barrel, followed by the rolling and falling of several bodies outside; he has shot one, and the others have left the roof in a fright.

There comes the moon with a crimson glimmering like sunset through the crevices, quickly changing to yellow and then to vivid white—now he can see to do his work on that side of the hut.

“Bang! bang!! bang!!!” as fast as he can cram the cartridges into the breech he sends out the bullets wherever he sees a shadow or a break in the lustre; each report followed by exclamations from the wounded, and then for a few minutes he knows that he can let his rifle cool, for they have dragged away their slain out of range, and must have a consultation before they come on again.

It is hot, so he wipes his brow with his hand, which is wet with the blood running down his arm from the spear wound; then, without troubling to bind it up, he looks out.

They are coming on again and trying their old device of gum branches to cover their advances; he can see the bushes moving over

the now lighted plain and aims straight at the nearest.

Another stampede when they see that their trick is discerned, and next, after a short pause, without further disguise they rush forward, each man carrying his branch of dry wood, and careless about the shots the shepherd is pouring amongst them, for at last they are roused up to the fury of battle, and leave the dead and wounded to look after themselves.

He can see the man with the broken wrist leading them on and swinging his waddy about with his uninjured hand, and he aims his next shot at him, but misses; then he drops his rifle and pulls out his revolver while they wake the night up with their yells, and make the sheep rush wildly about in the distance.

There is no want of light now for the shepherd to see to fight with, for the dry bushes are spluttering up against the damp slabs, and the naked figures are swarming over the roof and jabbing at him wherever a joint in the walls is wide enough to allow a spear to get through; and although he jumps and dodges about, as he fills and empties his chambers, silver bars of light on the one side and orange stripes on the other cross each other and reveal him to the sharp eyes and sure hands.

He is one man amongst fifty, and although he does deadly work as long as he is able, they have got over their first fright of his weapon, and leave a spear sticking wherever they see a bar of light in their target. Still, doggedly, he

fight on, and staggers about, growing less certain in his aim, while the fancy that the lubra is with him grows more real as his actual sight becomes dimmer.

There is a hole in the roof now large enough to let them enter, and although the first three who attempt it tumble in dead at his feet, the fourth, fifth, and sixth follow each other without accident, for he can no longer find his cart-ridges.

Then the lurid and pale lights from the flames and moon, swim round him like phantasmagoria, and the young lubra clasps him closely in her arms to part no more.

* * * * *

Jack, the half-caste messenger from the head station, speeds on, leading his laden pack-horse at the top of his speed, because the boy wants to reach his destination before another night comes. He has been a week on the road, riding over a country of delicious spring, for the rains are past, and the whole land is lush with young grass, and flaming with flowers.

At one portion of his journey his horse shies from a red flag which covers a gleaming skeleton—it is the red flag that attracts Jack, for skeletons have been common enough on his road up—and he has a bad record to take back to the squatter.

He jumps off for a moment to examine this curiosity, and finds that it is a small skeleton with the skull fractured, and that the red rag is

the remains of a big flannel shirt. He finds also a rusty clasp-knife, and a tin tobacco box lying besides the fleshless hands; these he possesses himself of with a chuckle, and then remounting his horse he gallops on towards the hut.

The Demon Spell:

A CHRISTMAS EVE'S EXPERIENCE.

It was about the time when spiritualism was all the craze in England, and no party was reckoned complete without a spirit-rapping séance being included amongst the other entertainments.

One night I had been invited to the house of a friend, who was a great believer in the manifestations from the unseen world, and who had asked for my special edification a well-known trance medium. "A pretty as well as a heaven-gifted girl, whom you will be sure to like, I know," he said as he asked me.

I did not believe much in the return of spirits, yet, thinking to be amused, consented to attend at the hour appointed. At that time I had just returned from a long sojourn abroad, and was in a very delicate state of health, easily impressed by outward influences, and nervous to a most extraordinary extent.

To the hour appointed I found myself at my friend's house, and was then introduced to the sitters who had assembled to witness the phenomena. Some were strangers like myself to the rules of the table, others who were adepts took their places at once in the order to which they had in former meetings attended. The trance

medium had not yet arrived, and while waiting upon her coming we sat down and opened the séance with a hymn.

We had just furnished the second verse when the door opened and the medium glided in, and took her place on a vacant seat by my side, joining with the others in the last verse, after which we all sat motionless with our hands resting upon the table, waiting upon the first manifestation from the unseen world.

Now, although I thought all this performance very ridiculous, there was something in the silence and the dim light, for the gas had been turned low down, and the room seemed filled with shadows; something about the fragile figure at my side, with her drooping head, which thrilled me with a curious sense of fear and icy horror such as I had never felt before.

I am not by nature imaginative or inclined to superstition, but, from the moment that young girl had entered the room, I felt as if a hand had been laid upon my heart, a cold iron hand, that was compressing it, and causing it to stop throbbing. My sense of hearing also had grown more acute and sensitive, so that the beating of the watch in my vest pocket sounded like the thumping of a quartz-crushing machine, and the measured breathing of those about me as loud and nerve-disturbing as the snorting of a steam engine.

Only when I turned to look upon the trance medium did I become soothed; then it seemed as if a cold-air wave had passed through my

brain, subduing, for the time being, those awful sounds.

"She is possessed," whispered my host on the other side of me. "Wait, and she will speak presently, and tell us whom we have got beside us."

As we sat and waited the table had moved several times under our hands, while knockings at intervals took place in the table and all round the room, a most weird and blood-curdling, yet ridiculous performance, which made me feel half inclined to run out with fear, and half inclined to sit still and laugh; on the whole, I think, however, that horror had the more complete possession of me.

Presently she raised her head and laid her hand upon mine, beginning to speak in a strange monotonous, far-away voice, "This is my first visit since I passed from earth-life, and *you* have called me here."

I shivered as her hand touched mine, but had no strength to withdraw it from her light, soft grasp.

"I am what you would call a lost soul; that is, I am in the lowest sphere. Last week I was in the body, but met my death down White-chapel way. I was what you call an unfortunate, aye, unfortunate enough. Shall I tell you how it happened?"

The medium's eyes were closed, and whether it was my distorted imagination or not, she appeared to have grown older and decidedly debauched-looking since she sat down, or rather

as if a light, filmy mask of degrading and soddened vice had replaced the former delicate features.

No one spoke, and the trance medium continued :

"I had been out all that day and without any luck or food, so that I was dragging my wearied body along through the slush and mud, for it had been wet all day, and I was drenched to the skin, and miserable, ah, ten thousand times more wretched than I am now, for the earth is a far worse hell for such as I than our hell here.

"I had importuned several passers-by as I went along that night, but none of them spoke to me, for work had been scarce all this winter, and I suppose I did not look so tempting as I have been ; only once a man answered me, a dark-faced, middle-sized man, with a soft voice, and much better dressed than my usual companions.

"He asked me where I was going, and then left me, putting a coin into my hand, for which I thanked him. Being just in time for the last public-house, I hurried up, but on going to the bar and looking at my hand, I found it to be a curious foreign coin, with outlandish figures on it, which the landlord would not take, so I went out again to the dark fog and rain without my drink after all.

"There was no use going any further that night. I turned up the court where my lodgings were, intending to go home and get a sleep, since I could get no food, when I felt

something touch me softly from behind like as if someone had caught hold of my shawl; then I stopped and turned about to see who it was.

"I was alone, and with no one near me nothing but fog and the half light from the court lamp. Yet I felt as if something had got hold of me, though I could not see what it was, and that it was gathering about me.

"I tried to scream out, but could not, as this unseen grasp closed upon my throat and choked me, and then I fell down and for a moment forgot everything.

"Next moment I woke up, outside my own poor mutilated body, and stood watching the fell work going on—as you see it now."

Yes I saw it all as the medium ceased speaking, a mangled corpse lying on a muddy pavement, and a demoniac, dark, pock-marked face bending over it, with the lean claws outspread, and the dense fog instead of a body, like the half-formed incarnation of muscles.

"That is what did it, and you will know it again," she said, "I have come for you to find it."

"Is he an Englishman?" I gasped, as the vision faded away and the room once more became definite.

"It is neither man nor woman, but it lives as I do, it is with me now and may be with you to-night, still if you will have me instead of it, I can keep it back, only you must wish for me with all your might."

The séance was now becoming too horrible,

and by general consent our host turned up the gas, and then I saw for the first time the medium, now relieved from her evil possession, a beautiful girl of about nineteen, with I think the most glorious brown eyes I had ever before looked into.

"Do you believe what you have been speaking about?" I asked her as we were sitting talking together.

"What was that?"

"About the murdered woman."

"I don't know anything at all, only that I have been sitting at the table. I never know what my trances are."

Was she speaking the truth? Her dark eyes looked truth, so that I could not doubt her.

That night when I went to my lodgings I must confess that it was some time before I could make up my mind to go to bed. I was decidedly upset and nervous, and wished that I had never gone to this spirit meeting, making a mental vow, as I threw off my clothes and hastily got into bed, that it was the last unholy gathering I would ever attend.

For the first time in my life I could not put out the gas, I felt as if the room was filled with ghosts, or as if this pair of ghastly spectres, the murderer and his victim, had accompanied me home, and were at that moment disputing the possession of me, so instead, I pulled the bedclothes over my head, it being a cold night, and went that fashion off to sleep.

Twelve o'clock! and the anniversary of the day that Christ was born. Yes, I heard it striking from the street spire and counted the strokes, slowly tolled out, listening to the echoes from other steeples, after this one had ceased, as I lay awake in that gas-lit room, feeling as if I was not alone this Christmas morn.

Thus, while I was trying to think what had made me wake so suddenly, I seemed to hear a far off echo cry "Come to me." At the same time the bedclothes were slowly pulled from the bed, and left in a confused mass on the floor.

"Is that you, Polly?" I cried, remembering the spirit séance, and the name by which the spirit had announced herself when she took possession.

Three distinct knocks resounded on the bed-post at my ear, the signal for "Yes."

"Can you speak to me?"

"Yes," an echo rather than a voice replied, while I felt my flesh creeping, yet strove to be brave.

"Can I see you?"

"No!"

"Feel you?"

Instantly the feeling of a light cold hand touched my brow and passed over my face.

"In God's name what do you want?"

"To save the girl I was *in* to-night. *It* is after her and will kill her if you do not come quickly."

In an instant I was out of the bed, and

tumbling my clothes on any way, horrified through it all, yet feeling as if Polly were helping me to dress. There was a Kandian dagger on my table which I had brought from Ceylon, an old dagger which I had bought for its antiquity and design, and this I snatched up as I left the room, with that light unseen hand leading me out of the house and along the deserted snow-covered streets.

I did not know where the trance medium lived, but I followed where that light grasp led me, through the wild, blinding snow-drift, round corners and through short cuts, with my head down and the flakes falling thickly about me, until at last I arrived at a silent square and in front of a house, which by some instinct, I knew that I must enter.

Over by the other side of the street I saw a man standing looking up to a dimly-lighted window, but I could not see him very distinctly and I did not pay much attention to him at the time, but rushed instead up the front steps and into the house, that unseen hand still pulling me forward.

How that door opened, or if it did open I could not say, I only know that I got in, as we get into places in a dream, and up the inner stairs, I passed into a bedroom where the light was burning dimly.

It was her bedroom, and she was struggling in the thug-like grasp of those same demon claws, with that demoniac face close to hers, and the rest of it drifting away to nothingness.

I saw it all at a glance, her half-naked form, with the disarranged bedclothes, as the unformed demon of muscles clutched that delicate throat, and then I was at it like a fury with my Kandian dagger, slashing crossways at those cruel claws and that evil face, while blood streaks followed the course of my knife, making ugly stains, until at last it ceased struggling and disappeared like a horrid nightmare, as the half-strangled girl, now released from that fell grip, woke up the house with her screams, while from her relaxing hand dropped a strange coin, which I took possession of.

Thus I left her, feeling that my work was done, going downstairs as I had come up, without impediment or even seemingly, in the slightest degree, attracting the attention of the other inmates of the house, who rushed in their night-dresses towards the bedroom from whence the screams were issuing.

Into the street again, with that coin in one hand and my dagger in the other I rushed, and then I remembered the man whom I had seen looking up at the window. Was he there still? Yes, but on the ground in a confused black mass amongst the white snow as if he had been struck down.

I went over to where he lay and looked at him. Was he dead? Yes. I turned him round and saw that his throat was gashed from ear to ear, and all over his face—the same dark, pallid, pock-marked evil face, and claw-like hands, I saw the dark slashes of my Kandian

dagger, while the soft white snow around him was stained with crimson life pools, and as I looked I heard the clock strike one, while from the distance sounded the chant of the coming waits, then I turned and fled blindly into the darkness.

A Face at the Window.

I REMEMBER once, while knocking about the Colonies, taking a fancy to a quiet, hermit sort of life. It was in New Zealand that this fancy came upon me, suggested by the appearance of a deserted bush hut, which afforded me a temporary shelter when overtaken by a sudden downpour of rain. This hut seemed to have been untenanted for some considerable time. It stood in the centre of a little clearing, surrounded by miles of forest of kauri fern, and the tangled intricacies of the supple-jack; just the very spot for a cynic, or a dreamer, to squat and be happy and undisturbed, with no habitation nearer than five miles as I afterwards found out, and over ten miles distant from Auckland Bay.

When I first caught sight of this ramshackle hut, the rough log door hung open slantingly upon its only leather hinge, so that I could see dimly a few yards of interior. In that first glimpse I thought that some one had taken shelter before me, for I was almost sure that I saw, amongst the bistre shadows, the figure of a man in duck trousers, and red, clay-stained shirt; indeed, so positive was I of this, that I carried the impression further as of a man, middle-aged, with a sandy coloured beard, and unkempt, long, straggling hair. True, I only

took a very rapid glance upon reaching the clearing, and then hurried forward keeping my head down, as I breasted the fierce rain-pour, yet I could almost have sworn that just before I had passed the last barricade of foliage I saw that ungainly figure sitting upon a fallen tree a few yards in front of the hanging door, bare-headed, and that he had risen as I was breaking through the close tangle, and passed inside. Indeed, I remember thinking it very odd that any one should care to sit outside under such a shower, with shelter so handy; and having the idea that he showed a little more sense by going within again, judge then my astonishment when I reached the open door to find the place empty, with every appearance about it of having been so for at least six months.

Log sides covered with green moss and mildew, with bush-spider webs festooning the roof, and a general dampness all about, suggestive of the long absence of humanity and the uninterrupted reign of nature. Grass had sprouted up through the earthen floor and in at the open crevices, while young tendrils had invaded the windows, making a very picturesque but decidedly unhome-like appearance of them, as I walked in and looked over my new possession.

Still I found everything that was strictly necessary for existence lying about, as if the last owner had left them with the full intention of coming back. In the fireplace beside the damp, dead ashes, lay a small frying-pan and "billy," red

with rust ; on the roughly sawn plank which had served as a table were a couple of tin pannikins, and a plate with knife, fork, and metal tea-spoon, all thickly incrustated with the same coating of the painter Time. He had not been of a very hospitable turn this former tenant, because I found only one log set up on end beside the table, which had answered as a seat. A hermit such I intended to be until his return, for with that first look round I resolved to stay rent free until I was kicked out.

Like most bush huts this one had been erected in the most primitive fashion, and seemingly by the single owner who had worked at the clearing. His axe and saws lay in a corner beside the raised planks from which he had made his bed ; tree trunks cut the needful length and laboriously sawn through, had been planted side by side and held in position by tendons of rope-like supple-jack ; the roof was made up of branches interlaced and thatched with the fronds of the fern trees, in thick enough layers to resist the rain. It was partitioned into two apartments, with a doorless passage between them. The portion in which I stood had been used as bedroom and sitting-room combined, whilst the other end had been reserved to stack his firewood in, of which I discovered a good supply in clumps all cut and ready for use.

The outer doorway had been fixed in the exact centre of the front, with a large window in the side nearest the fireplace, while on the

other side was placed the bed, upon which I discovered a couple of grey blankets, such as swag-men use when on the tramp. The hut owner must have left in a great hurry, I thought, as I took up these damp and half-rotten articles, to leave his swag behind him in this fashion.

In the store-room I found another little window in the end and nearly opposite the doorway, also fitted with glass; the only evidence of refinement about the place. I mention these details somewhat particularly so that you may be able to follow me in what happened afterwards.

Having made up my mind to squat here, I set to work to make myself as comfortable as possible. I got a fire set agoing, and hunting about, managed with some provisions that I had in my own swag to enjoy a good meal; after which, fixing up the door and hanging up the old blankets as a screen and window curtain, I would have passed a very comfortable day and night but for the curious impression which would not leave me of that former occupant.

Sometimes when I went to the window to look at the falling rain for a brief second, I seemed to see that figure on the log; or if I turned about quickly while boiling my billy he seemed to be beside the table, an impression which always vanished at once, yet invariably left a creepy sensation behind it.

Still I was not going to be scared out of my quarters by a mere impression, so I resolutely

spread out my own blankets, shut my eyes, and went to sleep, waking up next morning more firmly resolved than ever to live rent free as long as I could.

The rain having cleared away I tramped back to Auckland, and, laying in a stock of provisions, paper, books, and other necessities, borrowed a horse from a friend who wished it put to grass for a month or two, and returned to my new home; feeling that at last I would have peace to think and work. In a week I was fairly settled down, and even used to my impression; so that at such moments when I paused with my pen in my hand, and looked up for a fresh thought, it would have startled me if I had not met that fleeting image at the fireside; or when I opened the front door in order to get fresh water from the stream, to see that log unoccupied would have been as great a surprise as had been my first discovery that I was alone in that deserted hut; I had got used to the man in the old red shirt and duck trousers, and did not mind his fantastic habits in the least.

During the day at least these were my feelings upon the subject, but when night fell over the forest and the time came for me to blow out my candle, I was not so sure but that I could have dispensed with his company. It was always as the light was puffing out, that my eyes encountered the shape most vividly over beyond it; then a moment of horror would seize me lest I might see him in the dark, and that he would stay with me then and not vanish as he

did during the light. It was this nameless horror which made me shut my eyes and keep them so, until I fell asleep.

He never once visited me in my dreams, although each night I went to sleep thinking that he would do so; also he had the good taste never to look in at the window upon me, another thing that I constantly dreaded might come to pass; although why, I cannot say—but first thing in the morning when I opened my eyes, and all the day long whenever I glanced hastily at the place where I had first seen him, he was always to be discerned vanishing in a wink—leaning upon the table, stooping over the fire, or sitting on the log outside. He was most methodical in his habits, and not to be got rid of.

In this fashion I lived from week to week for about two months, riding down to Auckland when I wanted anything, and getting on with my work, without seeing the face of another human being to disturb my solitude. No one came to dispute my right there, except my “impressionist” friend, and he never stayed long enough to say whether he was pleased or otherwise at my intrusion.

One day I found myself getting short of candles and manuscript papers, and had made up my mind to ride to town, but was forced to postpone the visit as the rain came on just as I was about to start, and soon showed that it meant to be both a long and a strong New Zealand storm, which is not a state of weather to be braved with impunity; so tying my borrowed

steed inside the shed which I had managed to build for him at the side of the hut, I went myself indoors and fastened the door up, to finish the few sheets which I had still left, in the daylight.

When night came, the storm was raging outside wilder than ever. The wind shrieked and whirled about the hut and through the forest as if ten thousand furies were out and determined to wreck creation; the crashing of trees and branches, as the swift flashes of forked lightning cut them asunder and sent them headlong to the earth; rain rushing down without intermission, as if from a mighty watering-pot; and thunder-peals, resounding after each rapid blaze of flame, before the echoes of the last peal had time to rumble off to the far distances—such a day and night of stupendous grandeur and majestic gloom as I have seldom witnessed.

I finished my writing and got up a blazing fire. In spite of the spluttering waterfall which rushed down the chimney, my clumps of wood were dry and caught fire quickly and blazed up merrily, and then getting my small stock of books on to the table, I lit my last of two candles, also lit my pipe, and sat down to enjoy myself in my own way inside, as the Storm King seemed to be enjoying himself in his favourite style outside. The first volume which I lifted up was not, perhaps, the best under the circumstances, although the surroundings were singularly appropriate to its contents. It was "Poe's Tales of Mystery and Imagination." I had not

read the book before; indeed, to my shame, I must admit that I did not know anything at all about his prose works, although I had read some of the author's poetic works. But, with my vanishing friend by the side of the fire, and the awful turmoil going on outside, I thought that "Edgar Allen" could not be studied under finer conditions, and so, without looking further, I began at once at the beginning — "The Adventures of one Hans Pfaall."

The first story of Edgar's is an insinuating one, a kind of mild prelude to what is to follow. Even with my silent companion over against me, the repeated flashes of lightning which darted through the room about as quickly as he himself vanished, and my first candle gradually being consumed, I did not feel much more than the ordinary horrors which I usually felt of an evening alone with my ghostly friend, or host, and without the storm outside, or the unfortunate weird genius of America—indeed, I was rather tickled than otherwise with that first story.

But I read on, and my only remaining candle had to be lighted. I got through "The Gold-Bug," "Valdemar," "The Descent into the Maelstrom," "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," "Marie Roget," "The Purloined Letter," and had just dived into the horrors of "The Black Cat," when the candle guttered and went out, with a wild flare, which revealed to me my vanishing host, and the fact that my fire was getting low, with no wood on the hearth, and

that awful journey into the blackness of the back room before I could get more fuel.

Heavens! what a tempestuous night outside, and what a fascination of horror was upon me as I looked at the dull red glow of that dying fire, and thought upon that dark, back room, with its little square window, the room at present covered from me by that old, mouldy blanket, which I must lift up and drop behind me before I could get at these clumps of fire-wood.

But it had to be done, for I dare not permit that fire to go out this night of all nights. I dare not think of what each of these blinding flashes might reveal to me, and so drive me mad. That fire must be replenished at once, and kept blazing brightly until I fell asleep; for it was not only my weird host that I feared, but a thousand unformed and nameless horrors, which seemed to be crowding that darkly lurid space, each instant so appallingly lighted up and plunged again into worse than total darkness. At last I plucked up a desperate courage, and with a wild gasp I staggered past that woollen curtain, my nerves in an acute state of tension and my heart strained with agony.

I stooped over the stack with my eyes shut, and hastily grabbed at the nearest clumps, filling my arms as quickly as I could, when a fierce blaze of lightning forced me to open my eyes and look towards that window in spite of my efforts not to do so.

What was it I saw in that rapid illumination

at the window? A face ghastly like death staring in upon me as I knelt beside the logs!

I could not be sure of that, but I was paralysed and could not move, yet knelt with the clumps sliding from my useless arms, and my eyes fixed upon that window, surrounded with such a blackness as only the Egyptian night could compare with.

Another blinding flash, and again I saw the face, white behind the glass, and staring at me with awful black eyes; then an interval of darkness, which seemed longer than usual, while my starting eyes strove to penetrate past the window frame into the night beyond.

That interval of darkness saved my reason I think, because, as my eyes grew accustomed to the dark, I saw, or thought I saw, a lighter shade of space around a dark object like a human head.

It was palpable and solid. Then it must be a living mortal, and no ghostly visitor. Why I reasoned in this most illogical fashion at such a time, I cannot say. Only that it comforted me, and sent my blood once more coursing through my veins, calming my throbbing brain, and giving me some of the courage which I had lost so completely.

Then I waited for the next flash, picking up the wood quietly as I did so. When it came, I saw more than last time—a white face, with staring black eyes, and long hair hanging loosely about the blanched cheeks. Enough, it was no ghost, whatever it might be, so,

without looking up again, I went back to the front room to feed my fire and think it all out.

My first action was to put about a dozen of the clumps upon the red ashes, thereby plunging the place into as complete darkness as the other room had been. Then I felt about the corner of the room until I got hold of the axe.

"Marie Roget" and "The Black Cat" were completely forgotten in my present exhilarating excitement. I felt that I had not to face a ghost, but an enemy lying in wait to surprise and perhaps murder me, so I determined to take the bull by the horns and surprise them whoever they might be instead.

When I had secured the axe, I opened the door. It did not matter how much noise I made with that tempest raging outside, and as the curtain had dropped between me and the other room. Then when I got outside I stole gently towards the back, feeling my way along the rough planks as I went, my axe ready in hand in case of a surprise.

What I was mostly frightened for was the lightning. If a flash came now, I might be revealed. However, fortunately for me, one flash came just as I turned the front of the house, and then I felt sure that I could reach the back before another came.

I felt along until I came to the turn at the rear, and then I went more cautiously, stretching out my arms at full length and feeling in advance.

Ha! I had touched the body of my visitor—a wet loose garment of some sort. I did not wait to find out what it was, but, with a sudden leap forward, caught up the entire bundle somewhere as near the waist as I could calculate, half dragged, half carried it through the rain and mire, round the end and side of the house, on to the front, bang through the open door; then, pushing it with all my strength from me into the room, I drew the door shut behind me with one hand, while with the other I hove up the axe, and waited for the attack.

One more flash of lightning came, during which I saw a confused bundle of wet rags lying against a corner of the room motionless, and then once more darkness, during which I was delighted to see that my clumps of firewood were beginning to take light. Little tongues of blue flame had begun to shoot out between the clumps, and in a few moments more I knew I would have light on the subject.

* * * *

I do not think that I can tell you much more that is interesting about this ghost adventure. You see I didn't have the necessity of killing anyone that night. I married that bundle of wet rags instead, for when the fire blazed out, it got up and showed me as pretty a Maori face as ever I care to look upon. She was just sixteen then, and had been moved with her sex's curiosity to see what I was up to, all alone by myself in that lonesome hut, and so had left her camp night after night for about a fortnight

past to watch at my back window, and try to find out. They all thought that I was a wizard of some sort, and would you believe it, she is unsophisticated enough to think so still, in spite of all that she must have found out about me since! However, she very soon banished the "impressionist" with the duck trousers and red shirt, and altogether made a wonderful alteration in that old hut.

The Phantom Model.

A WAPPING ROMANCE.

I.

THE STUDIO.

"RHODA is a very nice girl in her way, Algy, my boy, and poses wonderfully, considering the hundreds of times she has had to do it; but she isn't the model for that Beatrice of yours, and if you want to make a hit of it, you must go further afield, and hook a face not quite so familiar to the British Public."

It was a large apartment, one of a set of studios in that artistic barrack off the Fulham Road, which the landlord, himself a theatrical Bohemian of the first class, has rushed up for the accommodation of youthful luminaries who are yet in the nebulous stage of their Art-course. Each of these hazy specks hopes to shine out a full-lustred star in good time; they have all a proper contempt also for those servile daubsters who consent to the indignity of having R.A. added to their own proper, or assumed, names. Most of them belong to the advanced school of Impressionists, and allow, with reservations, that Jimmy Whitetuft has genius, as they know that he is the most generous, as well as the most epigrammatical, of

painters, while Rhoda, the model, also knows that he is the kindest and most chivalrous of patrons, who stands more of her caprices than most of her other masters do, allows her more frequent as well as longer rests in the two hours' sitting, and can always be depended upon for a half-crown on an emergency; good-natured, sardonic Jimmy Whitetuft, who can well appreciate the caprices of any woman, or butterfly of the hour, seeing that he has so many of them himself.

Rhoda Prettyman is occupied at the present moment in what she likes best, warming her young, lithe, Greek-like figure at the stove, while she puffs out vigorous wreaths of smoke from the cigarette she has picked up at the table, in the passing from the dais to the stove. She is perfect in face, hair, figure and colour, not yet sixteen, and greatly in demand by artists and sculptors; a good girl and a merry one, who prefers bitter beer to champagne, a night in the pit to the ceremony of a private box, with a dozen or so of oysters afterwards at a little shop, rather than run her entertainer into the awful expense of a supper at the Criterion or Gatti's. Her father and mother having served as models before her, she has been accustomed to the disporting of her charms *à la vue* on raised daïses from her tenderest years, and to the *patois* of the studios since she could lisp, so that she is as unconscious as a Solomon Island young lady in the bosom of her own family, and can patter

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"Art" as fluently as any picture dealer in the land.

They are all smoking hard, while they criticise the unfinished Exhibition picture of their host, Algar Gray, during this rest time of the model; Rhoda has not been posing for that picture now, for at the present time the studio is devoted to a life-club, and Rhoda has been hired for this purpose by those hard-working students, who form the young school. Jimmy Whitetuft is the visitor who drops in to cut them up; a marvellous eye for colour and effect Jimmy has, and they are happy in his friendly censorship.

All round the room the easels are set up, with their canvases, in a half-moon range, and on these canvases Rhoda can see herself as in half-a-dozen mirrors, reflected in the same number of different styles as well as postures, for these students aim at originality. But the picture which now occupies their attention is a bishop, half-length, in the second working upon which the well-known features and figure of Rhoda are depicted in thirteenth-century costume as the Beatrice of Dante, and while the young painter looks at his stale design with discontented eyes, his friends act the part of Job's comforters.

"There isn't a professional model in London who can stand for Beatrice, if you want to make her live. They have all been in too many characters already. You must have something fresh."

"Yes, I know," muttered Algar Gray. "But where the deuce shall I find her?"

"Go to the country. You may see something there," suggested Jack Brunton, the landscapist. "I always manage to pick up something fresh in the country."

"The country be blowed for character," growled Will Murray. "Go to the East End of London, if you want a proper Beatrice; to the half-starved crew, with their big eyes and thin cheeks. That's the sort of thing to produce the spiritual longing, wistful look you want. I saw one the other day, near the Thames Tunnel, while I was on the prowl, who would have done exactly."

"What was she?" asked Algar eagerly.

"A Ratcliff Highway stroller, I should say. At any rate, I met her in one of the lowest pubs., pouring down Irish whiskey by the tumbler, with never a wink, and using the homespun in a most delectable fashion. Her mate might have served for Semiramis, and she took four ale from the quart pot, but the other, the Beatrice, swallowed her dose neat, and as if it had been cold water from one of the springs of Paradise, where, in olden times, she was wont to gather flowers."

"Good Heavens! Will, you are atrocious. The sentiment of Dante would be killed by such a woman."

"Realistic, dear boy, that's all. You will find very exquisite flowers sometimes even on a dust-heap, as well as where humanity grows

thickest and rankest. We have all to go through the different stages of earthly experience, according to Blavatsky. This Beatrice may have been the original of Dante in the thirteenth century, now going through her Wapping experience. It seems nasty, yet it may be necessary."

"What like was she?"

"What sort of an ideal had you when you first dreamt of that picture, Algy?"

"A tall, slender woman, of about twenty or twenty-two, graceful and refined, with pale face blue-veined and clear, with dark hair and eyes indifferent as to shade, yet out-looking—a soulful gaze from a classical, passive and passionless face."

"That is exactly the Beatrice of the East End shanty and the Irish whisky, the sort of holy after-death calm pervading her, the alabaster-lamp-like complexion lit up by pure spirits undiluted, the general dreamy, indifferent pose—it was all there when I first saw her, only a battle royal afterwards occurred between her and the Amazon over a sailor, during which the alabaster lamp flamed up and Semiramis came off second best; for commend me to your spiritual demons when claws and teeth are wanted. No matter, I have found your model for you; take a turn with me this evening and I'll perhaps be able to point her out to you, the after negotiations I leave in your own romantic hands."

II.

DANTE IN THE INFERNO.

It is a considerable distance from the Fulham Road to Wapping even going by 'bus, but as the two artist friends went, it was still farther and decidedly more picturesque.

They were both young men under thirty. Art is not so precocious as literature, and does not send quite so many early potatoes into the market, so that the age of thirty is considered young enough for a painter to have learnt his business sufficiently to be marketable from the picture-dealing point of view.

Will Murray was the younger of the two by a couple of years, but as he had been sent early to fish in the troubled waters of illustration, and forced to provide for himself while studying, he looked much the elder; of a more realistic and energetic turn, he did not indulge in dreams of painting any single *magnum opus*, with which he would burst upon an astonished and enthusiastic world, he could not afford to dream, for he had to work hard or go fasting, and so the height of his aspirations was to paint well enough to win a note of approval from his own particular school, and keep the pot boiling with black and white work.

Algar Gray was a dreamer on five hundred per year, the income beneficent Fortune had

endowed him with by reason of his lucky birth ; he did not require to work for his daily bread, and as he had about as much prospect of selling his paint-creations, or imitations, as the other members of this new school, he spent the time he was not painting in dreaming about a possible future.

It wasn't a higher ideal, this brooding over fame, than the circumscribed ideal of Will Murray ; each member of that young school was too staunch to his principles, and idealized his art as represented by canvas and paints too highly to care one jot about the pecuniary side of it ; they painted their pictures as the true poet writes his poems, because it was right in their eyes ; they held exhibitions, and preached their canons to a blinded public ; the blinded public did not purchase, or even admire ; but all that did not matter to the exhibitors so long as they had enough left to pay for more canvases and frames.

Will Murray was keen sighted and blue-eyed, robust in body and for ever on the alert for fresh material to fill his sketch book. Algar Gray was dark to swarthinness, with long, thin face, rich-toned, melancholy eyes, and slender figure ; he did not jot down trifles as did his friend, he absorbed the general effect and seldom produced his sketching-block.

Having time on their hands and a glorious October evening before them, they walked to Fulham Wharf and, hiring a wherry there, resolved to go by the old water way to the

Tower, and after that begin their search for the Spiritual, through the Inferno of the East.

There is no river in the world to be compared for majesty and the witchery of association, to the Thames; it impresses even the unreading and unimaginative watcher with a solemnity which he cannot account for, as it rolls under his feet and swirls past the buttresses of its many bridges; he may think, as he experiences the unusual effect, that it is the multiplicity of buildings which line its banks, or the crowd of sea-craft which floats upon its surface, or its own extensive spread. In reality he feels, although he cannot explain it, the countless memories which hang for ever like a spiritual fog over its rushing current.

This unseen fog closes in upon the two friends as they take up their oars and pull out into mid-stream; it is a human fog which depresses and prepares them for the scenes into which they must shortly add their humanity; there is no breaking away from it, for it reaches up to Oxford and down to Sheppey, the voiceless thrilling of past voices, the haunting chill of dead tragedies, the momentous hush of acted history.

It wafts towards them on the brown sails of the gliding barges where the solitary figures stand upright at the stern like so many Charons steering their hopeless freights; it shapes the fantastic clouds of dying day overhead, from the fumes of countless fires, and the breaths from countless lips, it is the overpowering

absorption of a single soul composed of many parts; the soul of a great city, past and present, of a mighty nation with its crowded events, crushing down upon the heart of a responsive stream, and this is the mystic power of the pulsating, eternal Thames.

They bear down upon Westminster, the ghost-consecrated Abbey, and the history-crammed Hall, through the arches of the bridge with a rush as the tide swelters round them; the city is buried in a dusky gloom save where the lights begin to gleam and trail with lurid reflections past black velvety-looking hulls—a dusky city of golden gleams. St. Paul's looms up like an immense bowl reversed, squat, un-English, and undignified in spite of its great size; they dart within the sombre shadows of the Bridge of Sighs, and pass the Tower of London, with the rising moon making the sky behind it luminous, and the crowd of shipping in front appear like a dense forest of withered pines, and then mooring their boat at the steps beyond, with a shuddering farewell look at the eel-like shadows and the glittering lights of that writhing river, with its burthen seen and invisible, they plunge into the purlieus of Wapping.

Through silent alleys where dark shadows fleeted past them like forest beasts on the prowl; through bustling market-places where bloaters predominated, into crammed gin-palaces where the gas flashed over faces whereon was stamped the indelible impression of a protest against

creation ; brushing tatters which were in gruesome harmony with the haggard or bloated features.

Will Murray was used to this medley and pushed on with a definite purpose, treating as burlesque what made the dreamer groan with impotent fury that so dire a poverty, so unspeakable a degradation, could laugh and seem hilarious even under the fugitive influence of Old Tom. They were not human beings these breathing and roaring masses, they were an appalling army of spectres grinning at an abashed Maker.

"Here we are at last, Algy," observed Will, cheerily, as the pair pushed through the swinging doors of a crammed bar and approached the counter, "and there is your Beatrice."

III.

THE PICTURE.

THE impressionists of Fulham Road knew Algy Gray no more, after that first glimpse which he had of Beatrice. His studio was once again to let, for he had removed his baggage and tent eastward, so as to be near the woman who would not and could not come West.

His first impressions of her might have cured many a man less refined or sensitive ;—a tall young woman with pallid face leaning against the bar and standing treat to some others of her kind ; drinking furiously, while from her lips

flowed a husky torrent of foulness, unrepeatable ; she was in luck when he met her, and enjoying a holiday with some of her own sex, and therefore wanted no male interference for that night, so she repulsed his advances with frank brutality, and forced him to retire from her side baffled.

Yet, if she offended his refined ears, there was nothing about her to offend his artistic eyes ; she had no ostrich feathers in her hat, and no discordancy about the colours of her shabby costume ; it was plain and easy-fitting, showing the grace of her willowy shape ; her features were statuesque, and as Will had said, alabaster-like in their pure pallor.

That night Algar Gray followed her about, from place to place, watching her beauty hungrily, even while he wondered at the unholy thirst that possessed her, and which seemed to be sateless, a quenchless desire which gave her no rest, but drove her from bar to bar, while her money lasted ; she appeared to him like a soulless being, on whom neither fatigue nor debauchery could take effect.

At length, as midnight neared, she turned to him with a half smile and beckoned him towards her ; she had ignored him hitherto, although she knew he was hunting her down.

"I say, matey, I'm stumped up, so you can stand me some drink if you like."

She laughed scornfully when she saw him take soda water for his share, it was a weakness which she could neither understand nor appreciate.

"You ain't Jacky the Terror, are you?" she

enquired carelessly as she asked him for another drink.

"Certainly not, why do you ask?"

"'Cos you stick so close to me. I thought perhaps you had spotted me out for the next one, not that I care much whether you are or not, now that my money is done."

His heart thrilled at the passivity of her loneliness as he looked at her; she had accepted his companionship with indifference, unconscious of her own perfection, utterly apathetic to everything; she a woman that nothing could warm up.

She led him to the home which she rented, a single attic devoid of furniture, with the exception of a broken chair and dilapidated table, and a mattress which was spread out in the corner, a wretched nest for such a matchless Beatrice.

And as she reclined on the mattress and drank herself to sleep from the bottle which she had made him buy for her, he sat at the table, and while the tallow candle lasted, he watched her, and sketched her in his pocket-book, after which, when the candle had dropped to the bottom of the bottle which served for a candlestick, and the white moonlight fell through the broken window upon that pure white slumbering face, so still and death-like, he crept softly down the stairs, thrall'd with but one idea.

Next day when he came again she greeted him almost affectionately, for she remembered his lavishness the night before and was grateful

for the refreshment which he sent out for her. Yes, she had no objections to let him paint her if he paid well for it, and came to her, but she wasn't going out of her beat for any man; so finding that there was another attic in the same house to let, he hired it, got the window altered to suit him and set to work on his picture.

The model, although untrained, was a patient enough sitter to Algar Gray when the mood took her, but she was very variable in her moods, and uncertain in her temper, as spirit-drunkards mostly are. Sometimes she was reticent and sullen, and would not be coaxed or bribed into obedience to his wishes, at other times she was lazy and would not stir from her own mattress, where she lay like a lovely savage, letting him admire her transparent skin, with the blue veins intersecting it, and a luminous glow pervading it, until his spirit melted within him, and he grew almost as purposeless as she was.

Under these conditions the picture did not advance very fast, for now November was upon them with its fogs. Very often on the days when she felt amiable enough to sit, he had no light to take advantage of her mood, while at other times she was either away drinking with her own kind or else sulking in her bleak den.

If he wondered at first how she could keep the purity of her complexion with the life she led or how she never appeared overcome with the quantity of spirits she consumed, he no

longer did so since she had given him her confidence.

She was a child of the slums in spite of her refinement of face, figure and neatness of attire ; who, six years before had been given up by the doctors for consumption, and informed that she had not four months of life left. Previous to this medical verdict she had worked at a match factory, and been fairly well conducted, but with the recklessness of her kind, who resemble sailors closely, she had pitched aside caution, resolved to make the most of her four months left, and so abandoned herself to the life she was still leading.

She had existed almost entirely upon raw spirits for the past six years, surprised herself that she had lived so long past her time, yet expecting death constantly ; she was as one set apart by Death, and no power could reclaim her from that doom, a reckless, condemned prisoner, living under a very uncertain reprieve, and without an emotion or a desire left except the vain craving to deaden thought, and be able to die *game*, a craving which would not be satisfied.

Algar Gray, for the sake of an ideal, had linked himself to a soul already damned, which still held on to its fragile casement, a soul which was dragging him down to her own hell ; her very cold indifference to him drew him after her, and enslaved him, her unholy transparent loveliness bewitched him, and the foulness of her lips and language no longer caused him a

shudder, since it could not alter her exquisite lines or those pearly tints which defied his palette ; and yet he did not love the woman ; his whole desire was to transfer her perfection to his canvas before grim Death came to snatch her clay from the vileness of its surroundings.

IV.

A LOST SOUL.

DECEMBER and January had passed with clear, frosty skies, and the picture of Beatrice was at length ready for the Exhibition.

When a man devotes himself body and spirit to a single object, if he has training and aptitude, no matter how mediocre he may be in ordinary affairs, he will produce something so nearly akin to a work of genius as to deceive half the judges who think themselves competent to decide between genius and talent.

Algar Gray had studied drawing at a good training-school, and was acknowledged by competent critics to be a true colourist, and for the last three months he had lived for the picture which he had just completed, therefore the result was satisfactory even to him. Beatrice, the ideal love of Dante, looked out from his canvas in the one attic of this Wapping slum, while Beatrice, the model, lay dead on her old mattress in the other.

He had attempted to make her home more home-like and comfortable for her, but without

success; what he ordered from the upholsterer she disposed of promptly to the brokers, laughing scornfully at his efforts to redeem her, and mocking coarsely at his remonstrances, as she always had done at his temperate habits. He was not of her kind, and she had no sympathy with him, or in any of his ways; she had tolerated him only for the money he was able to give her, and so had burnt herself out of life without a kindly word or thought about him.

She had died as she wished to do, that is, she had passed away silently and in the darkness, leaving him to discover what was left of her, in the chill of a winter morning, a corpse not whiter or less luminous than she had been in life, with the transparent neck and delicate arms, blue-veined and beautiful, and the face composed with the immortal air of quiet which it had always possessed.

She had lasted just long enough to enable him to put the finishing touches upon her replica, and now that the undertakers had taken away the matchless original, he thought that he might return to his own people, and take with him the object which he had coveted and won. The woman herself seemed nothing to him while she lay waiting upon her last removal in the room next to his, but now that it was empty, and only her image remained before him, he was strangely dissatisfied and restless.

He had caught the false appearance of purity which was about her, but all unaware to him-

self; this constant communication of the more natural part had been absorbed into his being, until now the picture looked like a body waiting for the return of its own mocking spirit, and for the first time, regretful wishes began to tug at his heart-strings; it was no longer the Beatrice of Dante that he wanted, but the Beatrice who had mockingly enslaved him with her vileness, and whom he had permitted to escape from him for an ideal, she who had never tempted him in life, was now tormenting him past endurance with hopeless longings.

He had gone out that afternoon with the intention of returning to his studio in the West End, and making arrangements for bringing his picture there, but after wandering aimlessly about the evil haunts where he had so often followed his late model, he found that he could not tear himself from that dismal round. A shadowy form seemed to glide before him from one gin-palace to another as she had done in life; the places where she had leaned against the bars seemed still to be occupied by her cold and mocking presence, no longer passive, but repulsing him as she had done in the early part of the first night, while he grew hungry and eager for her friendship.

She was before him on the pavement as he turned towards his attic; her husky, oath-clogged voice sounded in his ears as he passed an alley, and when he rushed forward to seize her, two other women fled from him out of the gloom with shrieks of fear. All the voices of

these unfortunates are alike, and he had made a mistake.

The ice had given way on the morning of her death, and the streets were now slushy and wet, with a drizzling fog obscuring objects, so that only an instinct led him back to his temporary studio; he would draw down his blind and light his lamp, and spend the last evening of the slums in looking at his work.

It appeared almost a perfect piece of painting, and likely to attract much notice when it was exhibited. The dress which Beatrice had worn still lay over the back of the chair near the door, where she had carelessly flung it when last she took it off. He turned his back to the dress-covered chair and looked at the picture. Yes, it was the Beatrice whom Dante yearned over all his life—as she appeared to him at the bridge, with the same pure face and pathetic eyes, but not the Beatrice whom he, Algar Gray, passed over while she lived, and now longed for with such unutterable longing when it was too late.

He flung himself down before his *magnum opus*, and buried his face in his hands with passionate and hopeless regret.

Was that a husky laugh down in the court below, on the stairs, or in the room beside him?—her devil's laugh when she would go her own way in spite of his remonstrances.

He raised his head and looked behind him to where the dress had been lying crumpled and away from his picture. God of Heaven! his

dead model had returned and now stood at the open door beckoning upon him to come to her, with her lovely transparent arm bare to the elbow, and once more dressed in the costume which she had cast aside.

He looked no more at his replica, but followed the mocking spirit down the stairs, into the fog-wrapped alley, and onwards where she led him.

Down towards Wapping Old Stairs, where the shapeless hulks of the ships and barges loomed out from the swirling, rushing black river like ghosts, as she was, who floated towards them, luring him downwards, amongst the slime, to the abyss from which her lost soul had been recalled by his evil longings.

Marie St. Pierre.

"Many a with'ring thought lies hid, not lost,
In smiles that least befit who wear them most."

—BYRON.

"WE were all assembled, a gay company—a very gay company—and I was the gayest of the gay. How giddy we can appear when the heart is ready to burst with misery! I sang to them alternately comic and sentimental ballads, played for them operatic selections, recited parts of some of my old stage pieces, until they wept with maudlin sympathy, or roared out with vulgar applause. They thought me so light-hearted, so coquettish, so happy. How they admired my beauty, followed with their greedy eyes each graceful motion, watched the ease with which I handled my fan, and envied my vivacity of spirits as I showed them my teeth and laughed! But how they would have shrunk back with horror could they have read the purpose stamped within my wretched and distracted mind!

"I sank back upon a couch with the book in my hand, studying it very carefully, yet taking time to glance up now and then with a placid smile at the poor puns of my brainless companion. Neither did I shudder when he inquired what was the title of the book I was poring so

intently over, but replied carelessly as I handed it to him, 'De Quincy on Opium.' I laughed in answer to his remark that it was a singular study for a young lady, and turned lightly from him to it again, learning off by heart the deadly recipe—the proper amount of drops required for a girl of my fancied organism to sleep on for ever. I knew the consequences of an over-draught, therefore was all the more careful, for I did not wish to suffer too much pain, nor to disfigure my person in any way. I wished to look as fair and as interesting in that slumber as when awake, that they might all admire me as they had done before, that some might pity the shell who had no pity for Marie St. Pierre when pity would have done her good. I wished *him* to see me who had so falsely left me to suffer alone the bitters of a weak impulse, that he might also feel to the full the vain regret of a remorseful heart as he gazed upon the lovely morsel which his coldness had thrown from him. This would be my revenge for long nights of sleepless agony, and for this I spent every spare moment upon the pages, and every thought concentrated upon their contents, even as I played, and laughed, and sang.

"I was an actress, and ambitious; overmuch so, the managers thought, since they wished to humble my pride by offering to me a subordinate engagement; but they did not know my spirit when they attempted this: I was not to be brought down while the means of escape lay in my little bottle. The funds were ebbing low,

with no means of replenishing them except by stooping; yet I could afford to be cheerful when I knew that I should never require to stoop while I kept that little bottle. I loved a man, who had acted well when he could deceive a professional actress, but even his base desertion, my hidden shame, and breaking heart, could not affect my features while I was upheld by the proud consciousness that in my own hands lay my destiny; that in my desk, amongst his *billets doux* and perfumed love-tokens, reposed a little draught, like the asp of Cleopatra among the roses, waiting but for my consent to waft me away from the memory of mortal woes.

“That night I made myself agreeable, and after a few hours of entertaining misery, my amused visitors departed to their respective and respectable homes, leaving me to myself. Graciously I returned their bows, pleasantly wished them all good-night and sweet repose; then, as the last disappeared, without a betraying look or tremor, took from the hand of my landlady the candle, and smilingly ascended to the solitudes of my chamber. The hall clock struck three as I locked my chamber-door, and laid the candle beside my desk on the dressing table, while I sat down to gaze at the reflection of myself in the mirror. How deadly quiet the space around me seemed, yet how fearfully crammed it felt; it seemed as though ten thousand eyes were fixing themselves upon me to bear witness against the daring and impious purpose of my desperate will; as if the chamber were thronged with

shadows who hung about me; as if arms were pressing upon me, and voices striving to shriek out their entreaties for me to pause and reconsider my mad intent. But I was resolved, and their efforts were idle. With a spiteful stamp, I sprang to my feet, and shook off the stupor of horror that was closing upon me, and taking from me my forced courage. While pressing my lips firmly to keep back a shriek, I began my last task upon earth. Opening my desk, I took from thence his letters. One by one I read them through again with a bounding heart and bitter scalding tears; I kissed them passionately; then, kneeling down, gathered them into a little heap on the hearthstone, and applying a light, watched them slowly consume to ashes, as my hopes had done before. These mute witnesses of my unwise love destroyed, I arose, and pouring some water into the basin, carefully bathed my eyes, so that the world might see no trace of the workings of the heart upon my countenance when it came to gaze upon it in the morning. Then, again sitting down to the desk, I commenced to pen a few last directions. I told them to spare the time of the coroner with his jury, for that my own hand had liberated my soul with the aid of laudanum, but to bury the frail prison unbroken, as I had left it; thus, in my conceit, thinking on the looks that had ruined me. I gave no reason for my rash step, but finished the epistle by bidding all a kind farewell, bequeathing all that I did not require for grave

purposes to the few friends I had left. This I sealed and left on my desk ; then began leisurely to deck myself out for the tomb. I selected the white-satin robe in which he had first beheld me, dressed up my hair in his favourite fashion, and, seating myself upon the bed, arranged the folds of my costume most effectively ; after which I reached over, and taking the phial from its perfumed nest, drew out the stopper, and with a silent prayer for pardon, but with a steady hand, I counted out the calculated drops into a wine-glass, and quaffed it quickly off. I had time to put back the phial and wine-glass, also to stretch myself upon the bed and think, before the poison began to operate. What were my thoughts during those silent moments I will not say ; yet although stinging, I do not think they were so agonising as those which had racked my mind for weeks back.

Then the air began to grow thicker and lighter methought. Although the candle was guttering and dying in its socket, silvery clouds rolled upwards from the floor to the ceiling, coming nearer to me, and waxing denser and brighter as they neared. I watched those vapours for some time with curiosity, not unmingled with fear, as I observed starry lights gleam through them and shift about ; until, with a wild start, I beheld the cloudy columns burst asunder, and from their centre leap forth shining and dark forms, who surrounded me, and gazed upon me, the brighter ones with benevolent and pitying

looks, and the darker ones with malignant leers. Then it flashed across my mind that I was looking on the spirits of the departed, and I felt that my time was drawing nigh. I tried to cry out, to push back the influence of those dark and loathsome phantoms, for it was them who seemed to come nearest me, as if they had the best claim upon my captive soul; but I could not keep them away, and only a low moan broke from my icy lips in place of the shriek that rent my bosom. Nearer they pressed, one upon the other, with ghastly faces, and glowing eyes peering upon me, and the weird fingers spreading out at me, until, in the midst of my awful terror and unexpressed abhorrence, I felt as if lifted up by demon talons and dashed down again into chaotic blackness."

Through the Gap.

AN ADVENTURE.

CHAPTER I.

ZACH FLEMING'S YARN.

"I AIN'T much chucks at spinning a yarn, mates, being as ye all know much easier with my fists or my Colt in a shindy than with my tongue, at the telling of it, but if ye want to hear how I got out of that blessed German trap, and over that blessed German wall, here goes to do my best to amuse ye all."

They were resting on one of the steep ridges of the Owen Stanley chain of mountains, three white men and five naked, shivering savages, who rolled themselves about as well as they could manage with their numerous wounds, in order to get as near to the blazing logs as it was possible for them to do without being roasted.

Three white men, two of them passably covered with flannel shirts, well patched pants, and high boots, and the third with a few shreds still hanging about his legs that had once been trousers, and the rest of his sun-tanned body as bare as were the savages who lay beside him; this tattered specimen of civilization was the speaker to whom the others listened gravely as they smoked their pipes.

Heavily-bearded and long-haired men were the whites, presenting the appearance of having roughed it for months amongst the forests and ridges, tall and lank the two of them were, with the skin drawn tightly over their cheek bones, at least what could be seen of it from the tangled masses of uncombed hair, with strong sinewy and knuckly hands, that held on to their wood pipes firmly as if they were treasures which they had to guard with force.

The speaker was a medium-sized, square-built man of about thirty-eight, with glittering black eyes under heavy eyebrows, broad-shouldered and hairy-chested, and as he spoke he sawed the air with his powerful left arm, the right one remaining bandaged against his knee. Like the savages, he appeared to have had a stiff time of it lately, for his body bore many marks of recent and old wounds upon it, while the bandages had stiffened and were stained with the red blood which had saturated through them, and become dried since they were first put on.

At the feet of the two listeners lay fowling pieces and Winchester rifles, while in their belts were stuck long revolvers and jack-knives, and even as they listened, their eyes were ever on the move, as if on the look-out for sudden surprises.

It was a ridge high above where the trees grew, and bare to the piercing night wind which breathed damp and icy upon them; they had fixed their camp here as the safest, if not the

most comfortable position, with a steep wall of rock on the one side, dropping sheer down thousands of feet, before the tops of the great forest trees could be reached, and on the other side sloping steeply down towards other forests, at an acute angle, some parts grass-covered, and other portions bare and rocky.

A very circumscribed plateau it was upon which they squatted on this chilly night, with about half-a-dozen feet comparatively flat, and grass-covered, then a few yards of easy incline terminated by some broken boulders before that abrupt hill began to fall away. Being upon the highest point from where they camped they were able without moving to overlook this decline, and as the tropic moon was shining full upon it, it was impossible for even the most wily enemy to steal upon them unperceived, at least not while the moon remained unclouded, while from their barren vantage point they could easily have pushed any number of foemen over these boulders and sent them rolling for at least three-quarters of a mile, before they could be stopped.

This was the advantage of their present position, a great advantage to strangers in a country like New Guinea, where it was impossible to cover their tracks in the forests or do without fires on the heights. Each man knew that he was safe so long as the sky remained clear, and also that there was no need to attempt to hide their camp fires from eyes which may have been upon them for weeks.

They trusted to their position, and their superior weapons, also in luck, for with adventurers who traverse this land, luck is everything.

The great full moon cast down upon them its white flames, striking the yellow flames from the dead wood branches, and changing to wreaths of silver the thick wood-smoke; it beat upon the glistening native grass until it shone like snow under their feet, losing its radiance in the dense banks of mist which hung over the gorges and forests; until they appeared to be camped on the top of a cone-like island in the middle of a boundless ocean, three white men and five wounded and dispirited savages.

There was not much humour expressed in the faces of the two listeners, nor even much appearance of interest in what the narrator was telling them. They listened apathetically and sucked at their pipes slowly as men do who are limited in their stock of tobacco, and who wish to take the most out of each pipe-full. Under the two were spread blankets, which, as they were the only ones provided with such comforts they did not roll them round themselves, although the heavy dews were drenching them like rain. They lay on them to keep the blankets dry against the rolling up the next morning; and with that unostentatious courtesy which the roughest bushman naturally acquires, were content to suffer the same discomforts that the other sharers of their mountain camp were enduring.

"Things hadn't been going well with me on the south coast for some months past, for you

know, mates, that it ain't all fair sailing with a free-trader, now that the Government war-sloop has got to know her way inside the reefs."

"We know it, Zach Fleming, for that's what sent us up here bird-catching instead of taking our ease amongst the friendly natives, worse luck," growled one of the listeners, taking his pipe for a moment from his lips, and then putting it back again, while the other silently nodded.

"That's so," continued Zach Fleming in a plaintive tone, as one might use if speaking about a once prosperous business which had gone to the dogs through the dishonesty of customers. "Our kind of trading ain't what it used to be in no quarter of the world, and there's no chance now left for a man unless he can get the soft side of these blessed Missionaries in New Guinea, which, as with yourselves, my card ain't quite clean enough for me to present it at Port Moresby.

"It was at Cooktown, last trip I made there, that I heard the Government was after me for a little bit of a shindy that happened off East Cape, and that there was no use in my landing anywhere west of that, which same I was mighty sorry to hear, for I had some pretty cargoes booked at two or three places. However, there was no good crying over spilt milk, and as I couldn't stop any longer where I was, with my boys eating their heads off on board, I just thought that I'd take a run up to the German

side and see if anything likely could be picked up there.

So I up anchor and started straight across for the Louisiades, keeping a wide berth of the mainland, intending to take them in my line round.

But I saw no chance there, for the sloop had been afore me and set the islanders dead against me; so I slid in by Fergusson Island and through Ward Hunt Strait to Collingwood Bay, where I thought of putting in for a spell, but had no chance there either, for the natives of them parts are about the most uncivil savages you could wish to meet, although in the main they are tall, fine fellows to look at.

I expect that they don't chivey on to a white fellow as kindly now as they may have done at one time, for they lie too close to the German settlements and know more about the neighbours which they have got for masters. They wouldn't let us land, but followed us along the bay, showing battle front each time I tried it on.

After this I left that part in disgust and beat round to the settlement on the Augusta river. Lor, mates, that is a place if you like, talk about Melbourne springing up like a mushroom, it ain't in it with the way these Germans go to work. I sailed along mile after mile of land all under cultivation, plantations, gardens, farms, terraces, townships: why, the whole country seemed to be building houses, digging and trenching and road-making, and never a blessed native to interfere with them in their work. I

saw crowds of the *Deutschers* at work in the fields and gardens, fat "*Fritzes*" with their broad-beamed "*Fraus*" helping them, and their little kids rolling about in the dust, while for scare-crows they had a naked savage hanging up here and there on the branches of the ringed cotton trees, but never a sight of a living one about, either man, woman or child. I guess they set to work and cleared them off first, before they cut down the trees, at least that's the only way that I could account for it.

Then I got round to the main settlement with its harbour crammed full of ships, unloading fresh emigrants with their tools and stock and baggage, for they take everything out with them, or else filling up with cargoes of native produce. It was a lively scene and no mistake, and looked as if they meant business.

As I was sailing in, for I wanted a squint at the town, I was met by one of the Custom-House boats and boarded. Not a man amongst them could speak English, but as soon as they saw that I was a stranger, the officer took possession of my smack and made signals to shore for an interpreter, who when he came aboard asked me all about my business, and told me that I'd have to anchor outside until he could get instructions from the commander as to what was to be done with me. Thinks I to myself, this is as bad as quarantine, and different to the fashion we use them in Australia, but every country to its own customs, so I yielded and anchored where he told me, while he left me (to

go ashore to report, I expect) in the charge of half-a-dozen marines.

After an hour or two waiting, with the sun going down behind us, I saw a boat once more put off with my interpreter in it along with another regimental-looking cove, and two or three soldiers sitting with their muskets ready, besides the boatmen who were pulling; they came aboard and I showed them into the cabin, when they began to make a regular court-martial of me. What right had I to put into their port? Was I sent by my Government to spy upon them, or had I come for pleasure only?

I tried to answer all their questions as best I could, and not wishing to make myself appear too small afore them, I told them that I held an office in Port Moresby as missionary pilot, and that I was then on my way from one of the stations north, and had put in for provisions which I was willing to buy from them if they would sell to me.

The interpreter told this back again to the officer, who said that he would let me know in the morning, but meanwhile I was on no account to leave my ship, or else they would treat me as an English spy. I found out also that I had made a mistake by saying I belonged to the missionaries. I had heard that the Germans were a praying lot and I thought that they'd treat me better for telling them this, but they told me pretty square that missionaries were the last kind they wanted there, so that I was vexed at my own crass stupidity. However, I

promised them that I'd obey orders, so the two went off after a glass all round, leaving me in charge of the soldiers and water police.

It was a fine dark night after they had left, so I had nothing to do except look over at the lights of the beer-shops ashore, and listen to their bands. I grew regular melancholy, and at last made up my mind for a swim. Where we lay was about two miles off shore, but I could easily do that and back again, and as for sharks, I care no more about them than I do about herring when I'm in the water; so seeing that my keepers were paying no sort of attention to me, I just slipped down to my cabin, and, putting some loose change in my pockets, walked along to the bows and dropped gently overboard.

I struck out leisurely, without being missed, and got ashore all right, and was just giving myself a shake on the strand when a couple of policemen collared me and marched me off to "quod," when, after the Governor had seen me, and whom I noticed was the military cove, he clapped me into a cell, and left me to think over it until the next morning.

It wasn't pleasant, nor nearly as friendly as we treat them when they come over to our country, but it was something like what I might expect if I landed at Port Moresby; so I contented myself that they didn't know who I was, which was a comfort, and also that I wasn't likely to meet anyone who did know me.

The next day they had me up afore the Governor and all his officers, a regular court house full, making such a fuss over me as if I had been a conspirator threatening the downfall of Germany. You never saw such a suspicious lot as they are. They examined me, and put me through my facings, entering all that I told them in several books, asking me what we were doing on our side of the Owen Stanleys, and badgering me until I was like to drop with hunger and thirst, without even offering me a bite or a sup, and at last gave me my choice, either to be shot as a political spy or else clear out of the land without looking back.

I at once fixed on the running game, on which, after blindfolding me and clapping me in irons, they carried me back to the smack, which they had overhauled for secret papers. After this they warned me that if they sighted me again near their coast they would sink me straight away. You take your oath, mates, that I wasn't sorry to put to sea away from this jealous settlement, even although the weather outside was rough and looked like a storm coming on.

And so it was, for I had hardly got out to sea and clear of the reefs, than it came on, a regular south-easter tornado which took me all my time to keep her nose to the wind afore night came and swallowed up the land.

What a night that was after the daylight went, thunder and lightning over head, like a regular bombardment of artillery with fire-

works, while the flaming waves curled up, and the blast bent my masts like cane whips.

I was in strange waters and didn't know my way about, like as I do round the south coast, and my Malay boys were no sort of good to me at all. I just fixed myself to the wheel and hung on to that like grim death, while they flung themselves down the hatches and howled with a panic all the while that the wind whistled round, and the thunder broke, clap on clap, over my head, nigh deafening me, and the forked lightning slashed about, here, there, and everywhere, so that at one moment it was thundering blackness like a hundred quartz crushing mills at work, and the next as if the sky had opened and the infernal regions were blazing above the waves.

As for the rain it fell in sheets, and looked like sheets of glass being broken up when the zig-zag streaks went through it.

So we drove along, I keeping her head as well as I could to sea, with my ignorance of headlands, and the waves boiling up and near us all blue and green, like a lucifer match afore it begins to blaze up. I wasn't scared, of course, for I never felt that way at no time, but I still expected every minute to be our last.

The blast was driving me in I knew, in spite of all I could do, so that I was in no sense surprised when at last I heard the roar of breakers above the infernal din. I looked steadily ahead, and saw them at last, like high clouds of blue flames.

I ran for them and towards a black gap which I thought I could make out, and next moment we were through it and amongst the hummocks, driving like mad.

All at once there was an awful smash and I was spun overboard amongst the waves like a teetotum, and the next thing I felt was a mass of floating sea-tangle, at which I clutched and hung on with all my strength, while the surf flew over me and nearly choked the life out of me.

CHAPTER II.

A FINE HOLIDAY.

I WAS in luck that night and no mistake about it, for the waves must have washed me far past where the ship had struck and driven me right on to the main land, for never a splinter did I see of her afterwards, nor of my Malay boys either. She must have struck a reef of some sort and gone down plump with the howling cravens aboard down the hatches; gone down after the hole had been gnawed out of her hull, to waters past the sounding.

What I expects is that we got through an outer fringe only to be wrecked against an inner wall half a mile closer to the shore, and that when I was sent spinning overboard the billow drew me on right over the reef and through the shallow waters to the land; at any rate that sea-tangle was the saving of my life.

I made a grab for it and catching a firm hold, I hung on to it until I could get a chance of something firmer, while the waves washed over me and dashed me against the rocks, from which the soft dulse saved me from getting my bones smashed or my brains knocked out; then again I would be sucked outwards with one, and dance along with the wave, to be landed back again by a fresh wave until I was almost dazed. Still I kept my hold, and my head as well out of the water as I could, and that saved me.

I think I must have been over a couple of hours in the sea, struggling hard, when dawn began to break, and I was able to see things a little more plainly. I could twig the land in front of me, against which I was getting knocked, a gathering of rocks all tumbled about under the cliffs, which looked easy to climb, if one had the strength to do so, they were so seamed and ledgy.

I could see, too, that as the light came on the storm was going off. A big, black bank of cloud was scurrying off towards the nor'-west, all charged with forked lightning, which zig-zagged about, while to the sou'-east the sky was getting rosy-like and clear, something like what an oyster shell looks with the light on it.

I now made a pull as the next coming wave drove me on, and letting go my tangle stay I laid hold of a ledge above it, and hung on there while the water left me in its backward suck. It was a strain for a moment, for the weeds had

got twisted about me like ropes, and they hauled away like mad to drag me back again before they slipped from me or broke short. Then I found myself dangling above the boil, and before the next wave could reach me I had hauled myself over the ledge and could take a rest.

There wasn't a trace of the smack to be seen, not even a floating keg, the ocean was tumbling about dark under that oyster-pearl sky to the sou'-east with the lightning-charged thunder cloud now almost gone from the west. My property had sunk to Davy Jones's locker with all my crew and everything belonging to me, while here I sat on the bare rocks, without a blessed idea as to where I was, and with only my pants and shirt on, and not even a jack-knife to defend myself if attacked by the natives. I tell you what it is, mates, I never felt so dicky in all my life before, as when I sat on that ledge, or more inclined to drop back again into the waves and so finish it up, only I'm not one of the sort to drown easily.

After a bit I felt better and started climbing up the cliffs and very soon reached the top, where I found myself in a level country well covered with bush and showing signs of natives about, but no trace of white men.

I struck upon a native track, and followed it up for a mile or two, until I came to a spring of water, which from the footprints in the mud I could see was the well of some village close by, so as I knew the girls would soon be about

with their cans, and that it would be safest for me to get at their soft side first, before the men got hold of me, I laid down behind a bush near the spring and waited.

It was now bright day although the sun had not yet got out of the mist, and all the forest about me lay solemn and quiet, with the creepers twisting around the high, thick trunks and dropping down again from the branches like knotted rope-work, as I lay quietly looking up through all the leaves and twistings and wishing that I had a pipe, I began to think that I could be quite content to stay here for ever, and never look at blue water any more, it was so quiet like and peaceful, that it seemed as if it must be Sunday—at least the Sundays I used to know when I was a little shaver in the old country, in fact, mates, I began to wish that I had done better with my life than I had done, although I never was so bad, as some of them, that is, I never ill-used a woman old or young, black or white, although maybe I've brought unhappiness to them when I had to leave them.

I had got to this lonely, uncomfortable state of mind when I heard the voices of women laughing and chattering as they came along, and looking out from my hiding place, I soon saw about a dozen of them coming to the well, with their waterpots on their heads, swinging along easy, all mostly tall, young and well made, without a suspicion of any stranger watching them.

It was a pretty sight, mates, for a fellow to

look upon after a night of battling with the tempest. You know the women on our side are mostly undersized and not to be likened to the men for good looks, but this bevy which gathered round the spring were different from that; they were all tall and handsome, and light coloured, with big brown eyes, straight noses, and red lips, while as they laughed and chattered they showed teeth like coral for whiteness.

The prettiest amongst them was a girl about sixteen, who, being full grown, stood half a head above the rest. There wasn't a married woman amongst them, for their hair was worn long and free; but for hair she topped them all, it floated about her like a black stallion's mane, all crimped and shining blue-like when the light fell on it as it covered her back right down almost to her knees.

Such a dewy piece of freshness I never before had clapped my eyes upon, and the sight of it made my heart stand still and grow faint-like.

From what they were saying to each other, although their language was a bit strange in some words, yet I knew that I could make myself understood; so watching my chance, when they had filled their pots and were just preparing to hoist them up to their heads, I crawled out, and lay before them, right in their track, with my hands open to show them that I had no weapons, and meant no sort of harm.

I heard afterwards that I was the first white

man they had ever seen, and that the sight of my breeches and shirt gave them a terrible fright, and they showed it, for no sooner had the young things wheeled about to go back home with their filled water jars on their heads, and their eyes full on me, than with a shrill chorus of shrieks they dropped their burdens, and scattered in all directions, excepting mine.

All but Oviro, the prettiest and tallest; she had come the closest to me before she saw me, and whether she was braver than the rest, or that my eye being fixed only on her held her steady, I don't know, but there she stood as if turned into a statue, in front of me with only a few paces between us and the forest, as if left to ourselves, still balancing her filled jar on her glossy black head, the whites of her eyes and teeth showing out as she stared at me with all her might.

I knew that I must make haste before the other girls brought along the men if I didn't want a spear through my back, so I spoke to her quickly and softly and told her that I was alone, tired, hungry, thirsty, and without the means of hurting any one or even of taking my own part. I saw that she both understood and believed me after a bit, for the fear gradually left her face, and at last she motioned me to rise and drink out of her jar, which she lifted from her head and held out to my mouth.

Then with that one act we were friends at once. It's natural for a man when he falls in love with a woman, I suppose, to talk soft and

gentle to her, and I was in love with Oviro, for that was her name, from the first moment I clapped eyes upon her, not the kind of fancy we traders take to native wenches when we are thrown amongst them, but a deep respectful kind of love that made me grow shy and awkward before her, something like what the forest had filled me with before she came along, so that I felt as if I was lifting up my eyes to something far above me, while her fineness and perfect beauty made me think more of my own coarseness and ugliness, and wish that I was younger and better looking for her sake, so that I might win all her heart to myself and be able to live and die with her. I expect it comes to us all at one time of our life, and it had come on me in this lonely forest, just like a bad attack of the fever.

She must have read something of how I felt in my face, for she took the upper hand of me at once, and told me to follow her and she'd see me right through with her tribe, and there I trudged along, she floating before me like a spirit, so lightly and charmingly did she walk, with her water jar on her head, sticking out her bare arms and her hands on her hips, while her long hair almost covered her from my eyes like a seal-skin cloak, and I coming after her like a mongrel dog and feeling like one in my devotion and respect. I didn't care now whether I was walking to my death or not, so long as I could follow her to it. Lor', mates! I never could have believed that a man could grow so helpless

and spoony all at once for a stranger woman, as I was over that girl. She drew me, regularly drew me along as if each hair of her head was a magnet and I had become a needle.

We were met by a crowd of fighting men, with the women behind them, afore we got to the village, who when they saw her coming on unhurt and me behind, stood still, and waited for her to explain. This she did to their satisfaction, and then she introduced me to her father and the rest of the warriors, who at once flung their weapons to the girls to carry home for them, while they made me welcome in their village with great heartiness as if I had been a brother instead of a stranger.

Of course they were cannibals, but you know, mates, that's how cannibals behave when they've no cause to "scoff" you, different altogether to the treacherous, sneaking yam-eaters who turn up their noses at the flesh of an enemy, yet will murder him all the same, and leave him to rot afterwards; different also to the mean, suspicious Germans who sent me adrift, with a storm coming on.

We were very soon at home with each other and great friends. They made me free to every house from the chief's down, only as Oviro had found me first and they saw that I could not live out of her sight hardly, for savages see these things mighty quick, they let me go where my inclination took me, and settled me on her father as a lodger.

The chief of this tribe was a young man, and

the tallest and finest looking fellow I ever met anywhere, he was nearly seven feet high, and shapely all over; Laloka they called him, and his wife was the elder sister to Oviro, and by name Dwia; she was just turning twenty, and had a little son two years old, who was one of the liveliest and most amusing little "cusses" that ever I played with, and taught to square up English fashion.

The father of Oviro wasn't a very important man in the tribe, which was a good thing for me, and what was better, afore I came on the scene Oviro hadn't fixed upon a sweetheart, so that I caused no jealousy amongst the young fellows when I courted her, and it was all pretty fair sailing with me when I got over my first bashfulness. There were plenty of pretty girls in the tribe for the young men to pick and choose from, so that no one interfered with me, and as I was a novelty with my pants and shirt, Oviro took kindly to me in consequence, and before very long got to love me as much as I could have wanted, and a hundred times more than I deserved or even expected.

It was a happy village that, if ever there was one on earth. They had beaten off their enemies, and taught them a lesson not to come near them for a long time, so that they could go about their work or pleasures with light hearts, and sleep soundly at nights, while all round them for miles lay friendly tribes with whom they bartered, and who would warn them of any coming danger.

Their gardens and fields were in a flourishing condition, for the ground about these parts is very rich and don't want much scraping to yield, so that a couple or three days a week of labour was all they needed to do, and the rest of the week they spent in junketing, love-making, or hunting for game in the forest. We all helped in the gardens and fields on the working days, and enjoyed ourselves the rest of the time.

I've heard tell of Paradise and the Garden of Eden, but it couldn't have been a better place than that village, and I want no better heaven when I die than the months I spent with Oviro and her people. Every day the sun blazed down warmly on the earth, sending us into the gardens and forests for shelter—in the gardens, where the palm and sago trees waved and the banana and mammy apple trees hung over us like umbrellas; in the woods, where Oviro and I went bird catching and creeping our way under bushes, fairly weighed down with waxy looking flowers, while the paradise birds flew away up amongst the close dark branches of the high trees which shut out the sky, too far for even a gun shot to reach them, and lower down the parrots and cockatoos perched and chattered along with the wood pigeon.

What rambles these were that we had together in that forest, stopping now and then to kiss as we saw the humming birds and butterflies doing on every side of us, butterflies of all colours, like gaily-painted Chinese fans and lamps,

big patches of blue and scarlet and yellow all fluttering and mixing about through the dark green shadows.

And then the nights when the moon was up, when the lads and lasses went out in bands to the fields to court, and no couple troubled themselves about the others, for all was liberty there, we could come and go as we liked, and sleep when the inclination came on or do without. There we walked, with arms about each other, while the old folks sat round the wood fires to watch the moon rising redly over the trees and change from yellow to white as it mounted that deep blue star-covered sky, while the bushes and grass lay wet and cool as we brushed past them or walked over them with bare feet, that was a holiday, mates and no mistake.

They hadn't heard a whisper about the Germans taking their country as yet. That was to come by-and-bye, they would have laughed at me if I had told them that the land they were so fond of and so proud about, had been given away, for who could give what belonged only to them and their fathers for generations past the counting? So I never told them what I knew, I thought it best not to disturb them.

Well, after Oviro had made up her mind that she loved me enough to marry me, we got married with all the ceremonies of the tribe, and had a regular feasting and jollification, and then I was made one of them, and could take my place at the councils with the other husbands.

They helped me to build my house, and as my wife had a bit of ground of her own with some fruit trees on it, that was where we worked together.

I had no ground of my own, for all the land was portioned out, and had been for ages, and none of them would sell or give up their share even if I could have bought it; but I was quite contented with what I had won, and had never a fear of coming to want in my old age, for there were no such things as paupers in that tribe.

So the months slid on without me hardly noticing them pass, so happy was I with my wife and her relations, and with that little "cuss," my nephew, running about our shanty, and I was going to be happier still from what Oviro told me was coming, when the thunderbolt fell in amongst us.

The accursed Germans were coming to break us up.

CHAPTER III.

GATLING GUNS BY SAUL!

WE had finished our work for the day and were just taking it easy, when the village was set into commotion by the sudden appearance of a native, who came running at full speed, covered with dust, and footsore, to tell us that his tribe had been driven off their land by the enemy, and asking us to go and help them.

Laloka was up and roused into action in a moment. The tribe that this messenger belonged to was a distant one, nearly forty miles away to the east, and had always been their firm allies, so that there was no question now about what was to be done, still, as is customary with all nations, the chief instantly called his council together to hear the story of the man and talk the matter over.

When we were together in front of the Dubo House, the native got up and told us all about it. How a strange race of men, wearing trousers and having skins like mine, had come into the country in great numbers, with fire-sticks and big stumps, which also vomited fire and killed wholesale, and had driven back the natives, whole tribes at a time, mowing all down who did not yield up their lands and run off at once, abusing their women and killing their children.

The news had reached them only when they were ordered back, for the tribes which lived between them and the invaders had not been friendly, so that they had not fallen back on them for protection, but had fled amongst their own allies to the south.

"One day the white chief came, with plenty of men with him, and stood up in the village reading a paper, which told us in our own language that the land was his, and that we were to go away from it at once, with our wives and children. He gave us four hours to pack up and go, and told us that if we were not

away before the sun went down so far, that he would kill us all.

"We had forty fighting men, while they were two hundred, in our village, and while they waited they swarmed into the houses, taking our spears away and driving us out to the open with our wives and children, so that we could neither hold a council nor defend ourselves when the time came for us to go.

"There were big bearded men like him there, but different in colour, who spoke gruffly in a strange language, and laughed at our women as they dragged them about. Then we drew off, and talked to each other without being able to understand what they wanted, until the time passed, and at the word of their chief they suddenly fell upon us, stabbing at and shooting us down without waiting for us to fight.

"They seized some of our women and dragged them back to the huts while they hunted us out, killing all they could catch, the little children and the old men and women first, while our wives and sisters were shrieking out from the huts. Thus we fled with all we could carry with us, while the village was fired, and before we could hide ourselves in the forest, it was all over and only ashes left."

The native sat down after he had finished his account of the massacre, and fixed his burning eyes, as did the rest of the tribe, upon me, while Laloka rose up, and striding over to where I sat seized me by the arm, and forcing me upon my

feet said, as he faced me squarely, with his steady eyes on mine :

"Brother, do you know these men who have killed our friends?"

I felt uncomfortable, you bet, mates, as I stood before my brother-in-law, for, as you are aware, these natives think every white skin to be a cousin or something of that sort, but feeling as innocent of this and as mad as they were over it, I up and told them all I knew, and how the "cusses" had treated me when I visited them. As I spoke, I saw their faces clear up, and knew that they weren't going to blame me for it. Laloka waited quietly until I had finished my yarn, and then he gave me a big breath and said :

"It is well, brother, now you will help us to punish these thieves."

Of course I said "Yes" to that, for although I knew that we were going to butt our heads against a dead wall, and that it would only bring our own punishment the sooner upon ourselves, still my blood boiled at the way the poor natives had been treated, and I was as eager as they were to have a slap at the sausage-eaters for their dirty treatment of me the day before I was wrecked.

We were not long after this over the war council or in making our preparations. Laloka said a few words to his tribe and then asked for my advice. I told them about the fire-sticks, and how we could do no good unless we got hold of them, and then it was decided that we should

creep down upon the Germans and catch them if possible sleeping, when, if we were lucky, we might get some of their weapons. I wanted to have a Colt or a rifle in my hands while fighting, for I was mighty awkward with the spear compared to the natives.

Oviro, with her sister Dwia and the rest of the women, were outside the ring while we spoke, so that they did not need to be told what was to be done. Each wife took her husband indoors for a few minutes without saying anything, and then the men came out again ready for the trail while the women stayed inside.

Oviro went with me into our house, and when we were alone she put her beautiful arms round my neck and pressed me closely to her heart, while I kissed her times without number, but she did not sob and cry like white women do over their husbands when they go away. She fixed her eyes upon mine like a tigress, and said :

"Go, Tacha, and kill these white faces, so that I may forget that you are also white. Bring us back plenty of white heads to hang up over our doors, so that we may laugh at the robbers. Bring back plenty of white flesh for us to cook for you, and white captives for us to torture, for I am already hungry to taste them."

Then she glued her red lips to mine for a moment and pushed me out, laughing and crying stoutly :

"Be brave, Tacha, my husband, and don't let me hunger in vain."

As I turned to look back before jumping down the ladder, I saw my lass lying on the bamboo bed, with her face hidden in her arms and her cold black hair falling over her body like a cloak, for I wouldn't let her cut it off as the other married women do.

The stars were out as we began our march, and we walked all that night in single file, without speaking a word or halting. Laloka led the way with his war shield at his back and his club in his hand, a terrible heavy weapon it was, although he carried it on his shoulder easy, while a young boy carried his spears, bows and arrows behind. Each man had a young lad with him who carried the spare weapons.

At daybreak we came to a village where they were waiting for us, but, although I was hungry and would have liked some breakfast, I knew it was dangerous to ask for this, as they always fast when on the war trail, so as to be ready, I expect, for the cannibal feast afterwards.

This tribe joined us, and during the fore part of the day, three other tribes which we picked up. We were now about two hundred and eighty strong, all hardy fighting men, with nearly the same number of spear carriers.

About two o'clock or thereabouts, we were met by the few fighting men who had managed to escape from the burnt-down village, twelve men in all; the rest were either killed or too badly wounded to join us, and then we sat down in the forest to rest and wait for the coming of night.

While we sat and rested, some of the boys crept away as scouts to find out what they could about the enemy, for we were then within five miles of their camp. The soldiers and sappers had come first, and they would wait until the surveyors and immigrants arrived before they moved on to take possession of another village, for that was the way these masters worked, leisurely and surely.

The poor fellows who had lost their all did not say much, for their chief had been killed, and they were willing to be guided by their friends, but one rage filled every heart in that crowd, to kill as many as they could possibly kill and eat them afterwards.

As night drew on our scouts came back to tell us that the Germans were easy in their camp, although by no means careless, for they had posted their pickets closely round. I told Laloka that we must first get these pickets settled, and he said that he would see to that.

Early morning being generally the time which savages fix on to attack, I proposed that we'd begin an hour before midnight, so as to catch them in their first sleep, and after a little trouble this plan was agreed to.

It was close on ten o'clock that we started once more, and in an hour's time we had reached the clearing of the forest, and were ready to make the rush. I could see the camp fires and some of the sentinels walking about, but I felt sure that there would be some also

planted in the dark; but this Laloka and the others knew as well as I did, for while the main body halted and sank down quietly amongst the bushes, about a couple of dozen figures stole away, with their man-traps and spears, to settle the pickets.

I could not see the figures as they crawled towards the guards, but I could make out the Germans standing upright at their posts, and as I watched I could tell when the natives had reached them, for suddenly I would miss the upright figure, and then I knew it was all up with him. In about a quarter of an hour there wasn't a man left on guard; they had all been trapped by these wily savages.

I knew that they would be changing the pickets before very long, and so I waited anxiously for the return of Laloka, for he had gone with the other scouts to capture the rifles and revolvers. While I still lay trying to listen, I felt a hand placed lightly on my shoulder, and, starting up, could just make out the big figure of Laloka stooping over me, as he whispered, "Come."

I rose and followed him into the woods until we came to a part where there was a clearing, and here, under the starlight, I could just make out a couple of large mounds lying close together.

"Brother Tacha, you wanted the fire-sticks. There they are."

I made a grab at one of the mounds, and then started back with a nasty sensation, for

I had just disturbed a very neatly piled-up mound of human heads.

"The other one," whispered Laloka softly; and then I went to the other mound and found under my fingers a choice assortment of weapons—sabres, revolvers, and rifles.

"Have you got them all, Laloka?" I asked, astonished at the number of articles.

"Not all. Some of the thieves were awake; but we have killed nearly half of them and taken most of their fire-sticks. Now, brothers, pick out what you want and let us kill the rest, and then we shall go home with our food to our wives."

It is a curious thing, but up to that moment I had been all for Laloka and his friends with their wrongs, yet when I saw that hillock of heads with the piled-up heap of weapons so easily taken, I wasn't so sure that I didn't want to take sides with the weaker party, our enemies, and, like myself, the whiteskins. I suppose there must be something cousinly in our bloods—German, Frenchmen, and English—and something strange between us and brownskins. Whatever it was, I'd have liked, if I could, to have left the battle as it was and gone back to Oviro without any more blood-letting. But it wasn't to be. I had pledged myself to my friends and the others had used them cruelly, so I quickly crushed down these curious feelings and prepared for action.

Laloka with the other chiefs went out different ways with their men so as to attack

the camp from four sides. They had arranged this with signals, which they were to use when they had reached the open. I followed my big brother-in-law until we once more reached the edge of the forest and waited looking over the tents and camp-fires of the Germans. Some of them still sat up round the fires smoking, while others lay either sleeping or heedless inside their tents. They felt easy with the sentries, which they supposed were round about them, much more easy than I felt as I watched them and strained my ears for the different cries from the distant woods which would let us know our allies were ready for the charge, because I knew that at any moment some of the officers might go round and discover how unguarded they were, and I could also make out that there were enough of them, and to spare for that matter, to play the mischief with our first hundred odd men and boys, unless we could get near enough to use the spears before they were startled.

At last I heard the calls of four different night-birds, not common in that part of the country, one after the other, and then, without waiting a moment, we made the rush after Laloka, every man for himself helter-skelter, all yelling like fiends, for that's the way with the savages when they are charging; they can't keep quiet.

We hadn't over three hundred yards to run before we could come to close quarters, but I will say one thing for these Germans, they are solemn and slow when they are "boozing," but

it don't take them long to fall into order when fighting is the game.

Before we were half-way across the open they had clustered together, back to back in the centre, while their bugler trumpeted out the alarm, and they set out amongst us a rattling volley of musketry that made many a brave claw the ground; then, as we were still advancing at full speed, a bright white glare shot out all at once from the top of a high pole round which they were gathered, making broad daylight of the whole plain and showing us up to them quite distinctly, while, as they stood under a shade placed near the light, they were buried in deep darkness.

That awful blue-white sun throwing out its fierce rays, blinded and put the fear of death into Laloka and the rest of the allies. There they were on all sides, about fifty yards only from their unseen enemies, standing blinking with open mouths and upturned faces at that electric light, as if it were witchcraft, without attempting either to advance or retreat, for they had stopped dead at the sight of it, while the soldiers were potting them at their leisure like a covey of wild ducks.

"Run, Laloka, like mad, back to the woods, or we shall be murdered," I shouted to my brother-in-law as I set the example, after a single look at the light, and then the stampede began and we made tracks, while volley after volley were sent after us without hardly a stop.

"They are using Gatling-guns, by Saul!" I

yelled as I noticed whole lanes dropping at a time. "Scatter out, boys, and scud."

That was when I got this broken arm, mates, a bullet splintered the bone as I raised it to catch hold of a boy who was falling behind, while my arm dropped he fell dead, and the next moment I got behind a big tree and felt safe.

They did not follow us into the woods that night, but kept battering away for an hour without ceasing fire, and when at last we all gathered together in the glade, where the heads and weapons lay, we might have numbered some two hundred left alive, and hardly one without a bullet in some part of his body.

Then we began our march home again, pretty miserable. Laloka and the others took each their fair share of the heads and one or two of the bodies which they had picked up, while I got some of the young men to help me with the weapons. They hadn't an ounce of pluck left amongst them, for that electric light had finished them up.

CHAPTER IV.

THE ESCAPE.

AFTER we got back in the village they had their feast, while they mourned over their slain, cooking, eating and lamenting by turns. Oviro, with her sister Dwia, went to it with the other women, but I was not native enough to

join in, so I got away out to the forest by myself, and sat down with my native pipe out of their road, to think over it, and consider what was best to be done for the future.

My honeymoon was over now, and things looked black enough for us all, for although several days had gone by since our retreat, we knew that the Germans were coming on solidly, from the remainder of our allies, who kept dropping in upon us with what they had left, village by village. Our turn would come any day, and then we might look out for squalls.

I had spoken to Laloka and told him that the only thing left for us was to clear out while we had time, and fight our way through the hostile tribes which lay between us and the mountains, which we might get over and enter British New Guinea, where we would be safer; but that seemed to be jumping from the frying-pan into the fire. Laloka could not bear to leave the lands on which he had been born without another struggle, even although I told him, and I think he saw for himself how hopeless a game it would be to stand up against such an enemy.

Oviro also was obstinate when I urged her to leave her tribe, and risk it with me alone, through the bush. "Better to die with our friends than live with strangers," the brave girl answered me, and I thought perhaps she wasn't wrong, and as I couldn't live without her, I just made up my mind to stay where I was and see the game out.

Poor Laloka, when he had taken the rifles and revolvers, hadn't considered cartridges, so that barring the charges that were in the weapons when "nabbed," I had no ammunition to carry on the war ; still I had those, which I hoarded up, and determined to do my level best for the tribe when the end came.

I sorted up the Dubo House, as being the largest in the village for my arsenal and final retreat, and here I arranged with the chief that our women should take shelter on the first appearance of the enemy, so I waited patiently while our scouts went about the country and picked up news.

One morning we heard that they had camped about six miles distant, and were on the move towards us. Then while I got the women together, Laloka and all who could carry a spear went out to meet them. There was no use in trying peaceful measures, for their orders were always "Clear out, or be killed ;" and not a native there but wouldn't sooner be killed than give up a single foot of his property.

I waited with the women in the upper storey of the Dubo House, looking out at the forest, with the rifles and pistols handy beside me for use ; and I had not long to wait.

First the distant shots rolled out, which told us that the fighting had begun amongst the trees ; and now I felt sure that the natives would give a good account of themselves. Then nearer they came, while the women sat quiet round me, Oviro resting her pretty head on my

knee, and all the village outside deserted, and baking under the blazing sun.

Then I saw them coming, about a score of dark figures first breaking from the forest, and rushing over towards us, Laloka at their head, in his hurry to get to his wife, and holding his weaponless hands against his side as he ran, to stop the bleeding of the wound which was under them.

Then the white caps and linen jackets of the Germans shone out, giving me good marks as they marched steadily on, which I took advantage of by emptying rifle after rifle as fast as I could lift them up and aim. It stopped them a bit, because they didn't expect this reception, while it allowed our friends to reach us.

Poor Laloka had got his billet I could see as he flung himself down on the floor gasping, while Dwia tried to stop the gush of blood that kept pumping out of his wound; the other women were busy over their own men, while the new-made widows rolled about and moaned in their grief and despair.

I had emptied the rifles by this time, and now gathered the revolvers together for close quarters. I meant to let them come up near enough and then shoot as many as I could get a bead on, while the rest were getting out the back way and into the woods only a few yards behind, for the Dubo House stood by itself at the end of the village.

"Now be off as fast as you can," I said to them, as I saw the Germans enter the village

four deep and about eighty strong. "While I shoot, you clear."

I didn't look round after this, but kept at my work, getting a good few down before the sausage-eaters woke up to it and made for the shelter of the houses; it was a lively five minutes while I blazed away, and they did the same, filling the village with white smoke.

"Now, Oviro, get up and let us make tracks," I said when I had flung down the last pistol all smoking on the boards, and tried to lift up her head.

God of Heaven! mates, what did I see but my poor wife stone dead, with a stray bullet through her heart, still resting her young head as she had done for the last hour on my knee, with her cheek against my broken arm. She had died without me noticing it, while I had been busy shooting left-handed at those cussed beasts, who had come to make a hell out of paradise.

Her eyes were still open, and her lips wore a soft smile as I lifted up her head. They were beginning to grow dim, but they were brown enough yet to break my heart almost as I looked into them. Gone without a word, and our unborn baby with her, and I was left, without another shot in the locker to settle either my own hash, or polish off another of her murderers. Lord, mates, if I could only have had another brace of loaded barkers at that moment it would have eased my mind a bit. I would have let them cut me in pieces if they

liked as I ran amongst them, but I'd have sent another dozen of their black souls to hell first.

I looked about me, dazed-like. Laloka lay on his back, dead, with Dwia's arms round his neck, and their blood mixing together, for she had run a bone knife into her heart when she saw him die. The others had flitted, as I told them.

How long I sat there with my poor young wife on my arm I can hardly tell you. Some minutes must have gone by, for I could see that the gunpowder smoke had lifted from the ground, and that the Germans were once more beginning to show themselves in the middle of the street, and how long I might have sat I can't say—I suppose until they had caught me, or burnt me out; but at last I was roused by the appearance of one of the young scouts, who climbed the ladder, and poking his head in whispered:

"Come, Tacha! No good you wait here any longer. Laloka dead, Dwia dead; we want you and Oviro, over there."

They didn't know any more than I had done that my wife had left me and that what lay against me was only a dead weight. I rose up, and seizing a rifle in my fist, used it to hoist the warm body into my left arm, and to hold it there. Then I followed the boy down the back ladder and made off after him towards the woods.

I knew that they had seen me before I could reach the cover, for I heard them shouting; and as I slid behind a tree saw the bullets breaking

the branches and splinters from the bark. So I only ran for a little way, and then laying down Oviro on the grass I turned to wait for them, determined to have one more life at least before I turned tail on them.

The boy would not leave me, plucky little beggar that he was, but stood with a couple of spears in his hand ready for the fling.

Four chaps had set running after me with revolvers at the cock, and I could hear the dead branches smashing as they trampled them down with their feet; then the first one dashed by me snorting before I could bring my clubbed rifle down on his skull, but he did not run many steps before the boy had sent a spear through his back and settled him.

The second one I got in good time and he went down like a ninepin under my club, while the third tripped over his body and was pinned to earth by the boy before he could roll round. The fourth man I caught by the wind-pipe fairly while he was trying to stop himself, and once I have a man right there with this claw he ain't got much prospect of another meal.

Two or three minutes we rolled and twisted about on the ground, and then he, too, was a "goner." No more came on, and I could hear the bugle sounding the recall for the poor unfortunates who had left the ranks for ever; then I took their barkers and stuck them in my belt, and lifting up all that was left of Oviro, struck out for our stragglers, while the lad cut off the four heads and reeving them on one of the

spears, hoisted them over his shoulder, and with the four sword bayonets in his other hand, came after me.

I found the last of the tribe a mile or so ahead, fifteen men and three boys with a dozen of women old and young.

"Where are the rest of the girls and the kiddy?" I asked, as I looked round on the miserable-looking crowd, and they then told me that they had been seen crossing and chased into the woods, and that was all that had managed to escape; one of the soldiers had chucked the kid up against a tree and knocked its brains out, while they took back what girls they could catch and a couple of the boys. Then I felt gladder than ever that I'd punished these last four sausage-brothers.

They had got the dead body of my little nephew, and Lord, mates, when I saw the little innocent lying limp before me, with all his perky "sass" out of him, I fairly gave way and blubbered like a blessed woman.

We dug a grave and buried them both here before we quitted that spot, my murdered dear, and the kiddy on that breast where her own might have lain in a few more months had all gone right. Then while I still sat staring on the fresh earth, one of the boys who had been captured came on us as we rested.

They had recognised me it seems as the man who had been driven out of their settlement, and made cocksure now that I was an English spy sent out to report their cruelties, and they

had offered the lad his liberty if he would take them to me. They did not care a cuss about the other natives, but they meant to keep me from getting out of the country by hook or crook.

The young girls had been awfully mauled about before they had finished them, and my blood ran cold as I listened to that lad's yarn. They were ten thousand times worse brutes than any cannibals could have been, and after they were done with them, they had set fire to the houses and burnt the village to the ground, so Laloka and his wife had found a grave also, and were now resting amongst the cinders.

The boy had made his escape while they were firing the huts and got off amongst the smoke without being noticed. When I heard this I thought it about time to make a move.

I was appointed leader now, so I struck out across the country for the hills, and for weeks we knocked about, for we had to go warily to keep clear of hostile tribes. That was a weary tramp I can tell you, mates, through swamps and forests, over hills and into gulches, hiding ourselves during the day and wandering about at night, often having to turn back, or go round miles, and sometimes losing our way in spite of their savage cuteness. Often going for days without any grub, and even at the best of times having to content ourselves with roots and such like.

And every day our numbers got less, and had to be buried and left behind. What with snake

bites and fevers and odd tussles with natives which we could not avoid, by the time I reached the mountains I had only seven scarecrows left, and not a woman to comfort us. They had all caved in.

One afternoon I saw the Owen Stanley rising far above us, swimming in golden clouds, and with their peaks rosy red in the sunset. And then we struggled up to the top of one ridge and lay down to rest amongst some rocks. We were all dead beat, and fell asleep almost as soon as we lay down, careless of what might happen next.

The moon was up full, like as it shines to-night, when one of the men shook me awake, saying:

"Tacha, what is it coming after us?"

I hearkened for a moment, and then the truth broke on me like a flash.

"Bloodhounds, by Saul! They are determined to take me before I can leave their country. Come on, boys, we must make tracks for some water."

I could hear the sharp, short, bell-like whimpers of the hounds in the distance, for sounds carry a far way on the mountains on a clear moonlit night, and I knew that the Germans were behind them, for the natives had no dogs of this sort. So without more ado we set off full speed down the other side of the hill, hoping to find a creek of some sort in the gully.

It had been an uncommon hot summer, and

most of the streams which we had crossed had been dry; we thought this lucky at the time, but now I wasn't so sure about that.

Down the gulley we swarmed and tumbled in the dark with the yelpings coming on. I looked back, and could see them rounding the hill top, a whole pack of hounds running in front of forty or fifty white coats with the moonbeans glistening on the barrels of their rifles.

On we went, over the tangle and loose stones, without coming to a single pool of water, under great cliffs sometimes, and rolling over what would be waterfalls in the wet season; then up again towards another ridge. For hours I think we ran and scrambled and climbed, getting the start of them when we were racing, but hearing them again when we stopped to draw a breath.

At last I heard the sound of falling water as we got well over the second ridge, and not long after we came to a small stream that tumbled over a split cliff and ran along the valley to the east.

I thought a moment and then made up my mind, we would all plunge into the pool and then find our way up the rock face to the higher stream. This we did without much difficulty, for fear made us all pretty reckless, and not a moment too soon, for as we got into shelter above the waterfall we heard them reach the pool, and knew from the loud barking of the whelps that they were at fault, for *they* couldn't get up that rock.

We waited a bit listening to them going down

the valley, for they thought that we must have kept down the stream, and then when the coast was once more clear we kept on.

Curious, mates, that stream must have been sent to us by Providence, for we would never have thought about climbing it if we hadn't been so hard pressed, and yet I believe it was the only way through those mountains, for as we went on the split widened until it led us into other gullies and gaps straight through the chain.

We wandered on day after day, always striking for the south as well as we could, sometimes coming to a dead precipice, when we had to turn back and try another track. I lost two more of my men in these gorges over a cliff that we came upon suddenly when least expecting it. Then we struck another half-dried river, trending the right direction, and I knew that we had left the Germans behind, and had got through the gap of the Owen Stanley. So we came on until it led us to your camp.

That's my yarn, mates, and I hope you are amused.

A Deadly Voyage.

CHAPTER I.

CHRISTMAS EVE AT FEDERATION HALL.

JOHN DAGGET, Esquire, shipowner, or, as his employés and enemies termed him, "Federation John," sat in his sumptuous library on Christmas Eve, Anno Domini 1888, enjoying an exceptionally fine and solitary cigar, after having enjoyed an exceptionally good dinner.

Mr. Dagget could well afford the enjoyment of the most expensive dinners and cigars, as his costly and artistic surroundings seemed to imply, for he was one of the most acute and successful of business men, in spite of the apparent contradiction that so many of his ventures came to grief; indeed, the name of the Dagget Company line was more frequently to be read in the *Shipping Gazette's* list of casualties than that of any other company, yet still he went about the market, polite, smiling and suave, the staunchest supporter of shipowners' rights divine, and the most implacable enemy to Trade Unionisms or Protection Societies, excepting, of course, the Union of and Protection of his own party, The Owner.

He was a fine man to look upon, with features of the ancient Assyrian type, as seen

depicted on the monuments; tall, handsome and portly, without being at all corpulent; rather dark in complexion, with a good colour. Heavy drooping eyelids half covered slumbrous brown eyes; a broad, but receding and smooth forehead fell back from above a finely-carved aquiline nose, and beneath that again, very soft, carefully kept and long jet black moustaches and beard, the former completely concealing his mouth, and the latter reaching down with rippling grace to his massive watch chain; his hair, likewise, was worn rather long and wavy, so that altogether his appearance had just that touch of Orientalism about it which caused his modern evening dress to look a little incongruous when worn by him, and apt to make an artistic onlooker almost wish that the vanity which prompted him to take such extraordinary and loving care of his person could have moved him a little further for the sake of absolute harmony with his costume—a turban and robe seemed the correct thing with that splendid profile and perfumed, silky ebon beard.

In age he was considerably past the forties, but Time had not as yet desecrated, with his white powder, that inky mass. A little thinning at the temples perhaps, which only added to his refined and intellectual appearance, and a few minute crows-feet wrinkles at the outer corner of those heavy lids. That John Dagget, the wealthy and prosperous owner of "Federation Hall" and all those vessels which kept sailing out and seldom returning to port, had

been a widower for the past fifteen years was surely his own fault, with a sex that can pardon a thousand and one sins in such a man, possessed of such a magnificent beard.

The books on his well-filled shelves showed that his habits were extravagant as well as refined. *Editions de luxe*, displaying all the quaint conceits of costly binding; rare engravings covered the space left free of shelves, little gems of sculpture and casting in marble and bronze showed up softly in the chastened light of the silver lamp which stood on the table with its hand-painted porcelain shade. A closer look at the titles of the books and the subjects of the engravings and statuary proved this to be a bachelor's snuggery, the nestling den of a man who admired woman in the abstract and generally, rather than as a single ideal; a longer look at the man himself, and the manner in which he enjoyed his cigar, and reclined within his comfortable Russia leather easy-chair, revealed the selfish voluptuary; a nearer and still more rigid scrutiny might have made the disciple of Lavater shrink back with a shudder; it was the indolent softness and beauty of the food-satisfied human tiger.

One might easily conclude, after this final physiognomic revelation, that domestic ties, where they involved the slightest sacrifice or obligation, would be extremely irksome to this splendid-looking sybarite, and how unlikely it was that he should ever again shackle himself with a wife after he had got free from the first

encumbrance. Report had it that, the last years of the poor lady, who had given him the start on his prosperous course with her money, were unhappy ones, and that, in spite of his charms, they had existed under the same roof without addressing each other more than politeness required before the servants and company, and also that both had hailed their freedom with equal relief, for even fine-looking men, although these gifts of Nature are all sufficient to lovers, must have other qualities if they would continue to satisfy wives; therefore, although, I daresay, many spinsters and widows sighed vainly after this costly prize, and blamed the unappreciative, deceased Mrs. Dagget, it was a kind Providence which denied them their wishes, and left the fascinator still a solitary widower.

Federation Hall was a wide, roomy, and cottage-built retreat, with the dining, drawing-rooms and other day rooms on the ground floor, and the bedrooms upstairs, while the kitchen and servants' quarters were placed more to the back. As it was planned for comfort more than economy of space, it covered a considerable piece of ground, with well-laid-out pleasure grounds surrounding it. A wife, with her extra wants and habits, would have disturbed the economy of masculine comfort of this perfect lair; while he had been troubled with one, he had rented a town mansion, but since that happy release, he had bought this estate and built the house entirely to suit himself.

As he lolled back, with half-closed eyes, watching the distant wood log spouting out its blue flames in the hearth, and sending from his jetty moustache thin, leisurely, spiral wreaths of fragrant smoke, the subdued sound of a piano, mingled with a girl's fresh voice, stole in soothingly from the distant drawing-room, proving that something feminine, besides the servants, was in the house, which was also quite in keeping with his character, for, although he might not be bothered with the perpetual presence of a wife, such a nature required the occasional presence of a female, young, good-looking and subservient; to amuse, or sooth him when he felt inclined, and for such a position the player and singer, his niece, Mary Gray, exactly suited.

She had been left to his charge by her dying mother, his only sister, when at the most interesting age for such a guardian, that is, when she was interesting herself, being ready to leave school and bring her accomplishments into his lonely house, so that he received the charge willingly.

Mary, when she first came, had supposed herself a rich orphan, for her father had been in a good position and during his life denied her nothing, but it was not very long before her uncle, who had with the care of herself, also sole charge of her late father's affairs, informed her, that after paying up all outstanding debts, she had no other expectations except what might come from him, her benefactor; she

accepted his explanation as gospel and enquired no further about the intricate details of a business she could not understand, and as he was an easy enough guardian so that she did not intrude where she was not wanted, she accepted without much regret, or forebodings, the position of housekeeper and dependent, and did her best to entertain his guests whenever he gave an entertainment in the way of business.

He had another charge living in the house at this time, whose fortune he also had the unravelling of with the same unfortunate results of no balance left, but as he had taken his niece into his house, so he kindly employed the impecunious young Richard Harris, about his office and permitted him, by way of return, a corner at his bountiful table, and the use of a bedroom, with a little pocket money now and again, and a limited order at the tailor's and bootmaker's—not the most pleasant position for a youth of spirit to fill, even although it was backed by the somewhat vague promise of a future partnership, when he had mastered the business thoroughly.

At the present moment Richard Harris was sitting in a very dejected attitude with his elbow resting on a corner of the piano and his head supported on his hand, listening, or seeming to listen to the song which Mary was singing and playing for the young man, although the solitary smoker in the library was also getting his share of it, as he managed to get of most things.

Richard Harris was nineteen past, fair-

skinned, with curly brown hair, and soft earnest blue-grey eyes, a gentlemanly young fellow with an expression usually frank and attractive, but now clouded over with helpless and hopeless care.

Mary was between seventeen and eighteen, dark, like her uncle, with a graceful small figure and sympathetic face, perhaps there was more sympathy expressed in it than usual as she glanced now and then from her music to her inattentive companion, who had been her constant friend for over a twelvemonth, with a closer place in her heart, for she knew not exactly how long during that space of time, perhaps a little before his eyes had shown her how near she was to his, however, being both so utterly dependent on the great man in the library, they had not as yet ventured to express in words what both had read another way.

Of late Richard had been getting more into the business confidence of his patron, and being as yet a young man with genuine and humane instincts, life was becoming less supportable so that he was not such a cheery companion as he had been to Mary.

Both sat this evening near each other for some time, while she went over several of her songs and pieces, long enough for that fine cigar to be changed to ashes in the library, and the smoker to sink into a light after-dinner slumber within his easy chair, when suddenly Mary Gray rose from her music stool, and touched the moody youth lightly on the shoulder.

"Dick, can't you lay aside thoughts about business for one night—for this night of all nights—and be happy?"

"No, Mary, this night of all nights I must remember it most, for through it this is likely to be the last night you and I shall be able to spend together, for a long, long time, perhaps for ever."

"What do you mean, dear?"

"That I am sick of this wrecking office, where men are murdered for the insurance money, as surely as ever the poisoner, Palmer, killed his victims!" replied the young man passionately, raising his head and voice at the same time almost to a shout.

"Hush, Dick, or uncle will hear you! Come to the fire, and let us talk about it there; business ways, you know, are different to the romantic ways of boys and girls like us."

"Surely no other business on the face of the earth can be conducted as Dagget & Co.'s is conducted or we'd all be better out of it, and dead before every instinct of right and wrong is crushed out of us."

"Has uncle not been good to you, Dick?—every day you are getting more into his confidence and before long you will be his partner."

"Never! After to-day I would sooner starve than go back to that office, which the spirits of drowned sailors seem to haunt."

"But uncle cannot help the sailors drowning if the ships go down."

"He could prevent the ships going down if

he liked ; in fact, Mary, that is his principal business—to sink ships, drown the sailors, and rob the widow and the fatherless.”

“Oh! Dick, don’t say that of my uncle, and he so generous and kind to both of us, and so noble looking!” whispered Mary, in a piteous tone, putting her hand in front of his mouth to stop any more words.

The little hand he took in both of his and kissed it fondly, then dropped it in a resigned and hopeless fashion.

“Well, well! Mary, I won’t vex you by saying any more on the subject, only I cannot do the thing he has insisted on me doing to-night, therefore I shall have to go.”

“What is it, Dick? Surely nothing so very bad, since he was so pleasant at dinner to-night.”

“No, Mary, let it be, you’ll know perhaps when the times comes, and I don’t want to prejudice you against your uncle.”

“Dick, do you think I don’t care for you?” said Mary, taking both his hands in hers, so that she might see his eyes, for he had suddenly put them up to hide the despairing dampness which was gathering there.

“Yes, Mary, I think you care for me a little, but not so much as you care for your uncle, nor can I, a pauper, and all dependent on his generosity expect it, and not by a thousand fold so much as I care for you!”

“Dick!”

There was that in the girl’s eyes, as she

looked into his, which stopped further words on his part for a time. They were standing now in front of the blazing fire, and after that look, her slender arms crept up, the little hands releasing his hands and then joining themselves round his neck, while he clasped her closely towards him, the two pair of young lips meeting in a different salute to any they had had before.

For a moment Richard Harris forgot his poverty and business scruples as the glowing dark face lay on his breast, and the ebon tresses brushed against the tender down of his cheek, with a thrill which once it passed would never return with quite the same subtle sensation, although the after kisses might be sweet.

A moment passed, one of the supreme moments which go to make eternity, and then a flood of remorseful self-reproaches rushed in, where only love had been before. What right had he with this young girl's love? going as he was to fling from him protection and home; on that point, to his credit, he did not waver, even with those precious arms still clasping him, and that sweet face still resting against his beating heart. The horror of those business confidences was too real a nightmare for even love to lift. It was clearly his duty to leave her at perfect liberty and go from that ghost-filled, blood-stained house; the furniture about them, the clothes he had on, were all the proceeds of robbery and murders, murder and robbery protected, or rather winked at by law, yet real

as the victims who lay by hundreds under the sea, as real as the widows and children who had so much reason to curse the name of the sleek, cold monster who robbed them even of shillings to add to his pile of crimsoned gold, who gathered in all and gave out nothing.

Filled with these self-abased horrors he raised his arms and taking hold of her fingers unlaced them, then holding her from him he spoke :

"Forgive me Mary, my darling, I have done you a great wrong. Your duty, as you say, is to your uncle, mine to fly from him, while I can still call my soul my own, before I am perjured past the power of resistance ; perhaps his ways of working are the ordinary methods of business, since it is tolerated ; in that case, if I keep to the same mind as I am now, I can never be anything else than a beggar, while if I change and become a business man then I shall have become too utterly base to be worthy of you ; let me go, dearest, without saying any more."

"No, Dick, we have both said too much ever to be at liberty again, and I am glad of it, if you never regret, for now you are more to me than all the world ; tell me all your troubles and let me comfort you if I can do no more."

At this moment the door was opened noiselessly, and the discreet footman made his appearance with an emotionless visage :

"Please Mister Richard, master requests your presence in the library."

CHAPTER II.

JOHN DAGGET'S DREAM.

It is a much discussed question amongst psychologists how long a space of actual time it takes a dream of months or even years to occupy. Some say a minute is sufficiently long, others insist that the instant before waking is the longest time required; a dreamer may seem to fill out with crowded incidents the whole night through, and yet actually only dream a second.

Between the dropping of his three-parts consumed cigar from his relaxing fingers, as the soothing strain of distant music sent him to sleep, Mr. John Dagget had a very long and troubled dream—nightmare I suppose it ought to be called, since he had forgotten to take his customary glass of Benedictine. When he had last glanced drowsily at the time piece, it was a quarter to nine, when he woke up with a gasping yell and the perspiration rolling in large icy drops from his smooth brow and aquiline nose, the minute hand was pointing at seven minutes to the same hour, so that he had exactly been occupied eight minutes in the falling asleep, sleeping and waking up.

The first portion of the dream was pleasant rather than otherwise to a man of his temperament, but as it progressed, it grew in intensity and horror, an orthodox Christmas Eve dream with a grand climax.

He saw himself as a boy at school, liked by all his school-mates for his good looks and animal strength and spirits, and chuckled as he took advantage of this affection and fidelity to gather in and cheat them out of their pocket money. Then from school days he passed to his courting season and again he chuckled unctuously at the advantages his fine appearance and plausible tongue gave him over less fortunate rivals; his life hitherto had been one continued march of triumph, with a heavy baggage of loot. How easy and cheaply it had been for him to hood-wink his own relations as well as a confiding world, and keep up the character of being a "King amongst men" for good nature and generosity; the house he took from one sister under the plea that all he wanted was to be able to vote, the five hundred pounds he wheedled out of his grandmother, just before her death in order that she might get better interest for it, the legacy he borrowed from his other sister, the mother of Mary, and forgot to pay back again; the ease with which he smoothed all difficulties out of his way as he went on suavely, so that even that wronged sister thought him the proper trustee for her daughter and her fortune. At this stage of his retrospective vision, it felt as if the soul of the man was congratulating the shark-like spirit of the boy upon his early development in smart tricks.

His bride in her first infatuation smiled upon him tenderly as she placed her money-bags implicitly under his entire control and enabled him

to launch out into big speculations, such as the buying up of rotten ships, and the provisioning of them with putrid meat from the condemned stores of Government, all unquestioned by law, and good enough for the poor wretches who were sent to their death by this plausible and dreaming ogre; again he chuckled contentedly as the record of ship after ship missing passed before him; he did not want to see them again with their putrid stores and rotten planks, let the scurvy-devoured wretches gnaw at each other on their bare raft, or go to the bottom with the leaky over-laden craft on which they had been simple enough to trust themselves, so long as he got the insurance offices to pay up the full value for a sound ship, good stores and that over weight of cargo; better that they should all drown if on the return voyage, for then he could defraud the widows out of their dead husbands' wages in addition to his other clear profits.

A splendid part of the dream this, for it tickled the fancy to think how much easier it was to cheat the widows and fatherless children than it had been even to gull his school-mates and relations; all he had to say was that the drowned men had drawn the greater portion of their wages in advance to spend in debauchery in foreign parts and then pay what he pleased to the poor starving applicants, as a kind of charity, besides robbing the dead of the respect of their widows, all matters of congratulation and profit so far.

Some of the widows made by the foundering of his last ship were coming that night, headed by the clergyman, to appeal to him. One of them had received a letter posted before her husband sailed, in a foreboding spirit and telling her what was due to him. Well let them come, he was prepared with his cooked books to make that dead man out a liar and so save a clear twenty pounds; he had also his creature and dependent Richard Harris upstairs to back him out, for he had posted him carefully up to his duty that afternoon. As it was Christmas Eve, he would hood-wink the pastor by giving a ten pound cheque to the deserving poor of his parish, and distribute another five pounds as charity amongst the widows, who came clamouring at the heels of the clergyman, so he would get his name up for benevolence and save five pounds from the one man, besides the entire wages of the rest of the crew. Not much for a man of his position, yet even the discount on a shilling must be considered in a business like his.

Richard Harris, the son of that old school mate who had followed him about like a dog at school, and who had trusted him blindly to the last, although he had cheated him wholesale then, who had been so happy and satisfied to lose even his pocket money as long as he, John Dagget, condescended to notice him or give him a friendly pat on the shoulder, who afterwards went out squatting in Australia and realized a limited fortune—forty thousand pounds, and was foolish enough to entrust his son and money

to the tender mercies of this black-bearded wolf ; ah ! it was almost too funny to this dreamer to see old Dick Harris and his sister Nell Gray putting their lambkins into his claws with all their own wool, forty thousand the one, thirty thousand the other, trusted to him alone without a check, to do with and manage as he liked.

He had brought his dream down to the present day, where all was prosperity and comfort. Never once had he been stopped in his career. The bank respected him, for he had a balance to his credit there which would inspire respect from a bank to any man, he was in perfect health, with an appetite for moderate enjoyment which he was too keen-witted to spoil by over-indulgence, he stood high with the church, for a little charity spreads out very far with these simple-minded disposers of that article ; he was firm in his principles of the rights of employers over the rights of employés, so that he was trusted by his confederates as a right good man, with an impressive manner, an imposing presence, a heavy bank account and a keen brain ; he had good books, good pictures, good statuary because he had good advisers, a perfect cook and tailor, with tobacconist and wine merchant *sans reproche* ; what more did the man require who had no Parliamentary aspirations, who had only one ambition and that was to rake in the shekels ?

He had no reason to congratulate himself on his smartness or business capacity, as he entered

upon the second portion of his eight minutes' dream. Like Dante when visiting the Inferno, he could only look and wonder as procession after procession of drowned sailors, with their despairing wives and children swept before him, all pointing at him and shrieking the words "Murderer" and "Thief" as a chorus, that is the sailors cried "Thief" and the wives wailed "Murderer" as each crowd thought of the wrong nearest to them.

Yet this did not disturb him over much, for he had heard the terms often before, and as for the spectres, his soul was impervious to the influence of such airy shapes.

His sister passed with a cry "Restore"; his grandmother passed him with downcast head as one ashamed; his mother trailed her feet as if heavily ironed; his wife looked at him with fixed and stony eyes as one who looks upon a hated enemy.

At last from the abyss from which they were all passing forth, came his friend and former school-mate Richard Harris, with eyes in which horror and appeal were strangely blended; unlike the others he did not pass on, but rushing forward caught the sleeper by the hand, shouting as he used to do in the dormitory when the usher was coming.

"They have found you out, Jack; come with me and I'll make you safe."

With that intuitive instinct of dreamers, he now knew that his robberies of Richard and Mary were known, and with a convulsive clutch

at the spectre hand of his friend he turned to go with him, that horror of the night-mare-haunted for the first time laying hold of him.

He had no fear of his old school friend, although he had outraged his trust, for he had been in the habit of wronging all his friends and yet being received kindly by them and trusted. It was part of his fine physique and goodly presence to be so trusted, and he took it all for granted as his just due when in a dilemma.

"This way," whispered his old friend, as he led the way down an alley and into a deserted house; "you must disguise yourself, put on this rough seaman's suit, and I'll get you on board the first outward-bound."

His æsthetic tastes revolted against this suit of coarse serge, but not so much as at the wanton clipping short of his fine black beard, which followed shortly afterwards, yet it had to be endured, for he knew by instinct that outraged justice was after him.

Then he was smuggled on board a ship as a Federation recruit; the sailors looked askance at this fresh-water hand, who did not even know the correct way to come aboard, but he did not mind that, he was safe for a time.

By and bye the captain entered upon his duties and the moorings were loosed, then he knew that he was upon his own next outward-bound, leaky hulk, about which this very skipper had warned him as being untrustworthy for a single voyage, and on board of which were his most ancient and stalest stores of provisions;

some of the salt meat and pork were twenty years old and had been specially scraped and resalted for this vessel by his own orders; as this thought occurred to him, with the receding shores of old England, his horror become accentuated and the clammy sweat began to start upon his face.

He who had been so long accustomed to the best of everything, to be forced for hunger's sake to feed upon that scurvy-producing and rankly-pickled pork and beef with the weevilly biscuits which he knew were all the forecastle hands could get; when he thought upon this dire disaster and reconsidered the information which he had received about the gaping condition of the decayed planks, he almost wished that a storm would rise in the Channel and land them upon the Goodwin Sands, or founder them in the Bay of Biscay.

It seemed to him that days had passed while he wallowed in the poisoned atmosphere of the forecastle, too sick even to heed the kickings he received from the legitimate seamen when he would not get up to help them in their hard duties of pumping out that everlasting filling hold; a fierce gnawing of morbid hunger pervaded his whole being which would not be controlled even by the horrible nausea which the smell from the putrid mess produced.

Strong men round him were already beginning to cast their teeth, with their gums and limbs becoming swollen and helpless, still that fierce gnawing of hunger tore up his vitals like rusty

knives; he must eat, even if the punishment were death.

The apprentice boy, a lank and languid skeleton, came down the fok's'le steps with the men's allowance, holding the dish with one feeble hand and the other clutching his nose to keep the deadly fumes from entering. Each hungry man as he reached out a lank hand for his share, held with the other his nostrils firmly closed while he bolted the allowance with shut eyes so as not to see its colour.

The dreamer could no longer keep his fast. With a wolfish eye he watched the lad advance, then for the moment the deadly fumes overcame him, but ravenously he reached out his hand and clutched the meagre and foul allotment.

What was it — beef, pork, or compressed weeds? It looked like boiled grass in colour, like nothing he had ever experienced before for odour; he, the epicure and sybarite! But his appetite was like that of the starving wolf, he must take it whatever it was.

As he approached that lump of putrid, twenty-year-old, thrice round the world, pickled condiment, his pampered heart grew sick and faint within him, and the perspiration rolled in huge beads from his craven brow. Spectres of drowned victims! he would have hailed ten myriad of accusing victims rather than that one small lunch. Nearer, nearer, the agony of the damned is in him as it approaches his lips, and he has not the manliness to close his eyes

and nostrils. With a huge uplifting of his whole inward man as when the demon of a nightmare is about to touch one, he flung the loathed lump from him, and awoke.

Seven minutes to nine o'clock! That dream had filled out a long life-time.

The yell with which he sprang from his chair was not a very loud one, so that it had not disturbed the high-bred equanimity of James the footman as with a double knock at the door he entered with the coffee and cognac for his master.

He did not appear to notice the rather wild appearance of his master as he passed him, but turned his back to the well-padded chair, as he, James, arranged the coffee-pot and cup on the table; by the time he had arranged this to his satisfaction, the shipowner had recovered his presence of mind, wiped the damp dew from his forehead, and was, like Richard III., himself again.

"There's a party as is enquiring for you, sir, as I've told to wait for the present in the 'all. The parson, with a string of women dressed in black behind him, widders per usual I should say they was."

James is a privileged person, he has often seen widows waiting there for an audience before, and his master generally cracks a joke fitted to the occasion with him about them; on this occasion, however, the master answers his faithful and jocular servant somewhat briefly.

"Show them in, James, I am ready now to receive them.

As James leaves the library sedately and leisurely, his master pours out and swallows a glass of cognac neat, and next makes a sudden gulp at the brandy-flavoured coffee, and then cutting and lighting another cigar, he resumes once more his easy chair and waits like a senator on the coming of his victims.

A moment afterwards they appear, headed by the Rev. Mr. Charles Penwiper, who greets his patron's eye with a deprecating but gentle smile, as much as to say, "This ungrateful position is forced upon me, but I must do my duty to all parties concerned." Six red-eyed, yet vengeful widows follow after him, and look at the owner of Federation Hall like the spectres who have lately passed him in his dreams; he is easy once more, however, as Pharaoh was after the plague had passed; spectres and widows are not so appalling as his own special brand of salt beef and pickled pork to face.

"Have a weed, Mr. Penwiper?"

"Not at present," replies the mediator softly.

"James, ask Mr. Richard Harris to step down here," replied Mr. John Dagget urbanely, as he puffed out an extensive cloud after his faithful and appreciative servitor, and then turned about with a gracious smile to face the widows.

CHAPTER III.

TO HALIFAX, NOVA SCOTIA.

THE misanthrope, who has a limited income and indifferent digestion—for both these causes tend towards making a Timon of a man—may fly to the country and solitude, but when a man is gifted with youth, and the digestive faculties of a goat, without the wherewithal to gratify it, it is not the country he makes for, but the crowded streets of some city where at least he may have company, if nothing else.

Richard Harris on the 17th of January found himself within sight of the lights of Cardiff in the midst of a snow-storm, penniless, shirtless, and famishing.

He had asserted his manhood on that Christmas Eve, and greatly surprised as well as disappointed his magnificent patron, the consequence being that, as the church bells announced the anniversary of the birthday of the Saviour of Mankind, their joyous pealing rang out on the frosty air and greeted him as a wanderer and an outcast.

His refusal to corroborate his patron's statement did not benefit the widows in the slightest degree, nor did Mr. John Dagget lose his self-possession or depart from his customary urbanity of manner; he merely held up his shapely, well-trimmed hand as a signal of silence to the rash young man before anything very criminating

could be uttered, touched the bell, and when James appeared asked him politely to show Mr. Richard Harris to the outer door, and never to admit him again on any pretext whatever; then without another glance either at the unfortunate object who had been so promptly dismissed, or at the black-draped women who stood before him, he turned once more courteously to the clergyman, and repeated his false statements in an impressive and upright manner, which would have completely convinced his Reverence had not the proffered donation to the cause of charity done so already.

The six widows having no appeal except by the expensive process of law, and no moral support, now that the church had gone over to the enemy, took the pound apiece, which John Dagget offered as a Christmas gift, and their departure, shortly after Richard had taken his, leaving Mr. Penwiper to discuss the matter more at length with his gentlemanly host, over a cigar and a glass of wine.

Young Dick Harris managed to get, along with his overcoat, a parting interview with Mary Gray; what they said or did during that interview has no business with the present stage of this story; the effect of it, however, was that for the first few miles of his tramp, he felt warm and hopeful, and did not mind the icy air in the least.

When morning dawned, however, he found himself on a country road, rather cold and

miserable, for he had walked all night, and also extremely hungry. Then he looked at his purse and discovered there thirty-five shillings, which for a moment he meditated upon throwing away, but afterwards thought better of it, which was a good thing for him as it carried him on until New Year's Day.

This sum might have lasted him longer, only that, as yet, he was strange to the ways of catering for himself, and having always gone to good hotels, when travelling with the ship-owner, he now went quite naturally to those places when he wanted anything, thereby paying the highest price and getting the smallest equivalent in return.

His watch and chain he parted with to the landlord of one of these village inns for a pound, a supper and a night's lodging; he might have pawned them easily for ten or twelve pounds, but there were no pawn-shops near at the time, and he would have been ashamed to have entered such a place at this stage of his journey, therefore he accepted what was offered to him.

He tried his hardest as he went along to get work to do, but no one wanted an extra hand; indeed, he saw that the whole country was swarming with tradesmen and labourers out of work, as well as with professional tramps who pretended to want employment.

So the days passed over him, his pound melting to coppers, and then these also dissolved, after which he learnt, from stray ac-

quaintances, picked up as he went along, how to raise money on his clothes.

His overcoat went, then his shirt, vest and underclothing, for the hunger was harder to stand than the cold. His boots also, with coat and trousers, the last left, seemed to wear out and look shabby with magical quickness; they had been a gentlemanly suit when he quitted Federation Hall, for he had taken time to change himself into his ordinary morning costume before leaving, but now they were out at elbows and down at heel, while the hat looked as if it had been worn for years with the rough weather he had gone through, and the sleeping in all sorts of odd places; he looked at last like a tramp, and hard necessity was swiftly tearing from him his high-flown notions and morbid shyness.

He had some vague idea of making his way to London, but outside of Monmouth town he fell in with a negro, also on the tramp, who was working his way on the chance of getting a ship at Cardiff, he having been paid off at Liverpool, and after spending his money there had been forced to take to the road.

Jeff Johnson was the name on this coloured man's discharge papers, where he had been entered as a fireman, and when Richard met him they were both at a par as regards habiliments and funds, but Jeff was a cheerful and a mendicant negro who did not permit many chances to go by either to beg, borrow, or steal, and as he took it into his head to

patronize this impecunious young man, it was by his advice that Richard also turned his thoughts towards Cardiff, and the getting of a ship to take him out of England.

He told Dick that if he wanted a ship, he must pretend to be a Dutchman, or what was better, said he would introduce him to a crimp-house that he knew, where the landlord would find them lodgings and a ship for a good discount from their advance wages.

Jeff Johnson proved a good, if darkly-coloured, angel to him, for he had pawned the last article of wearing apparel which he could spare, and spent the proceeds the day before, and as he did not yet know how to beg, he must perforce have starved but for his companion.

Jeff begged that first night for them both, and the next day taught him one or two choruses of sea-songs, so that whenever they came to a village, they sang their way through it, and generally managed to get enough to house them for the night, with something to eat.

At Newport they stayed a couple of days, and did fairly well in their new profession, while under the cheerful influence of this happy son of Africa, the miles seemed to shorten and the cold grow less intense. Richard Harris had fairly turned his back on the refinements of civilization as represented at Federation Hall, while his shame fell from him like filthy rags, and he was now pretty well prepared to do any-

thing, except rob widows, for the sake of a square meal. Mary would not have recognised her chivalrous lover had she seen this grimy-looking beggar with his black mate singing for their bread through the streets of Newport.

The snowstorm was at its wildest as the pair of starving, thinly-clad wretches crept into Cardiff, and only for Jeff's kindly help the youth would have lain down amongst the drifts a dozen of times during the last half-dozen miles, but Jeff was strong of limb, with plenty of warm blood in him, despite all the privations he had gone through, and so he urged Richard along, with his sable arms round the lad's waist, part of the way, and an oath now and again breaking from his thick blue lips by way of comfort; that last half-dozen miles of beating together through the driving snow, made the oddly-joined pair chums for life.

Down by the wharf Jeff found his friend, the Dutch lodging-housekeeper, tout and crimp, and after a little aside talk, introduced Richard as his mate. After this, they had supper and lodgings on the credit system, their landlord promising to get them both a ship as soon as possible.

There was a strike going on at the time amongst the legitimate firemen and seamen, so that their chances were fairly good to be supplied soon, provided they were not Union men, and were willing to go at a reduced rate, this to Dick's inexperienced mind seemed fair enough considering that he had never been to

sea before; he was too hungry and cold to take anything into consideration except his supper that night, and the next morning he was too far in the power of the landlord to be able to object to whatever he liked to propose.

The next forenoon, the landlord brought two seamen's rig-outs to them, of the roughest and cheapest description, and which he marked down to their debit at the highest rates; a pair of trousers, monkey-jacket and two coarse flannel shirts, also a cap; this was the complete outfit for the voyage, but as beggars could not be choosers, Richard was grateful enough to have them even at the price. The landlord also informed them that there were two vessels ready for loading, one a timber ship bound for Halifax, and the other a steamer bound for Quebec. Jeff could ship if he liked as fireman on board the steamer, or as A.B. on board the other, where there was an opening for Dick as ordinary hand.

Without a pause, Jeff decided to ship along with his lately found friend, even although by doing so, he was taking a post for which he was not qualified, as well as going for less wages, the A.B. certificates, this convenient landlord provided along with the suit of clothes, as well as one for Richard Harris, who now discovered that his sailing name was to be James Thompson, while Jeff was transformed into one Eric Van Dorn, foreigners having a much more likely chance than Englishmen to get a ship, although

the owners did not object so strictly to the nationality of boys or ordinary hands.

A couple of hours afterwards, they were entered on the books of the *Nancy Jane*, outward bound with coal to Halifax, with a return load of timber to Cardiff, and while the landlord pocketed the greater part of their allowance notes for debts contracted, they were sent off to help in the loading, men being short at the wharfs.

Richard with his stalwart negro friend and several other half-starved scare-crows, had to battle their passage to and from the office, through crowds of hungry legitimate seamen, who were left unemployed because, unfortunately for them, they had the misfortune to be born free Englishmen, therefore they were to be punished for this accident of birth, by these free born English shipowners.

When the stoppages were explained fully to him, Richard Harris felt mean enough to be exempted from the despised title, but as he had taken the wages of a slave, he could no longer avoid the contract without further dishonour, therefore he slunk down alongside of his sable friend, and was very quickly about as tawny with the coal dust which so completely covered his blushes.

He was not very long in discovering the difference between holding a pen at the shipowner's desk and hauling in a coal basket on board the ship itself, happily for him he had been fond of athletic sports, and his past privations rendered him not too particular, and

as he knew that hands were not likely to be considered out at sea, he did his best not to wince at the raw places but worked with a will.

His comrades, with the exception of Jeff, were not much better at the task than he was himself, and many a narrow escape he had of loaded baskets coming down by the run on his head as the inexperienced loaders let the ropes slip through their wounded hands, while the unemployed regular men sat on the quay smoking and laughing over the mishaps.

It being a strike time, the blacklegs were exceedingly well treated by the owners, breakfasts, dinners, and suppers provided, with as much fresh beef, roasted and boiled, with potatoes and vegetables given and as much beer as they could swallow. To be a subordinate of the shipowners, during that strike at Cardiff, was to be a man replete with the good things of life, while the men who were fighting for their rights, with their wives and children, were famishing. Verily *hunger* is the grandest test of a hero.

The slaves of Sparta were surfeited with good things, while the children of the free men waited upon them fasting, this was how they were trained to be heroes, so the strikers waited upon the slavish blacklegs, of whom Richard Harris felt himself to be one of the vilest, and went fasting but resolute, free born Englishmen. As on Christmas Eve when the voice of his Mary could not raise his spirits, so until the anchors were raised and the Welsh hills receded from

his view, the jokes of the light-hearted Jeff Johnson failed to lift him out of the valley of humiliation, it seemed to him that so long as he required to eat so must he sink his young manhood in the mire.

These were the sensations of a chivalrous boy of course, who had read a great deal and who had once possessed a trusting and true man as a father, but who had been driven through force of circumstances into the hard plains of daily battle; perhaps we all felt that way once ourselves before our weapons were blunted. I should be sorry for the veteran, who, like Mr. John Dagget, has not; it may be good in a pecuniary sense, yet desperately bad for the man in all other senses who has not been able to feel as Richard Harris at the age of nineteen felt.

After leaving England, with that load of carelessly trimmed coal on board of the *Nancy Jane*, he had not much leisure for emotions of any other kind, excepting the sensations of cold, hunger, nausea, and fatigue.

The vessel had not been docked since her last load of timber, so that she was leaking almost at every seam which required the pumps going constantly day and night, and as they were short handed, with only one or two properly qualified seamen on board, the labour was excessive and unremitting; luckily they had fairly good weather all the way in spite of the season, otherwise they must have foundered.

The fresh roast and boiled beef came to an untimely end after they were clear of the land,

and the casks which were broached after that were not such as might have tempted a devotee to break his fast. Dick had never been an epicure, few healthy young men are at that age, indeed he had often in his mind thought how splendid it would be to go as an explorer, and brave starvation, but at the first sniff he had at the newly broached cask of salt beef, he took vegetarian vows as far as he was able to take them with the only other thing left him as a diet, the biscuit. The others might poison themselves if they liked with that putrid meat, he resolved to stick to the only fresh meats to be had on board, which were, the multitudinous maggots that were hatched in the weevilly and stale biscuits.

Over the Atlantic these brave and dauntless heroes rolled, keeping down the water with super-human efforts; with good captain and mates, for if they blasphemed and kicked and bullied, it was no more than human nature could expect, with such an incompetent crew on board. These hardy tars, who ventured upon each voyage as the gladiators of old did the arena, passing before their tyrant owners with, "We salute thee, us about to die."

They had a fair run over, considering all things, from England to Nova Scotia, and at last could take a breathing spell at Halifax while the ship discharged cargo and took in her fresh load; with the men Richard Harris went ashore, and there enjoyed his first comfortable meal since leaving Cardiff.

CHAPTER IV.

THE END OF THE VOYAGE.

THE skipper of the *Nancy Jane* was a splendid hero, in spite of appearances being sadly against him. He was a little man, and about as broad as he was long, with an ignoble nose and small, red-rimmed blue eyes and uncouth hair and beard thickly grizzled with white. A rough "sea-dog" he was, with a hoarse pipe and a blasphemous tongue, who took his rum ashore with little water in it, and puffed almost incessantly at his blackly coloured meerschaum.

He had been cast away three times in his voyages, and once at least had tasted the flesh of his fellows when starvation had forced them to cast lots; he did not like to talk of that time, and always turned the conversation with a volley of oaths when reminded of it. But to his owners he was staunch as a bull-dog, and excused the sorry crew they gave him as far as a man given to hasty bursts of temper could.

His mates were pretty much of the same mould, fiery and faithful, and given to kicking the ignorant and incompetent wretches who made up their watch and left them all the responsibility and half of the serious work to do, yet they never reviled the guilty owners, because they had been trained to obedience; they took it out of the ignorant crew whom they had been forced to ship.

A sailor will love his vessel as he would his wife, if she is not a regular dead load, but no true-born seaman could entertain a moment's respect, far less affection, for the kind of vessels which cross the Atlantic in search of timber; they are all labour without a point about them to admire, rotten to the core, full of leaks and discomfort, only fit to go—as they so often do—to the bottom, therefore, they—the men—feel no compunction when the charterer loads her ten or twenty feet above the deck and makes her look like the swampy tub that she is.

It is the custom of some sailors who have any articles they specially value to send them home by other ships before leaving port with their cargo, and then commending their souls to Providence; if they escape that voyage it has been more than they expected; yet such is their dog-like fidelity that they never blame their owners.

Richard Harris had a thought of running away from the *Nancy Jane* when he got to Halifax, only that the appearance of that country was not sufficiently tempting; besides, his friend Jeff had told him on the voyage out about the glories of South America, and the chances a man might have in Australia, so that he concluded to risk the voyage home and take another voyage in some southward bound vessel to a climate more genial.

When the *Nancy Jane* left Halifax, she was certainly more like a Noah's Ark than a modern brigantine, with the wood piled on her deck

ten feet above the bulwarks and the water almost flush with the deck; of course, he did not know the danger as the captain and mates did; it was only the outlandish appearance of the craft which struck him with dismay.

There seemed nothing ominous to his unprofessional eye in the way she leaned over as she got into the quiet waters; it was a greater discomfort than on the outward bound passage to find the decks so crammed up, which forced him to climb over the deals and made the forecastle dark and choking; it had been pretty bad before in that way, but now it was unendurable; the pumps also had to be started before they lifted the anchors, and this is not exactly the kind of exercise which even a lover of athletic sports likes to take constantly — it is decidedly monotonous as well as wearing.

However, the weather was calm and genial as they left port, with a clear sky overhead and a bright blue sea beyond. He would sleep on deck as much as possible during the passage, although, as Jeff remarked ruefully, there would not be many watches below for any of them, as one of the short-handed crew had deserted without his place being supplied.

He had written one letter home to Mary, telling her where to send her answer, so that he was looking forward to getting it when he reached Cardiff before his next voyage southward.

For five days the weather continued calm, with a fair light breeze which sent them along

at a moderate rate and opened the seams of the hull terribly; and as the skipper saw the water rush out of the pump without diminishing the quantity in the hold, he swore and bullied the men and mates more than ever.

On the sixth day the wind freshened so that they had to reduce sail, and all hands were sent aloft for this purpose. Not being practical sailors, this operation was clumsily and slowly performed, for the men, besides being inexperienced, were completely worn out with their unremitting spells at the pumps, and weak with the horrible food served out to them.

When, with much stamping and bellowing, the sails were at last made right and the men could return to the pumps, the water had gained so much headway that the deck was about three inches covered, and with all their efforts they were not able to get it clear again. Then, all at once, the captain left off cursing, and became quite lamb-like in his behaviour, serving out to each of them a large tot of rum from his own cabin.

Before night the wind changed, and became a moderate gale; then they began to find out what that deck-load could do in the shape of damage, for while the timbers below rolled and groaned and cracked, the wood above broke from its moorings and smashed bulwarks and supports all to pieces. So darkness fell upon them, with an ocean rearing up in great breakers and washing over the loosened battens, which the men caught at despairingly, even

although in the clinging two of them were crushed.

The skipper and mates gave no more orders ; the hurricane took the management of that water-logged brigantine entirely in hand, and did its work dexterously and thoroughly ; with a report like thunder the first mast snapped with all its gearing, and a few moments more the other followed suit, leaving a mass of wreckage hanging to the sides and half-submerged bow ; it was the easiest-made wreck that one could have imagined, something like the breaking of a leper's fingers.

Luckily for Richard Harris and his faithful chum, Jeff, they were together and hanging on to some battens, which kept their lashings and did not roll. The skipper was hanging on to the same mass, and he consoled them during the breathing pauses, after the waves had receded, by shouting cheerily but hoarsely :

"Keep up your hearts, my lads, and hang on. The old hulk won't sink any further to-night ; she's got her belly filled, and the wood will keep her floating for a spell."

It was an awful night for all that, but only the prelude to greater horrors. In a properly manned and properly loaded water-tight vessel, the storm was nothing to have alarmed any seaman, for they had good sea room, and the wind was only a stiff one, but upon this water-logged, rotten hulk, which ought to have been broken up before Dick was born, but which had been sent to sea voyage after voyage with

only the most superficial patching, it was the same as if they had been clinging to a lead-weighted log; the waves had their free fling, and rushed over this impediment in their career with resistless force.

So on it raged all through the long hours of darkness, the wind shrieking through and tossing the wreckage about, until they whistled and cracked like whipcord; the loose deals rolling about as the ship swayed before each swamping mass of water which rushed on and washed over them every few minutes, while beneath them they could feel the hull shaking and the supports parting as the water sludged and sobbed about them, without a ray of light to cheer them.

Dick knew that his darky friend was with him, though they could not see each other, for as each wave swept over, he felt his strong wet arm holding on, and when again the heavy brine went over him and choked him, that consciousness of friendship kept some of the heat in his heart.

At last daylight broke, and they could look round upon their disaster, for the wind had lulled a bit and the waves were more settled.

What they saw was a wide ocean, slate-tinted and covered with foam-flecks, with a cold grey sky bulging with spent and lank-looking clouds all torn to tatters as they trailed their dirty rags in front of the gathering light.

The captain and second mate, with a Swede sailor, were all that remained of the crew, with

the exception of Dick and his friend Jeff. One man lay under a mass of fallen battens, with his body crushed and only his head and shoulders showing out; the others had been washed overboard.

The vessel herself was under water, with only the moorings of the deck-loading keeping them to her, that and the wreckage of the two masts which still floated by the lee-side.

There was no getting below for provisions, for the timber blocked up the way completely; they were prisoners on a water-logged wreck, without the prospect of a meal, a drink, or even a smoke, for the matches and tobacco which they had in their pockets were saturated.

"This reminds me of the time I was aboard the *Caledonia*, and about the same parts, I reckon," gasped the captain weakly, as he crawled on his knees and looked round. They were all weak with the cruel buffeting they had received during the night, and could not have raised one of those loose battens even by their united efforts, far less the mass which lay between them and the submerged stores.

"We were nineteen days on that blessed wreck without grub, and only two or us were picked up alive. Ah! no, this blooming wreck will float most likely for the next six weeks, long enough to make mummies of the whole bilin' of us."

"Ye had grub that trip, old man," answered the second mate, with an ugly short laugh of despair.

"Shut up, Jack Williams; stow your jaw about them times," growled the captain harshly.

"What's the good? Wasn't I in the *Francis Speight* on her last voyage?" answered the mate, burying his face in his hands, with a dismal groan. "That's what we must all come to sooner or later in this accursed trade."

Richard Harris could not comprehend these dark words, but he shuddered as he heard them, with even greater disgust than he had done at the broaching of the first cask of pickled provisions.

Days passed over their heads in this horrible circumscribed prison, and never a sail or wreath of smoke broke the even line of that distant horizon, while they grew weaker and more helpless each day, until at last they all were waiting for death, past even the desire to keep a watch.

Several times had the captain and second mate made a motion as if to get down to that deal-crushed sailor, but with a frightened glance at each other and a shiver of disgust, they sank again upon their backs and looked blankly at the sky.

Fortunately for them, beyond a couple of rainy days, the weather was fine if cold; they lay and let the rain soak into them and felt the better for it, although after it was clear again the most acute of agonies racked their bones.

On the eighth day Jeff Johnson fell to kissing

the passive Richard, under the fancy that it was a sweetheart he was with. Jeff's delirium was an amiable one, for, although extravagant in his language and flowery, he was chivalrous and respectful in the extreme; the Swede yelled out a chanty in his own Norse tongue, while the captain and mate held independent conversations which no one listened to. Then Dick began to dream that he was once more at home, the owner of a fortune, with Mary Gray still waiting for him. Even starvation on the wreck of an over-loaded timber ship has its intervals of exquisite surcease and pleasure, as the victims of the Inquisition had when Nature gave way.

* * * * *

When Dick woke up next he found himself in a comfortable second-class bunk on board of a Cunard steam-packet, with his faithful friend Jeff sitting beside him; they had been rescued just in time.

Being young, and naturally strong, he was very quickly able to take his place at the table, and soon, with the others, became the centre of attraction on deck.

Of course, the first questions asked were their individual names, and when Dick had given his, a grey-bearded, sun-dried passenger stepped over to him and said:

"I knew a man once out in Australia called Richard Harris—was he any friend of yours, young fellow?"

"My father's name was Richard Harris, and

he was a squatter in Australia," answered Dick quietly.

"What part?"

"Waratah was the name of his station, on the Murrumbidgee River."

"But I don't understand why you are in this plight, for your father died a wealthy man—of that I am certain, for I was a neighbour of his out there at the time of his death."

Richard told his new friend his story from beginning to end, how he had been sent to an English school when quite young and afterwards consigned to Mr. John Dagget.

When the ex-squatter, who was returning from America, where he had bought an estate, heard of the doings of the accomplished John Dagget, he swore a mighty bush oath that he would see the son of his old friend righted if there was law to be had in England.

"It isn't hard-up sailors and broken hearted widows this shipowner has to deal with now, but a man who can plank down dollar for dollar with him. Keep up your pecker, my son, you'll get both your own money back and your Mary."

And he was as good as his word; for when they reached England he set to work with that energy which marks Australians when they are after money, and makes them so much alike to Americans. John Dagget fought bravely for his hand as long as he could and held out doggedly to the last, but on the eve of the trial he disgorged, with a virtuous air, and so

quashed exposure and sadly disappointed his opponent, who, being on the war-trail, wanted to have it out to the bitter end.

Mary Gray, through unguardedly expressing sympathy in the cause of Dick, got her instant and ignominious dismissal from Federation Hall, another false step of the shipowner, because it brought her not only to the arms of her fortunate lover, but also to his friend the squatter, who no sooner heard her story than he went on the new scent and never rested until her poor uncle had restored fortune number two.

Then this combative Australian took up the cause of the widows of drowned seamen and harried the repose of the owner of Federation Hall so much, that Father Time soon laid his flour bag over his head, leaving visible white traces on that magnificent black beard and wavy tresses.

There was no pleasure in sailing ships with a spy like this hovering about, looking after the provisions and forcing honest ship-owners to pay up full wages, so that finally Mr. John Dagget disposed of his lucrative business and retired to that paradise of the good Americans—Paris, where I believe he still resides, as amiable and bland as of yore.

I don't know if he dreams any more as he did on that Christmas Eve after his good dinner; I know that Richard Harris does, in fact his whole life is a dream—the continuation of that starvation dream on board of the *Nancy Jane*—and

the best I wish him is that he may never waken from it.

That ebon-skinned Jeff Johnson is in the dream also, and when anyone speaks about the ocean he says, with a broad grin :

"No, boys, nebber to sea no more for this chile, while I have Master Dick's hosses to look after."

Delphine.

A MALTA YARN.

CHAPTER I.

MYSELF AND STRANGE FANCIES.

PERSONALLY I have not much to tell of my existence previous to going on board the Ocean Liner *Malaga* at Tilbury Docks. I had seen a good deal of life, of course—all young men who are possessors of comfortable means do that as a duty—and my father being an Australian squatter had no need to stint me as far as the dimes were concerned. I drew my allowance regularly, and, it being ample for all my wants generally, I had no sort of excitement on that score, no anxiety in the morning, when I woke up after a heavy evening, as to where the money was to come from for the next night's amusement.

If I overran the cutter, which I sometimes did, all I had to do was to go to the Pater's solicitor, and state my case; he gave me a sermon, of course—they all do that—and afterwards unlocked his cash-box and produced. A dear fellow my old Dad was, who had worked hard for his fortune and determined to make a gentleman of his son; often I thought upon

this as I sat in my chambers, or in one of my many West End clubs, wondering how ever I could come up to the standard of that fine old Spartan hero of a father. He had gone to the colonies a poor boy, with neither education nor influence, and yet had toiled as only old Colonials and old Romans could toil, to build up a fortune and found a family, risking bush-rangers, natives, disaster and death, hourly for forty years; depriving himself and his noble wife, my uneducated mother, of every comfort, at first even the necessities of life, so that I, their son and heir, might rusticate at Oxford, and afterwards lounge along Piccadilly and Regent Street.

Was it not very grand and noble on their part, this sort of thing? And if I did not feel quite satisfied with my allotted part of the programme, that was not their fault surely.

I knew Piccadilly and Regent Street thoroughly, Leicester Square also, and the fashionable shops to patronise in Bond Street. I had no trouble in life at all, excepting perhaps, an occasional headache after too late a night at the club, or the very natural anxiety which a young fellow must feel of a morning, when he looks over his assortment of neckties and finds that he is the particular shade short which he ought to wear that day according to "form." I had learnt to play the banjo, *a little*, as that was the correct sort of thing to do. I never could learn to do anything very first-class, even at school; that was one item which my poor old Dad did

not take into consideration when he sent me out to be a gentleman ; but I could always pass in a crowd, and take my share either at whist, billiards, or whiskey, soda and cigarettes. Mediocre, I suppose I must class myself, yet all the fellows liked me, and I don't think I ever had a cross word or a nasty feeling against any one, either male or female, until I came on board the *Malaga* in my voyage home to see the old folks in Victoria.

I hadn't seen father or mother since I was sent home in my fourteenth year, nearly six years before, to be educated, and now I was going out to delight their eyes and reward them for all their trouble, with my brilliant display of fancy shirts, lawn tennis jackets, and fashionable costumes all up to date, and just a little before. I had the latest tips, you know, from my own tailor, as to what would be the fashion three months in advance, so that I was quite prepared to take the lead both on board the *Malaga* and also on "The Block" in Collins Street when I arrived. Yes, as my old school friend and present companion, Charley Figtop, remarked, "I was a regular toff, if nothing else."

Charley Figtop was the son of a country rector who had always shown me the right thing to do ; he had no cash himself, but kindly consented to be my guide, philosopher and friend, for his expenses and a slight consideration of two hundred a year, which no one could grudge to such a clever fellow who knew the world and

society so much; he wasn't a particularly generous young man, but none of the clever fellows are, and he was awfully clever, in fact he didn't believe in anything, which is quite the style now-a-days.

It was in the month of January when we left London, Charley and I, with the snow covering streets, house-tops, and telegraph wires, a slushy, wretched time which anyone would like to get away from.

Charley did not bother taking many traps with him, because, as he said, we were both of a size, and I had such a complete rig-out that there was no use of him bothering, since he could use my wardrobe.

A witty fellow Charley was; he made puns and jokes on everything; the poor wretches shivering and half-naked, mouching along the street, he turned into ridicule so funnily, that I always felt ashamed of the inclination I had to put my hand into my pockets and give them a sixpence; it seemed such a silly thing to do after Charley had made his jest upon the ragged beggars. I would begin by feeling wretched and pitiful as I looked at them, but I always had to burst out laughing at their ridiculous get-up, before Charley was half through with his comic description.

The night before we left, while we were staying at the Metropole, the evening papers were filled with the news of a most atrocious murder which had taken place in a lodging-house off Russell Square; an old lady who had

lately come to town had been found strangled and robbed, the suspected murderers being a maidservant and valet who had disappeared.

There was a full account of the scene, and detailed description of the accomplices, a dark, sallow-faced man of about thirty, five feet ten inches in height, gentlemanly in his manners; the woman was young, pale complexioned, with dark, lustrous eyes, and considered good-looking. It was not known yet how much they had robbed their mistress of, but it was supposed to be a large amount in gold and jewellery.

Charley was comic as usual over the ghastly news, but I did not quite enjoy his satirical picture; I somehow got the impression of the victim and her murderers into my mind so vividly that his jokes seemed out of place; a peculiar sense of horror and magnetism took possession of me as if I had known or was yet to become intimate with the actors of this fearful tragedy, and that I could by some occult gift recognise them when I met them. To me it read more than an ordinary murder, also as if something in me was cognisant of the whole drama, and as if I could fill out the blanks left by the reporters in the evidence which had been printed.

I could see the different acts as if it had been a ghastly tragedy enacted before my eyes, instead of a mystery in real life. We were just crossing the pavement from our cab to the portico of the Hotel Metropole when I felt *impelled* to purchase an evening paper from a

boy standing outside; the same inscrutable feeling forced me to open it the instant we entered, and pore over the account which reeked with horrors, leaving Charley to order supper; I always left him to do that, for he knew so much better than I did exactly what I wanted to eat and drink, as he always decided how we were to fill out the day or night.

All through the supper, the words danced before my eyes, with other words coming in between, as if someone else was reading to me another and more complete account of the crime. Charley, seeing me dull and preoccupied, and learning the cause, chafed me most unmercifully about thinking twice of the strangling of an old woman, saying it was a good joke rather than otherwise, for her heirs, if she had any property to leave.

I think it was this last remark of his which in a moment changed the words into a panorama of vivid pictures, which passed and repassed slowly before me, while I smoked my cigarette, all through the Empire Theatre of Varieties, into which we strolled after supper; growing more vivid, the more whiskey and seltzers we had together, so that I saw and heard nothing else; filling out my dreams when I went to bed, and only fading away, or rather giving place to *something* else, when we stepped on board the *Malaga* next forenoon.

I seemed to see the old woman distinctly enough from the first picture to the last—a pig-faced, white-haired, intensely selfish, self-indul-

gent, and exacting old lady, who gave as much trouble as possible to those about her who were dependent upon her ill-natured caprices. I saw the murderer and the woman who was his accomplice also; that is, I saw their figures but could never get a fixed impression of their faces; they both seemed to dance before me, and when I tried to look at them, became vague and mist-like; a gentlemanly, slenderly-built man of about five feet ten inches, and the figure of a beautiful young woman with a graceful gliding walk as she moved about.

At first, both appeared to be visitors to the old lady, for they were dressed fashionably, and seemed to be staying with her; still that did not prevent her using them as she did the servants; in fact she kept them perpetually on the trot for some duty or other. At times I noticed that she pretended to be very short-sighted, but kept watching them very closely from her half-closed eyes, while a malicious look overspread her selfish face whenever they turned their backs upon her. I felt that they all hated each other viciously, and also as if the young ones were afraid to offend her, while she took a delight in playing with them as a cat might with a couple of mice. From the first scene to the last I had no sympathy for the old woman.

Then I saw them again in changed positions—the old woman more capricious and domineering than ever, and the young people dressed as servants, he with a suit of livery upon him, and the girl costumed as a housemaid.

The surroundings changed constantly ; it seemed as if the old woman who had now become their mistress, dragged them about from place to place, and gave them no rest day or night, laughing at them always as she regarded them with half-closed eyes and piggish content, while they moved with the spiritless gait of serfs.

Then the two last scenes came, the one where the maid and the valet plotted the murder. A room off the bedroom ; it appeared to be a drawing-room divided by folding doors, through which I saw the bed where the old woman lay. Night it was—midnight—for the lamp burned low in the bedroom, while in the sitting-room only the ray through the half open door illumined indistinctly the chairs, table, and couch upon which the two indefinite figures sat plotting together.

The man was the most energetic, and appeared to be urging the young woman to help him, for in one hand he held a soft, window-curtain, rope, and with the other arm he embraced the shivering figure of the woman who reclined in his arms as if she had a right there ; he had his head close to hers, and appeared to be whispering while she clung to him with tight clasp and downcast face, and all the while shaking with horror. Then the end came, a mingling of figures as they all struggled together, and afterwards a glimpse of that white-robed form on the tumbled bed, with the piggish face distorted and horrible in its malice and agony ; the man sitting on a chair a little way off, with cowering

figure, the curtain rope, still in his nerveless hand, trailing like a serpent on the carpet, and the graceful figure, clad in the maidservant's black dress, lying face downwards as if she also had been murdered.

CHAPTER II.

OUR FELLOW PASSENGERS.

WE managed to secure very good berths on board the *Malaga* (Charley had seen to that), somewhere about mid-ship, where we could be together and not feel the motion so much; and it was not very long before I got quite intimate with most of the fellows going out, some officers in the next berth going out to the Soudan, a lieutenant and a couple of captains; one who had just received his commission, Captain Williams, a jolly little red faced fellow, who knew all the naughty little corners of Gibraltar and Malta, and the other an ex captain, who had served in India, but was now going out with his sister to Australia in the fond hope of getting some gentlemanly billet. He introduced his sister to me and Charley, before we had left the Docks, a service for which I was both grateful and savage, as Charley Figtop, with his usual easy assurance and lofty man-of-fashion style, faced up to her in no time, and left me completely out in the cold; I never had the least show, when Charley was in the game, either with barmaids, ballet girls, or ladies.

Captain Sparks, her brother, was a splendid fellow all round; he was very quiet and gentlemanly in his manner, and never showed off any of his many accomplishments, but he could always be depended upon as a first class-authority in any game of amusement; not too fond of cards, but always ready to take a hand at low stakes, and far more careful about me than ever Charley had been. If I was losing he generally managed to pull me up in good time, so that I might not drop too much, warning me in a quiet way that never offended, which my companion never did, although he was ready enough to chaff me afterwards.

In appearance Captain Sparks was fair-haired and light-moustached, with pale blue eyes, slenderly built; I would guess about thirty years of age, and very neat in his dress; indeed he was the only man on board who never failed to dress for dinner; he had brought with him a stock of white shirts for the purpose, which the other men, economically inclined as to their linen, dispensed with, the P. and O. service leaving this matter entirely to the option of the passengers.

I think he and I were the two most laughed at for our display of collars and cuffs, and this perhaps as much as anything made us close chums from the first and all through the voyage—a fellow *failing*, you know, makes us wondrous kind.

His sister, Delphine! Ah, I don't think I could ever describe this wonderful syren, who turned

all the male heads on board. Tall and supple in her figure, every movement she made seemed to be a study of lithe grace. The kind of girl I would have fancied Cleopatra to have been, when she was unrolled from the bale of cloth before the dazed eyes of her first Roman master and slave, with large lustrous dark eyes, bright and melting as a velvet pansy, and overlapped by long lashes; her complexion was of the richest brunette colour, glowing like a tropic flower. She never looked cold, even in that icy January air, but burst upon my eyes like a palpitating emblem of life and vitality.

Lips of the reddest and moist like ripe strawberries, small even teeth which shone like milk between them when they parted. My whole boy-heart leapt out to her with a bound at the first glance, and never again came back to me. I had been a boy up till that January forenoon; Delphine Sparks made me a man, with all a man's care and anxiety, in one brief instant of time.

How madly, slavishly I adored her, and for her dear sake, her brother; he might have asked me for anything, but he did not, for there was nothing of the sponge about him; he was ever ready with his advice, and what he advised was always for my good.

As good luck would have it, she and her brother sat opposite me and Charley at table, so that I could look at her often, during breakfast, tiffin and dinner; I did not make much headway as far as speaking was concerned, for I could

never think upon the right words to say until it was too late, so Charley generally took the runnings, and said such a lot of clever, smart things that beyond smiling occasionally towards me, Miss Sparks and he kept up the conversation, while I listened or laughed when she laughed, envying my companion his gift of amusing people.

Next to her sat a dark, sallow-faced man of about forty or forty-five, who was travelling out with his cousin, a thin-lipped female of the shrewish order, who made herself particularly obnoxious by a habit she had of making spiteful and bad-tempered remarks. She was one of those atrociously candid ladies who take a delight in always expressing their opinions about people to their faces, and considering me a duffer, which, perhaps, I was early in the voyage, she expressed her conviction in considerably varied terms at each chance she could get to make me feel uncomfortable.

I did not retort to this thin-lipped, thin-jawed and dark-gimletted-eyed young lady, partly because I could not, and partly because Captain Sparks and his sister generously took that duty off my hands, she particularly, giving it so hotly at times back to this soul of candour, that sometimes she would start up with a face like scarlet, and darting upon me a look of hatred—I always came in for that with her—she would rudely bound out of the cabin to the great relief and amusement of those left behind.

Sometimes I sought to conciliate this vindic-

tive female, Selina Grubbles, on deck or in the music saloon, but always found myself the worse for my peace making attempt ; she neither would be friends nor leave me alone, so that at last I left her the full pride of victory, taking her attacks in the same meek spirit of endurance that a puppy dog endures the scratching of a cat with whom he has to live. I shied off as far as possible when she began to scratch, and avoided her as respectfully and as often as I could with decency on board ship, where it is much more difficult than it would be ashore.

Her brother, Mr. Arthur Grubbles, was very much after the same pattern as most of the other fellows whom I had been in the habit of meeting at clubs, and drawing-rooms, the superior sort, you know, who are always setting themselves up in a priggish way as society oracles, and making us younger and more reckless duffers feel awful gluttons and drunkards ; fellows who could limit themselves to one or two cigarettes per day, hardly ever took any grub, and never indulged in any stronger liquid than weak tea or lemonade ; dons at college, and authorities upon everything under the sun with a lofty unbelief in everything beyond what they could see, handle and analyse, so confoundedly perfect that no one else ever had a chance alongside of them.

I always used to feel as if I had been made of common potter's clay when near one of these super-refined porcelain specimens of priggdom, wishing that I had been brought up

amongst the scalp-hunters. I always felt "creepy" while I listened to their silky voices and cold-blooded, sneering remarks, and shift, sly inuendoes, it seemed all to be so crammed over with snaky obscenity, so different from and so much more unwholesome than the old Tom Jones' description of bluff, rough, boisterous blackguards, who swilled into their tankards and roared out their coarse jests without leaving the nasty taste which these mildly-worded, dyspeptic, but slimy jokes left behind.

He had the same slow, drawling accent as if speaking was too much trouble; the boarding-school sense of humour, and general lifeless lack of human interest, which distinguishes all the fellows who are thoroughly in the swim, and who annihilate the clumsy wisdom and superstitions of their forefathers, with a languid remark which sums up and concludes everything as "bosh." Charley Fig-top was pretty fairly up to the mark, but then he could smoke and drink square, which partly reduced his superiority to the level of my dull comprehension. But this Arthur Grubbles never showed a single trace of weakness upon any point; the cut of his clothes was quiet and correct, just a suggestion of collar, cuff, and jewellery, which made me dreadfully ashamed of my lavish display; no one could trip him up, for he was always positive about his facts, nothing ever excited him or raised a flush to those sallow, clean shaven cheeks, and he had always the right word at command to crush his

antagonist in an argument, while he never spared his man.

I don't know how it was, but I felt the nearest approach to hatred which I had ever felt towards anyone the moment I set my eyes upon this man. It was at tiffin, our first meal, that I heard his soft, steady, emotionless voice, and as I looked towards him felt as if I had met him before—where?

The strangler of the old woman!—Was that it?—He had the same slender, gentlemanly figure, but then we were all of us more or less after the same build, and then Selina could not be the shrinking accomplice of my strange fancy, for she was by no means beautiful, to my ideal, although some people might have thought her fairly good-looking; her eyes were rather “beady” in their hard keen glitter than lustrous, and yet the fancy became a suspicion, strong enough almost to be a conviction, that the murderer was on board to prove a Jonah to us all, and that this man was branded with the mark of Cain.

I strove to push the horrible fancy from me, but in vain, and was glad to turn to the cheerful face of my new friend, Captain Sparks, and find relief in the contemplation of those beautiful pansy eyes of the smiling Delphine.

CHAPTER III.

THE PASSENGER UNDER SUSPICION.

I DID Mr. Arthur Grubbles injustice when I said that he was emotionless. The Bay of Biscay woke him up and showed that he had some portion of his anatomy capable of being moved by outward circumstances.

We had hardly passed the Strait of Dover before both he and his charming sister disappeared ; nor did they show up again until we were near to Oporto, which was a general relief to the rest of the less-gifted individuals. I stuck out as well as I could until I had seen Miss Delphine Sparks led below by the stewardess, and then Charley and I sneaked to our own bunks just after we had lost sight of the Lizards. We left Captain Sparks upon the deck leaning up against the engine-house, and smoking a long cigar, with his overcoat buttoned to the chin, and his pale blue eyes fixed steadfastly upon the grey drift which lately represented the last point of England. How we both wondered at any man being able to smoke at such a time, and how disgusted we felt at the sniff that we got as we darted swiftly down the companion way, to rock and moan for the next two days, love gone, green and sickly, and life a failure, while all the time we kept the steward busy with our fretful wants.

However, after that couple of days of weary woe and sad unrest, the steward informed us that we were just then sighting Cape Finisterre, and that we had left the cold weather in our rear, and had better go up and enjoy the fresh air before breakfast.

Breakfast! The thought of it did not seem so repugnant to my feelings as it had done for the last two mornings, so being the first ready, I left Charley finishing his toilet, and crawled slowly up to where I had left the brother of Delphine, and where I still found him, the only passenger yet on deck, and with what seemed the same cigar still between his lips.

"Hallo, Sparks, old fellow, have you stuck here all the time?"

"Pretty nearly, chappie," answered he with a kindly smile, "except when I went down to feed; I rather like rough weather at sea."

I made a wry face at his mention of food, for I had not as yet felt the necessity of eating for the sake of life. Then, after a pause, I asked:

"Is—is Miss Sparks all right yet?"

"Hardly yet, George, my boy, but before night I should fancy she will be."

"I hope so, indeed, how she must have suffered the past two days—I know I did awfully."

The ex-captain shrugged his shoulders while an amused light crept into his eyes.

"How we all must have suffered, you and the ladies below, and I on deck here with nothing

but the winds and waves for company and a host of unpleasant thoughts”

“What thoughts, Harry?”

“The usual train of meditation which a fellow naturally indulges in who has missed or thrown away his best chances in life, finds himself not over flush with money, and an uncertain future in front of him, with a pretty sister on his shoulders to look after, don't you know.”

“I haven't experienced much of that sort of thing for the old man always gives me what I want.”

“Lucky young dog—is your father so rich a man then?”

“So, I believe, a squatter who has done well in the colonies.”

“Ah, you must speak a good word for me and Delphine when we get out; perhaps he'll have a job as storekeeper or stockrider for me and a governess or upper housemaid's billet for my sister.”

“For Delphine? Ah, Sparks, I could not stand the thought of that for her; I am sure that my mother would welcome her as—as——”

“A daughter, eh? Now don't blush so awfully, my boy, I did not mean a daughter-in-law, still Delphine's a good girl.”

He was looking at me curiously as he interpreted my thoughts so bluntly, then all at once he took my hand, placing his other upon my shoulder, saying softly:

"Don't you think Delphine a pretty girl, George?"

"Beautiful, Harry, the loveliest girl I ever saw."

"That's right, George, she is better, for she is a good girl, true as steel, when she takes a fancy, and I have a notion that she has taken a fancy to you, so go in and win her, if you can. I won't object."

He laughed as he turned away to greet Charley, while I felt as if lifted into the seventh heaven.

They say that love takes away a young man's appetite. I don't know that, but I can safely say that sea-sickness does effectually, yet as he whispered that I had a chance of gaining the love of Delphine, I felt my sickness vanish like a flash, while a most insatiable craving for breakfast took possession of me all of a sudden; I was supremely happy and therefore desperately hungry.

The sun was beginning to break through the clouds, and away over the tumbling billows, swam in soft gray haze, the cliffs of Finisterre; every instant the air was becoming softer, already it had lost its icy keenness so that we could walk about with our lightest overcoats on; in an hour or two even they would have to be discarded, while the rain, which had been cold sleet in the Channel, was now only a tender Scotch mist. So the summer was rapidly rushing upon us, as already it was in my bounding heart, all warmth, hope and sunshine.

Charley was growling as usual at the beastly Bay over which we had passed, when my darling's brother replied cheerily:

"After all, we shall soon be in Paradise, and it is such a brief sojourn in Purgatory before we get to one of the most delightful of climates that it is hardly worth speaking about, or rather as Englishmen we ought to regard it as a special dispensation of the all-wise Providence, which directs our deliciously varied seasons at home, that we have a Biscay Bay to pass through before we can reach smiling skies and laughing waters. How could we ever live through the summers, which we have been favoured with of late years if it were not for the winters? So that a toss about for two days after we lose sight of the snowy cliffs of Albion is rather a benefit than otherwise if we regard it all in the right spirit."

Wonderful fellow the captain was for philosophising at times, as we all found out afterwards.

Of course the ladies could not be persuaded to regard it with the charitable spirit of Captain Sparks as they languidly staggered over to their deck chairs, with pallid cheeks, one after another, about the time we got opposite Vigo Bay, and the seas were dancing merrily under a bright blue sky, the mists and snows now far away from us for the rest of the voyage.

I had Delphine to myself all the afternoon, for she lay in my easy cane chair, wrapped in my rugs (blessed rugs, how I hugged them round

me afterwards when she relinquished them for the night), her cheeks and lips slowly recovering their colour and her eyes getting back their lustre, with just a tiny suggestion of toe peeping out from below the wraps.

Her brother, after handing her over to my care, had taken Charley into the smoke-room for a game of cards along with the other fellows, so that we were nearly alone, for the other passengers were as yet like myself glad enough to sit still and watch the distant shores.

I wonder if she thought me a very dull fellow on that first real interview? I tried all sorts of subjects but made a bungle of each one. I started feeling that I could only look at her with worshipping gaze, wondering what she was thinking upon as she lay beside me with her lovely oval face turned skywards, and her splendid dark eyes fixed upon and reflecting the intense blue like two deep, but translucent, pools.

"Harry tells me that you have a father and a mother," she said suddenly, without withdrawing her limpid look from the vault overhead, and interrupting something I was saying.

"Yes, and I hope you will yet come to know and like them, Miss Sparks."

"Do you?" She flashed a look upon me that made my heart quiver, and then looked up once more.

"Are your parents alive?"

"No, I never remember seeing them, they

died when I was a baby, and until I went to school I lived with an aunt."

"Was she nice?" I asked, idiotically, not knowing what to say next.

"No, she was what I would call the reverse of being nice."

"Ah!"—I thought for a moment what next to say for the sake of conversation. "Is—is the old party still alive?"

Again Delphine looked from the blue sky swiftly at me, an instant of bewilderment, for I could not make out the meaning of that strange expression.

"No, the old party is—dead."

She gave a little laugh as she repeated my words and then glanced over my shoulder nervously towards the open door of the music saloon.

I turned to follow her glance and there saw the coldly-dark and sombrely-sneering visage of Mr. Arthur Grubbles framed within the music saloon door, with a plaid shawl over his shoulders, and a single eyeglass fixed in one of his deep-set dark eyes, looking at us both with that supercilious stare which society men affect, an awful picture of seediness and inane superiority.

Yes, there he leaned, my tormentor, the passenger under suspicion, like a sea-sick Mephistopheles, bilious and emotionless, with the sunlaved shores of Spain in front of him and the obscurity of the room behind him—a panel picture which fascinated my eyes for a

moment with positive horror and appeared to have the quality of absorbing all the joy and lightness from my heart, a decided harmony of black and grey, but without relief.

He regarded us for a moment listlessly and then languidly picked himself together and sauntered towards the smoke-room where the men were playing.

"What an uncommonly disagreeable man that is—who is he?" remarked and asked Delphine as she watched his retreating figure.

"I don't know, only that he is called Grubbles, but you won't laugh at me if I tell you what I think about him?"

"Certainly not, so that it is not complimentary."

"It is not indeed. Did you hear about a horrible murder which took place in London two nights before we sailed?"

"No, what was it?" Delphine was lying with closed eyes as she asked, without seemingly much interest in what I was saying.

"An old lady who was found in her apartments strangled and murdered."

"Well! I fail to see the connection between her and this languid specimen of swelldom."

"I have taken it into my head that we have got the murderer on board with us."

"What do you say?" Delphine sprang upright in her chair, her cheeks pallid, lips quivering, and eyes wide open with a sudden horror, as she crouched with upturned knees and supple body twisted towards me, her white

hands clutching at the wicker-work arms of the seat.

"I beg pardon, but I didn't mean to frighten you, I ought to have known that it wasn't fit conversation for a delicate young lady."

"Yes, you did startle me, you foolish boy," answered she, smiling nervously, but sinking back once more and trying to sort the rugs about her, which I hastened to help her with, apologising all the while for my rudeness and thoughtlessness. "Never mind; now you have raised my feminine curiosity, tell me all you think."

"Well, I only think—nay, I feel convinced that he is the man that did it."

"Oh, what a ridiculous idea!"

"But it's not an idea, it is a conviction—a sort of inspiration."

"But why do you think it?"

"Because——" I was about to tell her all my funny fancies, when a sudden fear came over me that I might frighten her again, or worse, make her laugh at me as a fool; this I could not stand with Delphine, so I said, "Because, I think—that is I cannot say exactly, he is like the sort of fellow who could do such a thing just as an experiment, cold-blooded, and sedate; who has used up life and wants excitement. If you only heard these fellows speak sometimes at the clubs, you wouldn't wonder at my thinking the worst of them."

"Neither do I wonder," she retorted with

sudden warmth. "I think I can understand the kind of man you mean, the psychological description of modern monsters who dissect and analyse everything, who cannot comprehend faith, truth, or love, or feel a human emotion. Ah, I fancy I can agree with you and give them credit for any atrocity, so that it could be carried out safely."

"Yes, Miss Sparks, that is it, only better expressed a thousand times than I could express it; what an awfully clever girl you are!"

"No, Mr. Rankin, it is you who are clever and give me ideas; but yet why him more than anyone else on board, he looks as if he had come out for his health?"

"Yes, it might have been only for his health, he does look as if he wanted ozone, and as if the vitiated atmosphere of close gaslit rooms had dried up his vitality; but then again it might be to evade justice, and he has a certain air of gloomy mystery about him which is always apt to make us suspicious."

"I fear, Mr. Rankin, that you are very imaginative or superstitious; I think I'll get downstairs again as I feel tired; will you help me down?"

"With pleasure."

She rose from her chair and leaned upon me for support, as the deck was yet unsteady. So, happy to feel her arm within mine, even although it meant the termination of our interview for the day, I banished the mysterious

Grubbles from my mind and thought only upon the girl at my side.

When we reached the door of her cabin, she turned round with a charming smile as she gave me her hand, saying :

“Now don't you go fancying all these odd, horrible things, or I shall grow positively afraid of you, and think perhaps that you are suspecting us next, for instance, my brother and me.”

“You ! oh, Delphine !”

“Miss Sparks, you naughty fellow ! you have only known me a day, and must not take liberties like that.”

She laughed as she struck me lightly across the cheek with her taper fingers, and disappeared inside her cabin, leaving me standing looking dazed at the shut gold and white-enamelled door.

CHAPTER IV.

THROUGH THE STRAITS OF GIBRALTAR.

BEFORE we reached Malta we were all intimately acquainted with each other, and had started tournaments, games and concerts. All the gentlemen who could do anything got pressed into the service ; I with my banjo, and Lieutenant Green with his guitar, became great favourites with the ladies ; he particularly, was a very great favourite and an inordinate flirt, also a terrible young fellow for heavy stakes.

He was going out to the Soudan, and when he lost, gave I.O.U's. I had with the rest of us quite a bundle of them before we parted, but when he won he always managed to get cash from the loser, forgetting to redeem his I.O.U's. Charley Figtop and he did not play often with one another, for they both had the same habit of giving promissory notes, and found it no fun exchanging bits of paper instead of cash. I think they played twice against each other, and ever after that played into one another's hands or not at all.

In the concerts at nights we had great fun, one passenger who dropped his h's was a very good-hearted, honest fellow. He offered to sing a song one night, and treated the ladies to such a strong music-hall ditty that they all rose and left the room, and afterwards put the poor fellow into Coventry, a fate he really did not deserve, for he was all unconscious of wrongdoing. "Wat's wrong about that song, I wonder?" he remarked savagely, as he looked round on the empty seats. "My wife plays and sings that 'armony, and surely she is as much a lady as the best on them 'ere."

He was called Dungeness, so we christened him the Duc le Dungeness, because he was so refined in his manner and so delicate in his remarks and sense of humour. After being kicked out of the music saloon, he nearly got himself killed in the smoke-room by insulting Her Majesty's army. We interceded for him, for he was such an obliging all-round fellow,

and carried the finest cigars, which he freely gave to the whole of us, and so for the sake of his tobacco Her Majesty's outraged officers forgave him. A really good cigar is almost enough to stamp a man as respectable, particularly in military society, no matter how far he offends the proprieties in himself.

I had great cause to be grateful to him, for he took my part, not always wisely yet always exceedingly well and forcibly, in my many encounters with Miss Grubbles; offered to fight her highly-refined cousin for a 'alfpenny, if he couldn't afford more, and in general conducted himself as the stalwart champion of male virtue in distress against spiteful female malice, silencing the venomous tongue of Miss Grubbles with pure brutality, when nothing else could, so all honours be to the absent Duc wherever he may now be carrying on the social warfare.

Finally, we established a smoking House of Lords, and made him "chucker out." It was a congenial occupation, and ever after that we had no cause to complain of our bruiser champion of the doorway; he did his duty manfully, and thoroughly, as all the offending members felt to their cost.

Delphine was growing very tender and sweet, and seemed to like my poor company better than that of any of the other fellows. Charley, after trying his hardest to win her from me, gave it up in disgust, and took to heavy drinking and smoking at the expense of Dungeness. Delphine did not think very much of Charley,

and showed me what I would never have found out—what a selfish fellow he was in many ways, so that I had half made up my mind, if I could only win her, to get rid of him when we reached Melbourne.

I had not yet spoken fairly to her on the subject, but at nights after the ladies had retired, and we lay on deck in our pijamas, cooling down and smoking, I used to tell all my feelings to her brother; he was such a good sort, and so sympathetic with me, that I felt pretty confident from what he told me that she knew I loved her with my whole heart and soul, and that she liked me in return, so that I was only waiting upon an opportunity to tell her what I felt.

“Don’t you think it best not to commit yourself until you see the Pater, and hear how he takes it? He might object to your marrying a portionless girl, even although she is a lady.”

“No, Harry, my old man won’t object, he never does object to anything I do, and he won’t to this; besides, I must have things settled right off. I’ll speak to her at Malta if I get a chance when we are ashore.”

“I’ll give you the chance, my boy, if you have made up your mind.”

“Thanks, Harry, do, for I am an awful fellow for determination.”

“All right, you leave it to me.”

We sailed down the coast of Spain, past Lisbon and St. Vincent, and through the Straits of Gibraltar by midnight. I very nearly spoke

to her that night under the stars, with the great rock in front of us, for she wanted to see it, and Harry, feeling tired and able to trust me thoroughly, left her under my charge, so that we were all by ourselves. It was a hard matter to keep quiet and content myself with squeezing her hand tenderly, but I controlled myself that night—or rather, I didn't know how to begin, it seemed such a very short time since we had known each other—and so I let the chance slip by.

She was a splendid singer, and leaned against the rail, humming tender love songs to herself, which wafted over the sides and mixed with the surging of the waters. What a delicious night that was, and how ever I kept from kissing her, I cannot yet tell, she was so gentle and sympathetic.

We slid through the narrow Straits in silence, with the shores of Africa on one side and the hills of Spain on the other. My arm was round Delphine's shoulders with the excuse of keeping her wrap in its place, and she did not object to my trembling arm being there; she was so much entranced with the beauty of the night, I suppose, that she did not notice it. Stars, brilliant and humid overhead, and that soft dew-laden breeze which wafted over our faces and blew stray hairs of her perfumed tresses with light touches against my lips. The Lascars were gliding noiselessly about, for they knew their duty too well to require more than a guttural command in Hindostani now and again, and

they never came near to us solitary occupiers of the deck. We had it all to ourselves, for the flirtations of the others had gone on more sedately, and as yet were confined to suggestive compliments, when they met at cricket or ball and formed partners at these games. As we neared the tropics the coupling would be more decided, and dark corners at a par after dinner.

I wonder if Delphine ever knew the extent of my impulsive, mad passion, or how long it would last. I wonder if one of these women, who lightly take on flirtations with boys, ever calculate how deeply and widely the roots spread which this calf-love plants in the virgin soil, and how, years afterwards, when they are old and shrivelled up themselves, and all their joys departed, the boy who loved them in their bloom, and whom they played with for amusement, still may be digging, a stalwart labourer of middle age, all in vain to tear up the roots which interfere with the well-being of his other planting.

If they did they would make more boys love them, for women are remorseless, and to be loved and remembered is far better than wealth or fame.

CHAPTER V.

A DAY IN MALTA.

DELPHINE was twenty-two when we met and I was nearly twenty, not much difference at our age.

We had both seen a great deal of the world in our different ways, I, the world of London as it is represented in the West End—the theatres, clubs, cafés, gaming-houses and dancing-rooms—with the racecourses of Epsom and Newmarket and an occasional run over to Paris.

She, left so young, an orphan, and living under the protection of a penurious aunt, had spent most of her time abroad at different cheap continental schools and convents; that was while Harry was in India with his regiment. Afterwards, he had to sell out through some quarrel with his colonel. “A case of jealousy,” she remarked with a smile when she gave me this confidence, “which Harry will tell you all about, himself. I fancy he struck his commander, for he is very hot-tempered, and so had to leave and come home, also dependent upon the charity of this aunt, who made things pretty disagreeable for both of us while we lived with her.”

“And then she died?”

“Yes—she died, and left us free to face the world together with what little money she

grudgingly left us; the bulk of her fortune we cannot claim."

"You are not very like your brother?"

"Not in the least; I am like my mother and he is like his. We had different mothers, so that we are only half brother and sister."

"That explains the matter. I was wondering."

"Wondering, and of course suspicious, eh?"

"No, Miss Sparks, never of you."

We were both leaning over the rail, her hand within my arm, as we held these confidences, and watching the snow-covered Sierra Nevada mountains trembling in their sixty miles of distance through the heated atmosphere, with a deep sapphire line of ocean seemingly between us and them. In reality they were far inland; but they looked as if rising directly out of the sea, picturesque ranges, rising one over the other, thickly covered with dazzling snow, broken up by chasms and valleys of rose, violet and green tinted like the shadows of icebergs, with nearer ridges of bare tawny stone; a sterile region when near, I would fancy, but very lovely in colours when viewed from the distance as we viewed it then.

I suppose I had betrayed my emotion more than usual, for her little hand pressed my arm, and I felt a tremor almost like a shiver run over her form as it touched mine in our near proximity.

"Poor boy," she murmured, gently, as she looked towards the mountains.

"Am I the poor boy?" I asked jealously, for I did not take the words as a compliment. But she did not reply, and I was surprised to see a large tear roll down the cheek nearest to me.

I looked at that diamond glitter as it rolled down slowly and fell into the foam furrow which the ship was casting up as we dashed along, and felt dismayed to see it, not knowing what to say to comfort her at the moment; and while I was still thinking, the rasping voice of Miss Grubbles struck upon my ear; she was speaking about me and my companion with her usual loud candour to her lank and supercilious cousin.

"It's positively disgusting to see such spooning going on in the daylight; the captain really should interfere with it."

I grew hot and crimson as I heard this, but Delphine was equal to the occasion as she always was.

"I don't suppose you have ever been guilty of such imprudence, Miss Grubbles."

"I should say not, decidedly, nor am I ever likely to be, Miss Sparks."

"So I should say, also, Miss Grubbles."

"Leave 'em alone, you interfering, thin-lipped 'ag!" bawled out the loud voice of our champion Duc! "Ain't they paid their passage money as well as you and your trash of an eye-glassed cousin? Some people are so spiteful when they can't get 'old of a man themselves."

The mobile Duc was lying full length on his deck chair, sunning his magnificent figure, and

puffing leisurely at one of his magnificent cigars, whilst he studied a book of comic songs; his ditties were always welcome in the smoke-room, if not amongst the ladies.

Delphine laughed softly as she turned her eyes again upon the distant panorama, at this delicate retort of the gentlemanly Duc, in our behalf.

"Cousin, do you hear what this monster calls me—a hag?"

"Yes," drawled out Mr. Arthur Grubbles. "I don't know if he has used the right word though, exactly; it is a word derived from the German and means hedge or wood—a wood—or wild woman, an ugly old woman, a fury, a she-monster, a witch, an enchantress!"

"Them's exactly what your cousin is, all excepting the last—an enchantress," responded the Duc promptly, with a loud laugh at his own wit. "Dash my buttons if she could be that to anyone!"

"And are you going to endure this, Arthur?" asked his cousin, white with fury.

"Well, that depends." Mr. A. Grubbles looked at the Duc, and our champion now slowly raising himself from his recumbent to a sitting position, looked steadfastly at Mr. Grubbles all the while he was rolling up the sleeves of his coat as if preparatory to washing his hands.

"Yes, I think we can afford to stand this, Selina," at length responded her cousin. "You see, Mr. Dungeness is quite right in his delicate

remark; we have all paid our passage money here, so have no right to interfere with each other."

"I would say he could stand that from me—and more," snarled the Duc, once more putting down his sleeves as the pair cut a hasty retreat. "Bah!" he exclaimed in a disgusted tone, spitting upon the deck before returning to his song book, "I'm always getting disappointed with the skunks on board this 'ere liner; none of them can come up to the scratch, when a fellow expects it."

It was a beautiful morning when we steamed into the harbour of Valletta, with a long day and night to enjoy ourselves ashore, for the *Malaga* had to coal here, so that they were all glad to get rid of the passengers till the next morning.

Malta, with its dazzlingly green waves of the Mediterranean washing the rocks, upon which its white and ancient walls are built, crowds of gondola-like boats, painted bright red, and green and blue, waited upon us, the boatmen wearing bonnets like the Scotch bonnet; some of the boats laden with fruit, oranges, melons and grapes, and other with photographs, lace and silver, merchants waiting with their wares for our inspection.

Delphine, her brother, Charley and I made up one party, and hired a boat; the others went in different parties. Lieutenant Green, the Duc and military party went together. Dungeness by this time had become modified — as his

favourite member of Parliament, Joe Chamberlain, has since become in his rabid ideas of the upper ten and the army—now that they countenanced him and consented to let him pay the piper ashore for the company, Captain Williams acting as director of the ceremonies, while Lieutenant Green took charge of the Duc's purse, promising to pay out of it all expenses and render a faithful account of the outlay when they returned.

I learned afterwards from the Duc, who was in business matters a sharp man, although lavish where his fancy was tickled, that the guitar-strumming lieutenant gave a very unsatisfactory rendering of that day in Malta; like Iago, he told the Duc to put money in his purse when he was going to entertain gentlemen, and the Duc had done it, and been done considerably.

"Forty-one pun ten and eightpence it cost me for dinner, supper and sundries," he remarked solemnly when recounting the affair, "and not too much fun either for the money. I gave that lieutenant chap my purse with forty-one pun eleven in it and got it back from him with fourpence coppers."

We were continually running against each other all day long in the streets, churches, and on the ramparts; Mr. Grubbles and his ill-natured cousin particularly seemed to haunt our little party, she sneering, and he supercilious, with his eyeglass reflecting the bright rays of the sun like a focus glass, and half-blinding all who looked at him. Along the Strada Reale, if

we chanced to go into a shop we found the ill-conditioned pair inspecting the wares displayed in the windows close by ; in the market-place they were about five paces in our rear ; in the Church of St. John, while we inspected the monuments, they examined the pillars. All through the day they hung on to us as if tired of their own company, yet too ungracious to ask us to let them share ours.

We pitied them, for they looked dull and bored with one another, yet it was a nuisance for all that, worse than the guides and beggars with which the place literally swarms, but we could not object to it as they had as much right to the place as we had ourselves.

Captain Sparks showed the most irritation about it ; indeed, he had been out of sorts and almost snappy all day, glancing over his shoulders in a nervous way every now and then, and scowling at Grubbles, who looked steadily ahead in return, with the blank stolidity of a stone wall, but never left us long by ourselves.

"Confound that fellow, what the deuce can he want following us like that?" muttered Harry, as he pitched his angry glance backwards.

If Delphine saw the evil pair it did not seem to affect her in the slightest degree ; she looked serenely unconscious as she walked by my side, and divinely beautiful and glowing under her scarlet sunshade. She wore a tight-fitting dress of soft, clinging, light, maize-coloured stuff with graceful folds in the skirt which seemed to fall

about her like a Grecian robe, while the perfect contours of her upper part, the rounded arms, and the supple, slender yet beautifully developed body were revealed in thin, delicate curves at every turn.

We had taken rooms at the Hotel D'Angleterre, and were annoyed to find that Mr. and Miss Grubbles had done the same, but as the Duc and his friends were also there, it partly carried off the infliction, so we all joined in and made a jolly house full in spite of the supercilious marjoys sitting by themselves at a little side-table.

The Ducal lot were considerably elevated before they sat down to dinner, so that I was not surprised to hear them all make up their minds to finish the day at the opera and the vicinity of Florian, but I was decidedly surprised soon after they left to see that Mr. Grubbles had also gone out for the night, leaving the enchantress Selina behind him.

Charley and Harry joined the other jovial fellows; they did not ask me to accompany them; already by tacit understanding on board I was left to entertain Delphine.

"Now is your chance, George, my boy," whispered Harry as he rose to go. "Propose a sail to Sliema and you will have a good opportunity."

I gave his hand a parting warm clasp; it was so nice and brotherly of him to smooth all the difficulties away like that for me, but I fear I made after all a sad bungle of it, for I asked

her aloud at the window, near where Selina Grubbles was sitting, if she would care to go, and upon her consenting to my request, felt my first homicidal desire shoot across me, when to my dismay Miss Grubbles replied also with her rasping voice :

“If you two are going for a sail to night, as I am all alone, I don’t mind accompanying you, if Mr. Rankin will be so gentlemanly as to ask me.”

CHAPTER VI.

AT THE STRADA LEVANTE.

I WAS in despair, and I think that Delphine shared my feelings also, from the expression which for a moment darkened her beautiful brow ; then the next moment she laughed ; it was too comical not to laugh about even although it meant anything but fun for me.

The ladies had gone to their bedrooms to get ready, for, of course, I had to yield to circumstances, and I was left looking moodily from the window on the rapidly darkening sky. Was there nothing to be done to get rid of this incubus and have my darling all to myself for this evening ?

“Ah, confound conventional politeness,” I muttered savagely. “If I had been an ’Arry with my ’Arriet I would have been able to settle that vixen’s hash, but as it is——”

Just at that moment a soft voice breathed in my ear.

"Senor, you want to go on ze sail to-night?"

I looked round to see a little dark-skinned native of Malta, standing bonnet in hand beside me.

"Yes, but what is that to you?" I asked in return, roughly, for the sail had lost a great deal of its charm now.

"I am ze honest boatman of Malta."

"Oh, I'm glad to find that there is one honest boatman in existence."

"Yes, sar, and my brother ze waiter told me to come. How many of you zal go?"

"Three, worse luck! That is two ladies and myself, and I wish one of them was at Hong Kong!"

"Ah, you would like to take one of ze ladies and leave ze odder one behind?"

"By Jove, I would, if it could be managed easily."

"I sall do it. Come dis way and I sall explain," and this arch Maltese conspirator drew me on to the balcony.

"You see my cousin is in the Maltisi police—as you would say."

"Yes, yes."

"I sall tell him one dam thief is in this house, and he will arrest her as we go down the streets. You leave it all to me. How is she dressed?"

I described the gay Selina as well as I could do it, and ended by saying:

"I shall walk between the ladies, the one on my right arm is the one to take. Of course, she will be let off as a mistake when you get us away.

"Yes, my cousin shall manage all that quite easily."

"You are better than an honest boatman. There, take this and get to work."

My Mercury disappeared while I waited on the ladies with a considerably lighter heart. Delphine came down looking superb but slightly depressed, while Selina Grubbles was grinning all over her spiteful face like the malicious vixen that she was. As I looked at her I felt glad that I had plotted against her as she had done in her own narrow mind against us.

The stars were all out as we went down the long stairs of the Strada St. Lucia, from our hotel to the Strada Levante, and it was here that my boatman's plan was put into execution.

The police met us at the bottom steps where they were waiting for us, Miss Grubbles on my right-hand side. They came forward and very politely laid their hands upon her, telling her in broken English that she was their prisoner.

"Nonsense!" said Selina. "If there is going to be an arrest at all, although I wonder at Grubbles doing it yet, there's the woman you want, not me."

To my disgust she pointed straight at Delphine, who clutched at my arm with both her hands.

"No—no, George—Mr. Rankin, don't let them take me."

"Don't be afraid, it is all a plot between the boatman and myself to get rid of her," I whispered in her ear softly.

"Thank God, thank God for that!" murmured Delphine fervently with her form trembling violently as she clung to me.

"No, madam, you are ze one we want to-night," said the officer, with a slight glance in my direction and the faintest indication of a wink. We were standing under the lamp which lighted up one of the images at the corner, so that I could just see it.

I went forward as if to remonstrate with him, and slipped a sovereign in his hand instead.

"Take her off quickly," I whispered, "and let us get away."

"All right, signor. Now then, Signora, I sall trouble you to come with me."

"I am very sorry, Miss Grubbles ——" I began.

"Be sorry for yourself, you fool," she retorted, snappishly. "Sergeant, or whatever they call you in Maltese, get a cab and take me as fast as the horse can drive to your magistrate, I want to see him as much as you want to take me."

The cab was called and Selina sprang in with agility.

"Now then, hurry up, stupids. And as for you, I'll teach you whom you have been playing with."

She shook her closed fist in my direction as she drove away, at which I laughed as I hurried Delphine along to the water's edge where the boat was waiting for us.

"Come now, Delphine, let us enjoy ourselves while we can."

"Yes, yes, George," she returned, with a choking laugh. "Let us enjoy ourselves while we can."

CHAPTER VII.

UNDER THE STARS.

OUR little boatman was a gem; he sat at the stem sculling with his long oar, singing chants to himself, with his back and a deaf ear to us in the prow as we darted past Dragut Point and out to the open sea.

The stars were above us, large, lustrous, and close-looking; they seemed to bend over us both with yearning glances like tear-filled eyes of angels weeping over the sins and follies of earth.

A serenely calm night, with the sea sparkling as we slid through it, we were leaving Malta behind us and gliding out to the open, to a world of freedom and isolated passion.

I had studied the words I would say to Delphine all through the day, but this episode of the arrest drove them out of my head. And I

never had occasion to make use of them, for we had hardly shot round the point when she flung her lovely arms about my neck and drew my face down to hers, kissing me passionately on the lips, with lips hot and feverish.

"George, my darling, I know you love me, or think you do. Dear, dear boy, let us love while we can."

I was bewildered, stunned, and could only yield to her fervour, returning her kiss for kiss, and pressing her closely to my heart, while she stroked my hair, for my hat had fallen behind me, tenderly, almost savagely, like a frantic woman at a parting scene, who has no time to lose.

"Do you love me then, Delphine?" I whispered huskily.

"Love you — love you, my brave, noble, honest man——" she kissed me wildly on the eyes and then sank back moaning—"Oh, what have I to do with love—oh, what have I to do with love?"

A great despair fell upon my heart as I looked upon her white face, dimly showing in that luminous starlight. She was lying passive, and as if exhausted, with her head upon my breast and my arms encircling her. Her thick, black tresses had come undone, for I heard the hairpins as they scattered in all directions strike lightly against the planks, while the long jetty waves rolled over my knees and lost themselves in the deep shadows of the boat's sides. The Maltese boatman still chanted his song with his

back to us sculling from left to right and making the boat rock as it darted forward.

"Listen, George," she said suddenly, "I may as well tell you all now, for when we come back to Malta, you will know all, and I shall be a prisoner."

"A prisoner?"

"Yes. You spoke to me on the first day of the strangling of the old woman and told me that you had an inspiration that the murderers were on board of the *Malaga*."

"I said the murderer, darling."

"Yes, and you were right, the murderer was on board, but I was his accomplice."

"What you, Delphine?"

"Ay, and I think I would do it again."

"Oh, Delphine!"

"You shrink from me, George, but listen, before *you* of all men condemn me: I was an orphan, as my half-brother was, left to the tender mercies of a sister of my father's, who hated him and his wives, and who plotted from the first hour she took us, to degrade us both and make us miserable. She followed us both, hour after hour, when we were at school, prejudicing our teachers against us and taking us away from the schools, at once, as soon as she heard them give a good character of us, or if we had won a single friend. She bought a post in the army for my brother and then set emissaries to dog his footsteps and ruin his career. It was her delight to mar things and make misery where she could."

"What a horrible woman!"

"Yes, George—yes, she was horrible—more so than I can tell you. Then I came home expelled from my last school, with my character taken away, and my brother returned from India branded as a thief.

"After this she took us to live with her, not as relations, but as servants, I as a housemaid, and Harry as her man-servant. So with her hateful livery upon us, after educating us both as lady and gentleman, she forced us to go to all the places where we were best known and where people had known us before, to show them what she had now made us."

"Oh, the vile wretch, she deserved to be strangled!"

"Do you think so, George? Oh, thank you for that. But all this we could have endured for we were together, if she hadn't done worse."

"What did she do?"

"I cannot tell you, but my brother and I judged her, and condemned her to death—I should have done it myself—for it was I she injured, but I was a coward when the hour came, so my poor brother did it for me, one night——"

"No more, my poor Delphine, I know it all, I saw it——"

"Where—where?"

"In a dream."

"And you hate me now, do you not?"

"No—no—I—I love you, and love must condone all things."

Perhaps had I been a man I might have been stern with this miserable, guilty girl who had crept into my heart; but I was only a boy, and boys are like savages, and do not judge crime as men of the world do. I held that lovely palpitating form in my arms and bent my head to kiss the white, beautiful face.

A long pause of agonized rapture held us both while we were clasped together and the sound of water swished by us as we sat motionlessly, her thick, perfumed hair tossing about me as the ocean winds reached us, and enveloping us both like a soft canopy. No longer a boy now, all that had been swept away during the last five minutes. I was a man, with a man's depth of hopeless sorrow for ever and ever.

"George, do you hear the sound of oars? They are after me! Selina Grubbles and her brother are detectives sent out after us. I found it out to-day when we were walking together, and her last words to-night confirmed my conviction."

I listened for a moment—yes, they were coming nearer, they would see us presently.

"Delphine, they shall not take you while I have life to defend you. Boatman, have you a couple of oars?"

"Yes, sar, you will find them in ze middle of ze boat."

"One last kiss before you go. Oh, George, my own true love, my darling, had we but met a fortnight sooner!"

I kissed her hastily, then sprang to the seat and fixed the oars rapidly.

"Now, boatman, I'll give you twenty sovereigns if you help me to reach St. George's Bay before the boat behind can sight us."

"I sall try, sar. You pull and I will steer."

I bent my head to the task, pulling with a will and making the spray rise upward from the prow as the little boat flew through that semi-darkness, while the wiry boatman stood in the stern with his legs apart, working his arms as I daresay he never had done before.

We were flying from the present enemy, but with what prospect of ultimate escape, when we could only get to another part of that little island?

No matter, if we can only evade them now, I thought, perhaps we may be able to hide ourselves for a day or two until we find some fishing boat to take us over to Africa; there even a murderer may lose himself, if nowhere else on the face of the globe.

I meant to stick to her, nothing except death would make me part with her now; rather than allow them to take her from me now that I felt she really loved me, I would take her up and plunge with her into the deep Mediterranean, and so end the trouble that way.

"Listen, Delphine, for I cannot hear. Are they gaining or losing, tell me, my darling, tell me?"

I was rowing for life and love, with the oars

strained and bent, and the rowlocks beginning to emit sparks of fire with the friction.

My beautiful Delphine sat at the prow with her head bent over towards the land side, and her long, loose tresses floating straight in my direction, so furiously were we going along, that the jet black tresses which streamed like pennants from an ancient barge prow, flapped against my vein-swollen forehead, making my brains to throb and reel with the silken touches.

"Are we gaining or losing, Delphine?"

"Losing, George—give it up, and bid me good-bye."

"Never, Delphine, never; they shall never take me or you alive!"

I strained to my work with all my might, with my eye-balls starting and my brains like to burst.

"Another mile, sar, and we sall reach St. George."

"Thank God!" I gasped. "Gaining or losing, Delphine?"

"Hush! hush, George, or they will hear us," whispered Delphine, leaving her post and crawling along to my feet, which she clasped to her breast, making me lose a couple of strokes.

"It is all over, my darling; kiss me once again and say that you will not forget me too soon, for I love you as I never thought a woman could love a man."

"Stop rowing in the name of Her Majesty

the Queen of England," shouted a voice from the darkness close at hand, at which command the arms of the little Maltese dropped nervelessly to his sides.

"Go on!" I shouted seizing up my oars again.

"Stop, or we'll fire."

"Fire away!" I yelled back, seizing my darling in my arms and springing with her upon the middle seat, preparatory to leaping overboard. The hour had come, and since I could not live with her, I would die with her.

"Fire!"

A loud volley rattled over the water as I made the leap, feeling a sudden burning sting in my chest, as I did so, then we both went down—down—and I remembered no more.

EPILOGUE.

WHAT more can I tell you about what was to me an eventless voyage after this, days passing one after another, like one another, while I lay on deck looking skywards and doing nothing?

I wasn't allowed to die with Delphine, for they fished us both out of the water, me wounded with the same bullet which had gone through her heart. They buried her and her brother at Malta, for he also had managed to escape justice by taking his own life.

The detestable Grubbles and his pseudo

cousin had returned to England, so that I had not the misfortune to see them again. I fancy that they both wanted the trip to Melbourne, hence their delay in arresting poor Harry Sparks and his unfortunate half-sister ; the *dénouement* had come too quickly, and perhaps my own stupid bungling had forced their hands.

They had borne me wounded and unconscious on board the *Malaga*, and when I woke up and the bullet had been extracted from my ribs, we were just steaming into Port Said.

The Duc le Dungeness was very kind to me ; he understood trouble like mine much better than Charley Figtop, for he had run away with his own wife, a factory girl, and so knew what love was. Charley, I found, only had one affection and that was for himself ; all outside matters were a nuisance in his eyes if they were likely to trouble him, or take away from his own personal comfort.

The military element left us at Ismailia in the Suez Canal. Lieutenant Green leaving the fair sex in tears, and the male portion of our little community with pocket-books well filled with I. O. U's. After a general meeting, the holders of these interesting bits of paper decided that the only use to which they could be put was to light their cigars with them, which they did, saying as they watched them consume, "A dear light that, my boy, it ought to be good, for it cost me five pounds."

In time, we reached Melbourne, and my father welcomed me home ; he was very proud

of his son, and never learnt how near he had been to lose him at Malta.

I suppose, though, he will know about it some day, if he ever comes to read these recollections and then he will find out why I treasure the spent bullet which slew and saved from disgrace, my boy love, Delphine.

Humphrey Bolin's Account of the Spanish Armada Invasion.

PLYMOUTH, 1588.

CHAPTER I.

AT THE SIGN OF "THE MERMAID."

"I FAITH, sirs, but I will give you the discourse of our adventures by sea and shore with hearty goodwill," quoth Humphrey Bolin, as he set down his drained mug upon the deal table of "The Mermaid's" taproom, and looked round on the expectant company. "We have toasted our good Queen in better beer to-night than we had while we were fighting for her, and drank confusion to all her enemies, which Heaven and our guns have already scattered; so sit ye all as steady by your tankards as Sir Francis expected us to stand to our posts on board the *Revenge*, while I tell ye what befell me through the chase in the Channel, as I think I can, having served during the months of July, August, and September, first as an English soldier under the bravest and best man alive in Old England, and afterwards as a Spanish galley slave on board of the *Rata* and *Gerona*, under the great Spanish Don da Leyva—of whom, saving that he was a Spaniard, I can say nought excepting praise—until the

waves of heaven broke my fetters and put me into the hands of those who befriended me on the Irish coast, albeit ungodly wreckers as they were.

"Down, Martin, good dog, down! Ye see, my fair sirs, the old dog knows when I talk of the fighting, and would like to join in also, and could tell it as well as I could had he the tongue to speak, for he went through it all, losing an eye and an ear in the service of his country, and getting as much thanks for it as the rest of us; but there, we are English born, dog and man, and have not yet come to consider about the reward when we have a danger to face or a duty to perform, and until we do think more of the pay than of the work there isn't much fear of our flag being dragged through the mud."

It was a rare mixed Elizabethan company that ranged about the stalwart young hero, Humphrey Bolin, on this December night, 1588. Farmers from Edgecombe and Devonport, with their rough homespun jerkins and hose, and with rubicund cheeks blown out and mellowed with heavy October and fruity cider; disbanded sailors and fishermen, some whole, others still wearing, as badges of the battle, bandages and splints; timid townsmen who gloried in the listening to tales of danger, and whose beady eyes sparkled as if they felt all the ambitious fury of war tingling through their veins as they sat with beer-frothed lips and cans held out like weapons of defiance.

The huge logs blazed and spluttered inside

the immense fireplace, throwing a ruddy glare on all, and making fantastic shadows of outspread arms and bandaged heads on the time-stained wainscoting behind them, while over the yellow-sanded floor passed nimble-footed wenches in white aprons and caps, showing trim ankles from under their short bunchy petticoats, and whiter teeth between rosy cheeks, as they jested in the quaint language of the time while they replenished the black leather tankards.

Humphrey Bolin sat nearest to the fire in the seat of honour, his left arm in a sling, and by way of hat-gear, a gay-tinted neckerchief twisted about his head, and half covering his eye nearest to the company; it was arranged in a dandified fashion to conceal the linen that bound an ugly gash on the temple which nearly three months had failed to heal completely.

A young man of about twenty-five years of age, broad set, and with massive neck and chest, a frank face accustomed to laughing easily, and with a bold blue eye that flashed in the ruddy glow of the firelight as he spoke.

His right hand, when not lifted to reach his mug, or in the animation of his discourse, rested on the big head of the yellow-coated mastiff, Martin, who lay between the fire and his master, blinking with his solitary orb in an almost comical imitation of that one eye visible of Humphrey's, with an expression upon his massive jowl reminding one of the other, as dogs who follow men get, and a lop-sided look about him from want of that lost ear. As the

applause subsided over the patriotic sentiment which Humphrey had uttered, and all these quaint Elizabethan tongues concurred in the idea that it was impossible that Englishmen could ever dream of placing pay before work, or reward before duty, Bolin once more cleared his throat, and continued :

"You have all known me in this town, both boy and man, how I have never shirked a day's work, or refused to go forward when it was to serve a friend, and also that I can stand as much as any man whether it is in jest or in earnest."

"Marry ! We know you, Humphrey, for an honest son of Devon."

"Right, gentle sirs, I try to do my best ; but I will not be put upon, be he seeming friend or stranger, if so be it that I can see the way his bow is bent.

"I had long been keeping company with little Dolly Shuttleworth, as ye are all aware ; a skittish wench, and not easily brought to the point of speaking her mind, but true as her dog Martin there, as I now have good cause to know.

"Rumours of the treacherous intentions of King Philip had wafted over from Spain, and woke us up to look after our Queen and country. I would have taken service long before but for the love I bore to little Doll, which, as you know, is apt to make a great coward of a man when it comes to the parting with his lass. When I thought upon what I ought to do, I seemed always to see her bonny

dark eyes looking into mine, and something shake at my heart like a deadly fear.

"I went about the streets feeling ashamed that I should be content when England wanted all who could lift an arm to defend her coasts. My cheeks burned as I stood upon the quay and watched the squadron under our own gallant commander move off upon that glorious expedition last year, to think that I was not one of them. How the brave adventurers' cheers cut my heart as I answered, with a husky voice, and watched the bulging sails of the thirty ships grow less, until they one by one went over the sea line like blots of white against the April clouds!

"Dolly and her dog Martin there were with me on the downs as I turned my discontented face seaward and grew moody under her gay flouting. They knew what was pressing upon my heart, but only the dog could sympathise, for after he had made up his mind that I was good enough to mate with his young mistress he went with me more than he did with her.

"It was about this time that Dolly had a cousin of hers from London staying with them, a gay young spark in the tailoring line, with a wicked white face, and small green eyes that shifted about and could not look straight at anyone; one of these long lantern-shaped jaws, where the skin forms in wrinkles, being drawn tightly over the cheekbones. A lean chap with slender limbs, and an all-sufficient air about him which seemed to take with women; he brought

the latest fashions with him, and danced about with Dolly at all hours of the day through the streets and lanes in a second-hand suit belonging to some gay gallant of the Court, making a brave show, and us country lads to seem like clowns alongside of him. One of these pallid apes, full to the masthead with deceit and wickedness, that make honest men, for the time being, ashamed of the robust blood which the Lord has given to them.

"Of course my Doll had to go about with this rascally goose-wing as he listed, and I could not well object, even although I could not get in a word edgeways either at church door or casement; but it comforted me greatly that the hound Martin had my opinion on the matter, and showed him his teeth whenever he appeared, as if he would have had much pleasure in making away with the cast-off raiment which held together the shackly limbs of this town-bred spawn of wickedness.

"So things went on, while I forebore as well as I could with this infliction, and tried to make myself agreeable, and not show that I noticed his open sneers about my uncouth appearance, or the ugly suggestions which he threw out now and then, the which I only half guessed at, and at which my pure-minded lass innocently laughed, as at merry jests. I would at such seasons walk from them, leaving them together, with miserable thoughts in my breast, the old dog at my heels, growling, as he was doing, at the nasty shadow we were putting behind us.

"Martin was unhappy over it all in his own dog-like way, and showed in every motion how he wanted me to take the matter seriously in hand, and end it as he would have done, by flying at my enemy; and, i' faith, I would have followed the hound's sage advice often enough, as far as inclination went, particularly when the young imp told me of some of his city tricks as we were together, and there were no women folk about to halter his tongue; only out of respect to his cousin, and a sheepish fear lest I might appear ridiculous in her eyes, made me control my feelings and hold on to my waist belt with my clenching hands.

"Meantime Fame blew her trumpet along the coast to the tune of gallant Drake; the mounted messengers and advice boats came in from time to time with fresh news which caused my heart to throb with envy and desire; we heard with wild rejoicings of his doings at Cadiz—how he had rushed among the store ships like a tornado, and made them his own without hardly a man lost on our side; of the great galleons he had captured, sunk, manned, and rifled, and the galleys that fled at his approach like flocks of geese, which comforted the lovers of peace and stay-at-homes greatly, but made me boil over with fury at the thought of what I was missing all through the folly of this impotent love which kept me just out of reach of a maiden who, for all I then knew, might be fooling me with this accursed cousin of hers."

CHAPTER II.

HOW HUMPHREY CAME TO JOIN THE SQUADRON.

"In many ways it was a mighty pity that our noble lady sent the order to stop fighting to Drake, or that he received it just at the moment he did, for otherwise the great enterprise had never started from Spain; but it was ordained differently, doubtless for the greater glory of Heaven and England, that we should face this invincible Armada and conquer them piecemeal in our own waters.

"With the enemy, as one might say, in the hollow of his hand, our great commander was forced to let them escape and hold his reins, but we heard what he had done in Biscay Bay, and how he still managed, despite the restrictive commands from Her Gracious Majesty, to harass the enemy and cripple the intentions of the long-nosed Philip, for that season at any rate.

"Great was our rejoicing when the heroes came home in midsummer laden with the spoils of that rich carack, the *San Felipe*, every mother's son of them rich beyond his utmost expectations. Marry! Spanish ducats and doubloons—why, mine host can tell you how they filled his chest. We all remember how the beer casks were stove in and the wine flagons emptied, while our Plymouth lassies would smile at none except he had been a

buccaneer under the great and gallant Sir Francis Drake.

"Peter Huggins was the name of my sweetheart's cousin, which according to the fashion of the Court he had changed into Pedro Huggiana, and he seemed in no haste to return to the pleasures which he boasted about so much in the great city; indeed, now he talked of settling in our town and starting business with his goose and shears.

"He, like the others, joined in the general festivities, and made himself conspicuous amongst the most boisterous of the adventurers. Lord! how he swaggered about, letting the honest boys stand him treat, and dazing them with his lofty converse until I believe many of them came to doubt whether it was not Peter who had won the victories instead of Admiral Drake.

"I might have forgiven him all this braggadocio, since it left me more time to court my Dolly, only that somehow we were never alone now without bickering and quarrelling with one another. Peter, or Pedro, of course was the main subject of our converse, a subject that made us both wax hot and unreasonable with each other, and utter words which sent me to bed with a blind fury filling my eyes, and Dolly to a pillow of tears.

"Also it happened, oddly as if the devil had ordained it, that whenever we were about to patch up the peace, and I saw the glimmer of a smile of reconciliation cross my Dolly's troubled

brow, like an afternoon sunbeam across a cloudy sky, the weazened face of my tormentor would loom in sight, and with his malicious smile put all my good intentions directly to flight, so that I rushed out like a foaming madman with the dog at my heels, leaving the twain (whom I should have rather kept apart) together.

“Summer went by with winter, while the Spaniards were busy patching up their broken galleys and getting others into Lisbon, until we heard that they had no fewer than one hundred and thirty large ships ready to start, besides many store ships, and like a great wave, the alarm flew over England and Scotland from Land’s End to Johnny Groat’s house.

“The drums beat and beacon fires were built on every height ready for lighting the moment the enemy appeared in sight, while fishing and advice boats hovered upon the waters of the channel, continually running in for provisions or to give us scraps of tidings, each arrival bringing something more alarming to our peace than the last.

“It was in January that we heard that they were about to start under the command of Santa Cruz, and hard upon that came the somewhat cheering news that Santa Cruz was dead—poisoned, some of our people said, to make room for the foolish son-in-law of the favourite of Philip. With such a man as Santa Cruz we had great cause for dread, for he was to Spain what Sir Francis was to England; but no one cared a bodkin for the Duke of Medina-Sidonia,

who would be more likely to go wrong with his ponderous ships than right. Yet we were fain to offer up public supplications to heaven for aid in our extremity, for they were coming over in numbers like the Assyrians.

“ Things were also going on very badly with me and Dolly, for I had been drawn into a quarrel with her precious cousin at this very tap of ‘ The Mermaid,’ when I heard him toasting the maiden along with some hangers-on as if she had been his light-o’-love, and although some of my friends had taken us apart before I could damage him much, still he had acted his part so well with the maid’s mother that I was forbidden the house, and could only see my darling from the distance, or at church, without ever a chance of getting in a word of explanation. Martin, like the true hound he is, took sides where his sympathy went, and never left me, which somehow gave me a slight hope, as it was something lively of hers, and felt like a half promise that all things would come right, or else she would have taken back her hound.

“ It was truly a dolorous time for England and for me. All through those long cold months of winter and spring, I worked at my own trade, for it was better to be busy than to sit still and think, and of nights I used to come down here and drink till my miseries grew blurred, and I could not think upon what the dull aching was about so constantly at my heart and head.

“ May, 1588, was nearly spent when two

pinnaces run in to tell us that the Armada had sailed from Lisbon in full force, and were on their way to England. Four galliasses like mountains of timber they had counted, sixty-five mighty galleons, four large galleys, fifty-six armed merchant ships, over twenty caravals, and store ships past the counting and carrying nearly three thousand cannon, and over twenty-eight thousand men, with crowds of priests and torturers from the Inquisition, with all their implements for conversion safely stowed in the hold—thumbscrews, racks, head bands, and chains to bind the obdurate to the fagot, besides many other subtle inventions of the Spanish Inquisition for the making of good Christians out of bad heretics.

“Now that the danger was near at hand all my gloom fell away like the night clouds before the sun. What I felt, all England to a man felt, with the exception, perhaps, of a few pot-house gallants, like the valliant Pedro Huggiana. I wanted but one thing—to hear from Dolly Shuttleworth’s own rosy lips whether I had been a fool for loving her so long without so much as a smile in return, before I went to the man I admired most in the world to offer my body in the defence of my native land. So one fine morning, Martin at my heels, I set off past the Hoe towards the little cottage where the maid and her mother lived with their London lodger. I expected at this hour to find her alone, while her mother was marketing, and the bold Peter was regaling himself with swipes at someone

else's expense, and them with his city lies of abomination.

"I stepped out boldly at first, for I had seen the mother go past before I started, but slackened my pace considerably as I drew near to the trellis-shaded garden, for I was pondering upon what to say as a prelude to my explanation, when a low, savage growl at my side suggested the idea of introducing the subject by feigning that I had come to restore the hound to his lawful owner.

"I determined to reconnoitre, and for the purpose put my head to the fence, Martin standing beside me with bristling hair and bloodshot eyes, as if he smelt wickedness.

"Was he the devil, this Peter Huggins, or had the dog's growl let him know who was near to him? I saw the maiden like a blush rose stooping over the young flower plants which she was thinning out, and this white-faced incarnation of evil intentions standing over her with his lips moving as if he were whispering in her ear, and his arm, as it seemed, ready to encircle her unresisting waist.

"It might have been a diabolical pantomime the fiend was acting for my special benefit, for as the maiden stooped over her flower-bed, facing where I stood, she could not see her cousin's actions; but at the fell sight all the blood rushed into my eyes, as it was in the hound's eyes, blinding me to everything except the desire to kill. It was only long afterwards, when pulling sullenly at the galley-oars, that it dawned

upon me like a revelation from heaven—the glad light of recognition which leapt over her uplifted face as she rose up at the sound of the bursting gate, the arms and soil-stained hands outspread to welcome me before she read the cruel expression of my face, or the limp drooping of the figure while the white wave chased the roses out of her cheeks, as I caught that vice-wasted thing by the throat, and flung him like a crushed straw on the shingle path at her feet.

“A moment more, and I answered her wild shriek (as she saw the hound pounce upon my enemy) with a savage and coarse oath as I tore down the garden walk, taking with me in my haste torn sprays of clinging honeysuckle and sweetbriar, the smell of which never left my nostrils through the after fumes of gunpowder, nor from my mind’s eyes went that wicked face so close to hers.

“I was free to fight the Spaniards then, eager to pour out my heart’s blood for good Queen Bess after that.”

CHAPTER III.

FROM THE 1ST TO THE 20TH OF JULY, 1588.

“SCOTCHMEN, they say, fight hardest on an empty stomach, while Englishmen do best on the top of a hearty meal.

“I was full of hatred and jealousy, so wanted no other food for the task which I had taken in hand; and well it was so, for we were but

scurvily provisioned on board of Her Majesty's ships. Beer, bad enough to poison rats, and beef tainted enough to have sickened dogs, and withal so scanty that the brave lads who had volunteered lay down each night fainting from want, and with hardly strength enough—except when roused by momentary excitement—to hold a halberd.

“I could use both gun and spike, so found no difficulty with Sir Francis to be enrolled in his own galleon, the *Revenge*. Even the hound Martin, who had followed hard behind me in my flight from the Shuttleworth cottage, was permitted, after a very slight demur on the part of our bluff commander, to be also one of us. He had made up his mind to see the end of it, and would not be kept back.

“The life at Plymouth became hateful to me while waiting on news; so with my captain's permission I was sent out with the scouts to scour the seas, and glean intelligence of the movements of the enemy.

“By good luck I was appointed one of the crew, for the time being, of the pinnace the *Golden Hind*, with one Captain Thomas Flemming commander, a Scotchman and burly sailor who feared neither man nor devil, but tacked about the enemy like a lively wasp round hogsheads of sugar, dodging them easily, and caring no more about their great guns booming over our heads than he did about a thunder clap.

“I got on well with Captain Thomas, for

whereas I was reckless through despair, he was daring through long and close acquaintanceship with danger; yet, with the proverbial caution of his countrymen, never put his foot further than he could draw it back, knowing by experience the exact length to stretch it out, and always stretching it out as far as he dared to do; so he was a successful man in what he undertook, trusted by the Vice-Admiral for the certainty with which he could be depended upon, and liked by all under him for his bluff honesty.

"We cruised round the coast from Milford Haven to Bolt Head, cutting over to the shores of France and into the Bay of Biscay; and when we had any news to bring, darting back to Plymouth Sound to give it and take in fresh provisions.

"We were the first to hear of the rebuff which the Armada had received from an outraged heaven off Finisterre Cape.

"It was about the close of June that we rescued a boat's crew who had witnessed the disaster which scattered the squadrons right and left, sank one of their four largest galliasses, the *Diana*, named after one of their fancy dames I suppose, and drowning all aboard.

"We heard of the gallant action of David Gwynn, the Welsh galley slave, who by rare craft had hoodwinked the haughty dons, captured the great ship the *Vasana*, in which he was chained, and with his cut-throat crew took

the other galliass, the *Royal*, carrying them both to Prince Henry of Navarre, although why he didn't bring them to his own Royal Mistress none of us could then think; yet after all perhaps the Welshman had wisdom on his side, as the King of Navarre took his presents without asking any of the searching questions that our own prudent Lady is so apt to do at such gifts.

"Thus we knew that three of the four giant ships had been despatched, while the rest of the fleet had to hie them back to Corunna for repairs; so homeward we tacked once more, with the joyful tidings which set all the bells a-pealing over the land.

"We felt that they would soon be back again, so kept a wary outlook for the next month.

"On the 12th of July they once more put to sea, and in three days' time were off Ushant, the mouth of the English Channel. Here once more the Lord showed his anger at their impious attempt to subjugate his people, and tossed them about on wild waves, causing them to lose another galleon, the *Santa Ana*, of eight hundred tons, which went down, carrying with her three hundred soldiers, ninety sailors, with priests and instruments of conversion, besides fifty thousand ducats in gold.

"It was on the morning of the 20th of July that we saw them rise into view over the horizon just off the Lizard. We had lain about here a few miles from the shore all night, for we expected them any hour.

"There they were coming up one after another in the form of a half-moon, with the two advance galleons seven miles apart, and the others receding into the centre. Against the grey sky of dawn a gallant and a stately sight, with massive hulls outstanding, broad sails all set to the fair wind, and pennons flying bravely.

"The cliffs behind us were lined with figures watching, as we were, for the first sight of this long-looked-for terror.

"Captain Flemming sailed straight towards them until he was near enough to see their figureheads and read the signs upon their flags, counting as he ran before them leisurely, the number of their guns and reckoning up their sizes, all the while some of the lightest of them were attempting to give us chase, a task impossible to achieve with such an active sailer as the *Golden Hind*. We were all about, bothering them with our movements, their badly-aimed great guns the while blazing out of their vast sides, and wasting powder enough to have sunk a fleet of such boats as we were, if they had been flying high in heaven instead of sailing on the waves. We laughed as we saw the broadsides belch out as if they intended to sack the clouds, and dodged about in perfect safety just beyond musket shot, watching the spent balls splash amongst the deep waters.

"Ah! rare seamen they were on board these wooden castles of Spain; and splendid gunners,

who seemed to have plenty of ammunition to pitch away.

"We counted the Portuguese squadron, twelve great galleons, all Saints and Ladies, from the Captain-General the *St. Martin*, with two thousand tons and fifty brass cannon—from which the Royal Standard was streaming—to the zabra *Julia* with her fourteen thunderers. Fourteen came from Biscay, great ships varying from thirty to twelve guns. Castile contributed her sixteen, Andalusia eleven, Guipuzcoa fourteen, Levantisca ten; we counted eleven urcas, twelve armed merchant ships, twenty-four pataches and zabras, four great Neapolitan galliasses, and the sole survivor of the fated Portuguese four, the *Capitana*.

"Before we quitted them we had the mortification to witness the capture of a stupid English fishing smack which had got too close. We watched the prisoners taken aboard, and the question put to them in its varied Spanish forms. The screams of the poor wretches were heartrending; but whether they were persuaded to betray their country or not we could not find out, for being content with our pack of information we slid easily away, and very soon lost sight of that wondrous spectacle of crowding sails, which seemed to fill up the ocean with their majesty.

"It was afternoon before we reached Plymouth Sound, and when we got to the Hoe we found the Vice-Admiral and his officers busy at bowls.

"Sir Francis Drake heard our story with a bowl in each hand and his face towards the rest. He laughed loudly as he ordered us to go aboard our respective ships, and turning to the gentlemen who had been playing with him, remarked in his jovial voice :

"'Let's get on with the game ; there is plenty of time to finish that first and beat the Spaniards afterwards.'"

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST GENERAL ENGAGEMENT, AND CAPTURE
OF THE GREAT ANDALUSIAN GALLEON, COMMANDED
BY DON PEDRO DE VALDEZ.

"At last the time for action had arrived, and it was well for the patience of our bull-dogs, nigh exhausted with foul quarters on board and demoralising orgies ashore.

"It is a noble sight to see a great galleon afloat with her carved and painted sides, great stern splashed over with gilding and fancy scroll work, and forecastles whereon the sharpshooters may stand, with the shining sails outspread, and round-top cages—if you are looking from the shore ; but it is different when living in one for weeks at a stretch, in stuffy holes for quarters, and bunks of abomination swarming with rats, cockroaches, and worse, with no leisure to clean either oneself or the filthy nests, while all the time the outside seems gay and smiling like a whitewashed sepulchre.

"The game of bowls finished, Vice-Admiral Drake came on board, and began straight, but without undue haste, to cast away. There were thirty two ships under his direct command, varying from four hundred tons to thirty, our own flagship, the *Revenge*, being not more than five hundred tons.

"Before sunset we had joined the squadrons under the Admiral Lord Howard of Effingham, who were waiting outside the Sound under the shadow of the headland.

"Of Her Majesty's own ships there were thirty-eight, the largest of which was the *Triumph*, of a thousand one hundred tons, which, with the *Ark Royal*, *Victory*, *Bear*, and *Elizabeth Jones*, had been built upon Sir John Hawkins's new principle of long keels, low cabins and castles.

"The ships, as they lay around, had not the solid look of the old ones beside them, and experienced mariners shook their heads over them; but in the fighting afterwards they proved themselves to be of better service both for agility and assault than those which were lofty sterned, so we gradually got over our prejudice against them as the action grew hotter, and we found out what they could do.

"I was appointed as corporal of a company of sharp-shooters, and had our post on the main top, where we could look over the decks and see all that was going on. Martin I had roped to the foremast foot to keep him out of the way, and where he could watch me from below, the

only plan I could hit upon for keeping him quiet.

"At dusk the enemy hove in sight, and, seeing us all ready for action, although it was too dark for them to calculate our strength, their admiral made signals for his fleets to lie-to for the night, and prepare for action next day.

"All through the night we disturbed their mass-making by continually running to and fro, and pitching a broadside into them where we could, while they lay at their anchors like hulks with only a bellow by way of retort.

"Next morning being Sunday we had an extra supply of fresh water, and were able to wash our faces and mutter a short prayer each, after which my Lord Howard, as soon as it was light enough, gave the order to his pinnacle, *The Disdain*, to go out and defy the Spaniards. Like a little cock sparrow she rushed up to the lumbering giants, and delivered her message briskly, sailing, to Medina-Sidonia's astonishment, at the rate of two knots to every one of his fastest ships.

"At eight o'clock a fresh westerly breeze set in, on which the Armada hoisted their anchors, and attempted to close, on which our leader, perceiving the vastly superior sailing powers of his fleet, ran along their entire line with the *Ark Raleigh*, and three other ships, firing into each galleon as they passed backwards and forwards as often as he pleased, the massive Spaniards lying like slugs and butts for the English shots, with hardly ever a gun of theirs hitting any-

thing excepting a few of the very topmost spars, so badly were they aimed, and so slowly delivered.

"Meantime, they were slowly sailing up the Channel, our ships harassing them all round and in their rear, never coming to close quarters, much as they attempted to lure us, but running at them and away again as we liked, and battering away furiously at them as long as our powder lasted, which was not long, for we were most wretchedly provided with this, as with everything else that could be wanted.

"The *Revenge* was in the thick of it, having still some shot in the locker after the *Ark* had grown silent, strewing the sea with splinters, and the sky with white sulphur-clouds. Martin stood steady as a veteran at the mast-foot all through the action, with hair on end and laps drawn back, echoing each report with a sullen growl of defiance.

"Towards night the wind stiffened, with a sea heavy and rolling, while we had got the enemy all huddled together like a herd of wild bulls frightened at a thunderstorm. It was now that the last of the four great galliasses, the *Capitana*, met her doom, having on board Don Diego Florez de Valdez, the only leader amongst them who knew the bearings of the Channel.

"We saw her in the fading light run against another galleon, and spring her foremast, which went by the board along with her bowsprit, leaving her behind like a helpless log. For the moment two other galliasses sought to take her

in tow, but their cables snapping off short they were fain to leave her to her fate and look after their own safety.

"Our Admiral took no notice of her condition for the time, but pressed on in the chase up the Channel, while we went after another detachment, which we perceived making off southward; but, on coming up to them, we found that they were only paltry Flemish traders not worth our scanty shot, so we returned to our prey, getting the *Capitana* where she lay, and sending her back to Plymouth in charge of the *Roebuck*, taking prisoners of 304 soldiers and 118 sailors, besides the captain, Don Valdez, whom the Vice-Admiral received, and kept as a hostage on board until the 10th of August.

"In the *Capitana* we found many casks of reals, provisions enough to last us for weeks, and several tons of gunpowder, which we promptly divided and sent on by the swiftest trawler to replenish the well-nigh empty magazine of the *Ark Raleigh*.

"While we were goose-chasing the Flemishers the master gunner of the *St. Ann*, flag galleon of Don Miguel de Oquendo, blew her up in a fit of rage through being unjustly struck by the captain. The explosion tore off her upper deck and sent most of her crew into the air, but without much damage to her hull. She had in her hold the King of Spain's treasure chest, which the galleon *Our Lady of The Rose* managed to bear off in the dark before abandoning the *St. Ann*, Don Oquendo being, fortunately for

himself, on board of the *Admiral* at the time of the explosion. Lord Howard afterwards boarded her and found her masts still standing, and in her hold many barrels of gunpowder uninjured, and some of the left treasure, which served him for the time being. He had her towed into Weymouth as the second prize of the campaign.

CHAPTER V.

THE DEFEAT OF THE ARMADA. HUMPHREY BOLIN
IS MADE A GALLEY SLAVE.

“THE Lord of Conquest never left us after this, while I had little leisure to think upon my own private wrongs.

“Up and down the waters we pursued them, the wind favouring us at every turn. At early morning on the 23rd, when they lay becalmed off the Isle of Wight, we rowed about their vast hulks harassing the ungainly giants, with them trying to tack and barking impotently but much worried. We badgered them right and left, fore and aft, without even so much as the loss of a man on our side, although from their scupper holes spouted streams of shining gore.

“On the 24th our Admiral called a council of war and divided the fleet into four distinct squadrons, yielding to each commander independent action—the first squadron his own, the second under the command of Sir Francis Drake, the third under Sir John Hawkins, and the fourth under Sir Martin Frobisher.

"On the 25th we fought a fierce and long battle, getting slight advantage, with heavy losses on the part of the Spaniards. Our gains would have been more complete had we been sufficiently provided with ammunition; but, as it chanced, we were forced to relinquish our advantages through lack of powder, and allow the *San Marcos*, almost ours, to be rescued by Don Oquendo, who crowed mightily when he beheld my Lord Howard draw off, as if he had worsted the whole fleet. But this was their last gleam of hope, after which the clouds settled down upon their doom steadily and pitilessly, for next day the Admiral received his share from the *Capitana*, and went straight for the Spanish centre, making slaughter pens of their mid-decks.

"On the 27th of July we had forced the Armada to their anchors about a league or so from Calais in a panic of mortal fear, and while we held our position so as to cut off all communication between Sidonia and the Duke of Parma with his army ashore, our leaders held a council of war, and decided to use the fire-ships.

"It was a dark and freshly blowing night, with the tide setting strongly down from the English vantage ground to the shoals where the Spaniards lay packed together, when the eight fire-ships were sent off. We watched the shadowy hulks drift down upon the crowd of sails, and with loud cheers saw them do their fell work. All at once from the *Urcas* spouted

the huge mountains of flame and smoke, carrying panic and destruction amongst the enemy, who in their fright could be seen under that lurid glare hastily cutting their cables and making for the open sea.

"In the panic, the galliass, *General St. Lawrence*, commanded by Don Hugo de Moncada, ran foul of another and stuck on a sand bank, seeing which we pounced upon and boarded it with our boats, killing the commander with the first shot, and getting out of the wreck over twenty-two thousand ducats of gold before we left it to the Governor of Calais, who laid his claim as flotsam, and fired upon us while we were rifling it.

"Sir Francis Drake was now in his element, like the angel of destruction. As the Armada fled before us we gave them no time to recover, the *Revenge*, with half of the English fleet at her heels, driving in upon their centre while they staggered along in a confused mass, and breaking them up right and left at every charge. We kept ever to the windward, with Lord Seymour's fleet as our consorts, hemming them in at every turn until they were driven upon the shoals of Gravelines. Like a herd of sheep with savage dogs snapping at their legs, they scuttled about until they foundered and went down with all aboard, or heeled over, exposing their hulls below water line to the rapid showers of ball, with the guns dismounted and the scuppers streaming blood. All that long day of the twenty-eighth, from dawn till sunset, we

battered at them with our faces black as sweeps, slaying as we listed, while not a Spaniard mother's son amongst them so much as lifted a hand to strike back again for his life.

"That was at Gravelines, sirs, where we completed the rout, and where Martin there lost his ear. We had half-a-dozen men wounded besides him, and only left off when our shot was spent, and our arms so weak with lifting the ramrods that we could just lie and pant against the bulwarks. We drew off for a space, savage that we could do no more till we were replenished, watching their admiral extricating, as best he could, the remains of that shattered Armada, and making off towards the North Sea.

"I bound up the dog's ear while we had our short spell, and entered him on the list as one of the wounded of that day's slaughter. Only sixty amongst the whole English Fleet failed to answer their names, for Martin could only bay, and that didn't count; while amongst the enemy over four thousand were missing, and most of their best craft. Ah, that was a day, boys, to make us forget split heads and broken limbs, when with Drake we became tigers whetting our greedy lust to the full with blood.

"We had our supplies before morning and were once more off on the hunt, and when daylight broke on our flying foes we were within gunshot of them battering and blazing away with the same force as yesterday.

"My Lord Henry Seymour with Sir William Winter here tackled two of the great galleons,

St. Mathew and *St. Philip*, and after a fierce engagement, drove them upon the coast of Ostend, where they were seized by the Zealanders and carried into Flushing.

"On like demons after lost souls, we hunted and harried them past Yarmouth, Flamborough Head, Berwick Law, and to the mouth of the Frith of Forth, where by a most untoward accident, I was made a prisoner just as our Admiral was about to relinquish the chase and leave them in the hands of the Almighty to punish.

"We were desperately short on board of the *Revenge*, when we passed a galley disabled by the tempest which was then raging near the mouth of Forth, and Sir Francis, heaving to, ordered three boats to go aboard and see what they could find in provisions.

"While we were battling with the rough elements, the *Rata* drove in sight half dismantled and having the great commander da Leyva on board. They got between us and the galley, and as they saw us they also wore round, and dropping their boats drew to us for a hand-to-hand fight.

"Admiral Drake came to our rescue on his side, and while the two galleons were blazing at each other over our heads on the tossing waters of that North Sea, we grappled like English mastiffs and Spanish boars.

"I had my grasp upon the neck of a sturdy Andalusian, when all at once I got the smash which makes me wear this cover instead of my

beaver, and the cold daylight went out with a flash, leaving me in a pleasant land of dreams.

"I woke on board the *Rata*, lying in the galley hold with the galley slaves' chains about me, and my poor Martin standing over me, licking alternately the blood that ran over his chaps from his own gouged-out eye—which some of the ruffians had done as he was struggling to get at me—and the half-congealed clot that hung from my gashed head; while the vessel lurched up and down upon the wild billows, rudderless and left to herself, half of the keepers and Mediterranean seamen lying like logs through sea-sickness, while the mountains of yeasty fury lashed up and broke with damning thuds against the upper decks."

CHAPTER VI.

HOW HUMPHREY CAME HOME.

"DON DA LEYVA was a knightly gentleman even if a Spaniard. To his courtesy I was indebted for my life, with the company of poor old Martin, and now that we were at the mercy of God's elements I had not many days at the oars before he gave orders for my release with many of the best conducted slaves, seeing that I was too weakly to be of service to him or anyone else below.

"For those few days while we were tossed about and my arms were used constantly whether I would or not, along with six other

slaves who were chained with me to the oar, I passed in a daze, neither heeding the perpetual motion nor the strokes which the savage drivers laid upon my naked back.

"It was a pestiferous den that galley hold. Out of reach of heaven or earth, slippery with the oozing in of bilge water, and pressing against companions more loathsome than the crawling things which swarmed constantly over us, we sat below knee-deep in slime, moving our bodies backwards and forwards to the motions of those in front, while the drivers stood on the platform over our heads and whipped with heavy thongs whomsoever they saw or fancied were flagging.

"It was Martin who obtained my release from this misery, as he afterwards saved my life, for he had gone on deck and interested the commander first on his own behalf, and then leading him to where I sat, helpless and undone, working at a task which I wot not of.

"Through these days and nights I thought upon my love and old Plymouth, that I never expected to see again, and things came to light and showed me that I had been a poor suspicious fool all unworthy of such an angel as my Dolly Shuttleworth.

"They bore me to the fresh air, where I soon recovered enough to make myself useful, as all the active men were mostly laid down with sickness, pulling a rope or lending a hand at the pumps, although human aid was of little service now to the *Rata*.

"Martin seemed to know that he was in the

hands of the Philistines, for he grew wondrous meek, and went about the decks with a limp tail taking a kick or a cuff without retort, and asking for nothing more than to lie down beside me when he could, and lick my unwashed face and hands.

“It was all over with the Invincible Armada. Don da Leyva was no sailor, although a fair soldier, and this continued series of disasters had demoralised every man on board, so they let her drift at the mercy of the tempest.

“With winds and tides we drifted out to sea with the *Gerona* within hailing distance, at times past the fogs and ice drifts, clear of the Hebrides and down the west coast of Scotland. All August we floated, until about the month of September we made our way into a sheltered nook which is called Blacksod. Here we cast anchor and sent out scouts to test the natives, but who never came back.

“Next day a most tremendous storm blew over the land and broke the *Rata* from her anchor, dashing her helplessly upon the shore, after which we took shelter, those who were able to reach the coast, in an old ruined castle, being afraid that we might be slaughtered by the bloodthirsty natives, who lived only on plunder and murder.

“While here we were attacked by one of the Irish chiefs whom they called Richard Burke, or the Devil’s son, who drove us all to sea once more in what half stove-in boats we could find lying about the sands.

"Outside the bay we fell in once more with the *Gerona*, and were shipped on board, leaving the *Rata* in the hands of the savages of Blacksod to plunder. We saw two galleons run ashore and go to pieces shortly after we boarded.

"So on we roughed it, ashore and afloat, with the waves ever rising against us, all September trying to get off the Irish coast in vain. It was early in October, after a rest with the men of Ulster, that da Leyva put once more to sea, determined to reach Scotland. We rowed along the coast for several days, and were beginning to hope, for we had cleared Malin Head and Loch Foyle, and another few hours would see us at the Giant's Causeway, where we would be safe from being done to death in cold blood for the sake of plunder by the ruthless wreckers of Ireland, as we had seen so many done away with during that cruel past month. But it was not to be so with da Leyva, for a wilder storm than any we had yet experienced rose against us on that night, and dashed the weather-battered hulk of this once proud galliass straight upon a rock off Dunluce, and beat her to pieces in less time than I can tell it to you.

"Short time for all on board to make ready for heaven that tempestuous night, with the full moon surging through heavy clouds, and the ocean's breast a mass of boiling spume.

"On Dunluce's black cliffs the demon wreckers stood waving their treacherous lights. We knew them of old, but could not help ourselves, as we were washed from the split-up

decks and driven down upon those iron walls with giant force. Old Martin and I took to the waves together, with my arm upon his faithful neck, but without a hope of ever reaching land alive.

"We were close in now, with the highest billow dancing us along, full a hundred feet in its maddest leap, below where the cold-blooded wreckers stood waiting upon the result; with a chilly full moon shining brightly upon the ledges, and the white faces of the doomed men all scattered about that creamy waste, and dimming the yellow flaring of the smoking torches.

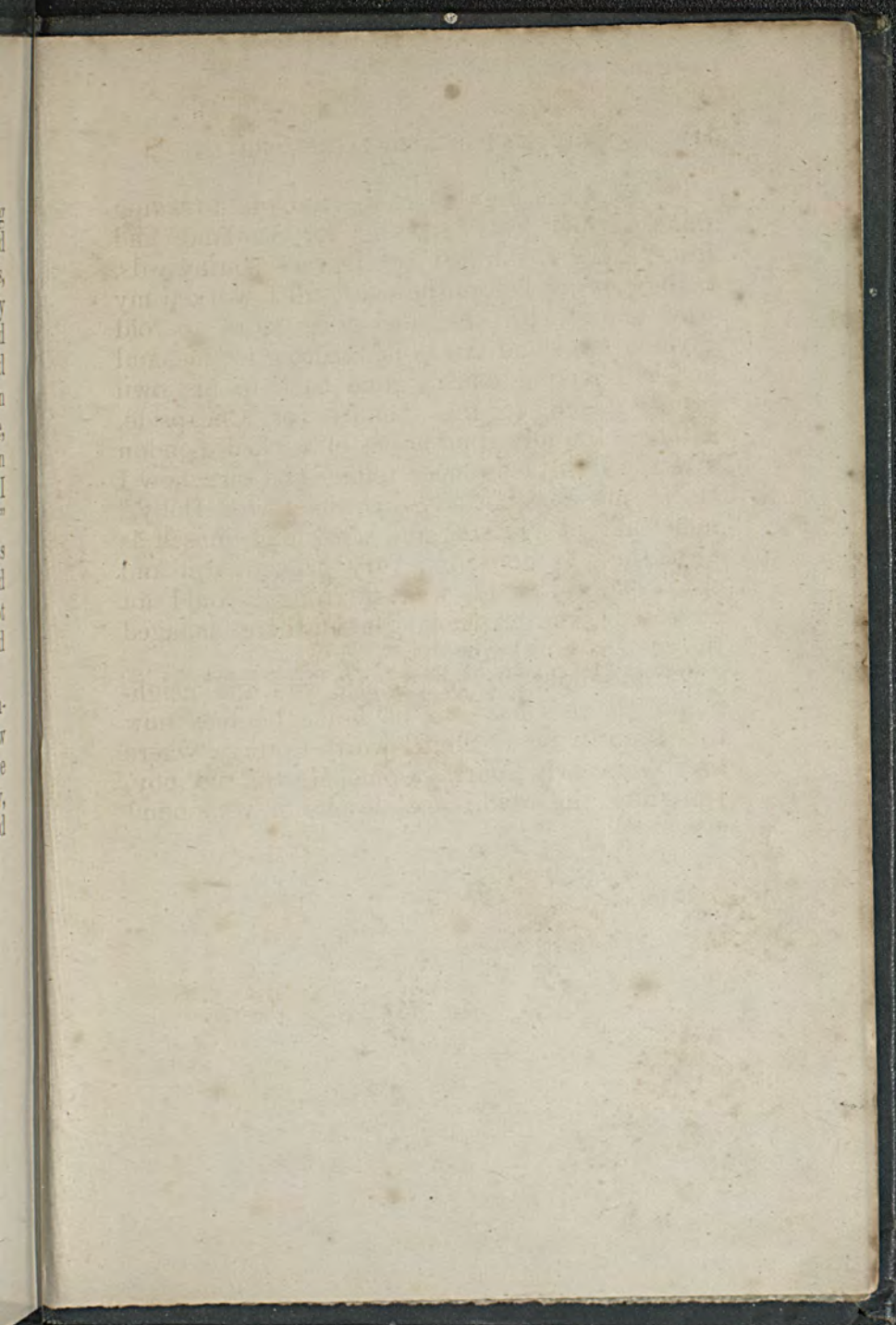
"The Don da Leyva was a hundred yards in front of me, struggling frantically with his strong arms against that on-sucking wave—I knew him by his rich vestments and glistening jewels upon his outspread fingers; and then, as my wave rushed down without striking against the flints, being buffeted and broken by the rebound of the wave whereon he fought, his supine body rolled back against me and the dog, with the thin water-blended blood pouring over his noble and rock-battered face.

"I got ashore somehow, with Martin and a broken arm. The hound had held on to me with his teeth till aid came, so that I woke up in the cabin of a wrecker, honest as wreckers go. Seeing, I suppose, that I was poor and English from my ravings, they had spared my life and let me depart ransomless, when I was able to move.

"The storm past, I got a chance in a trading smack which was starting for Scotland, and from there I shipped by degrees southwards, taking service before the mast, till I worked my way along with the dog once more to old Plymouth, to find my Dolly waiting for me, and her evil-making cousin gone back to his own proper place, to the bonfires of Cheapside, amongst the idle apprentices of wicked London Town. There is no need telling you, sirs, how I began my explanations this time with Dolly," said Humphrey, rising and stretching himself as he turned to depart. "My broken arm and split head did for me what my tongue could not have done, and my friend Martin there managed the rest, as you know.

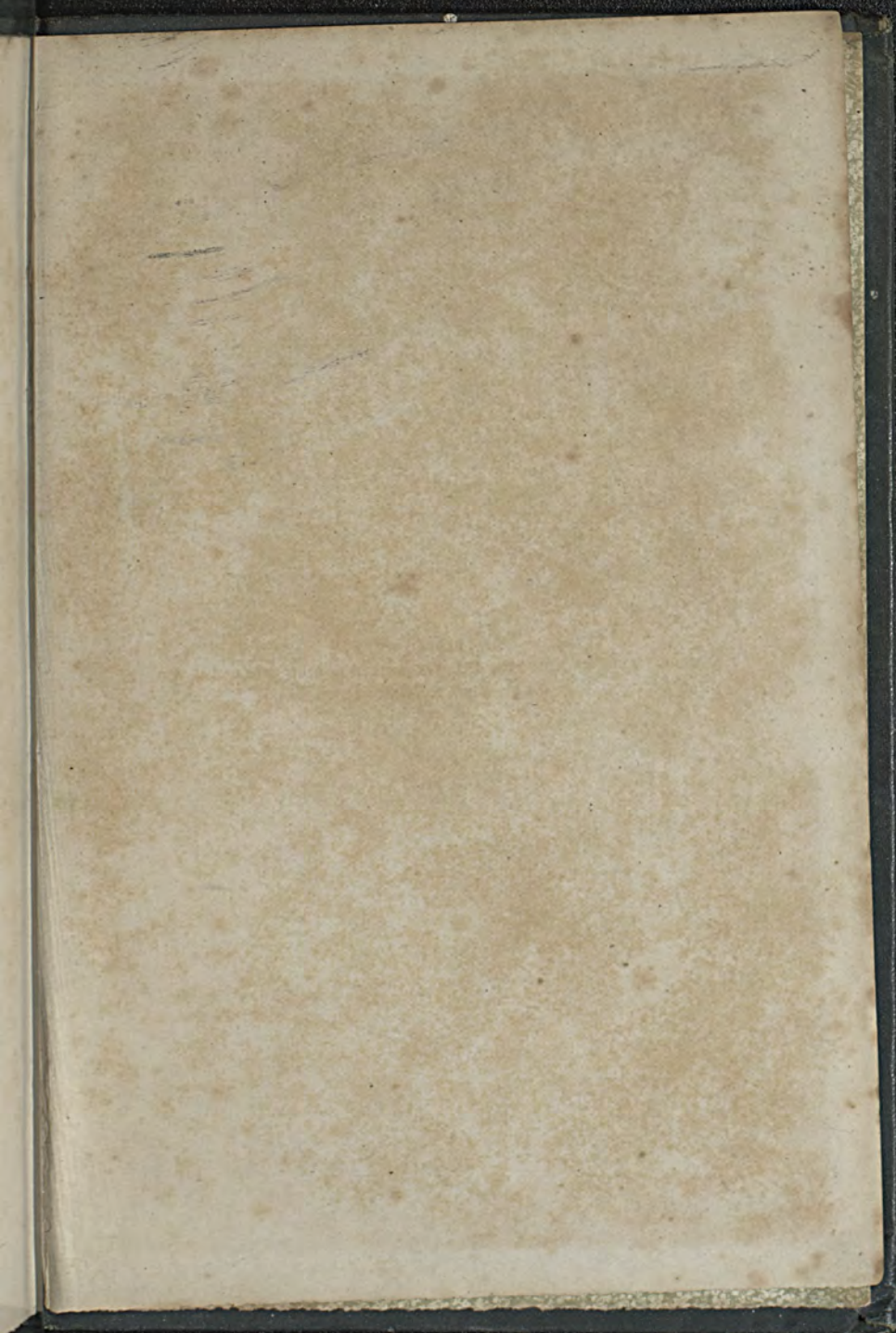
"Good-night to you, gentle sirs and neighbours all, as I have to be home betimes now that I am living at Shuttleworth Cottage, where they keep early hours. Come, Martin, old boy, you know the road home, despite of your blind eye."

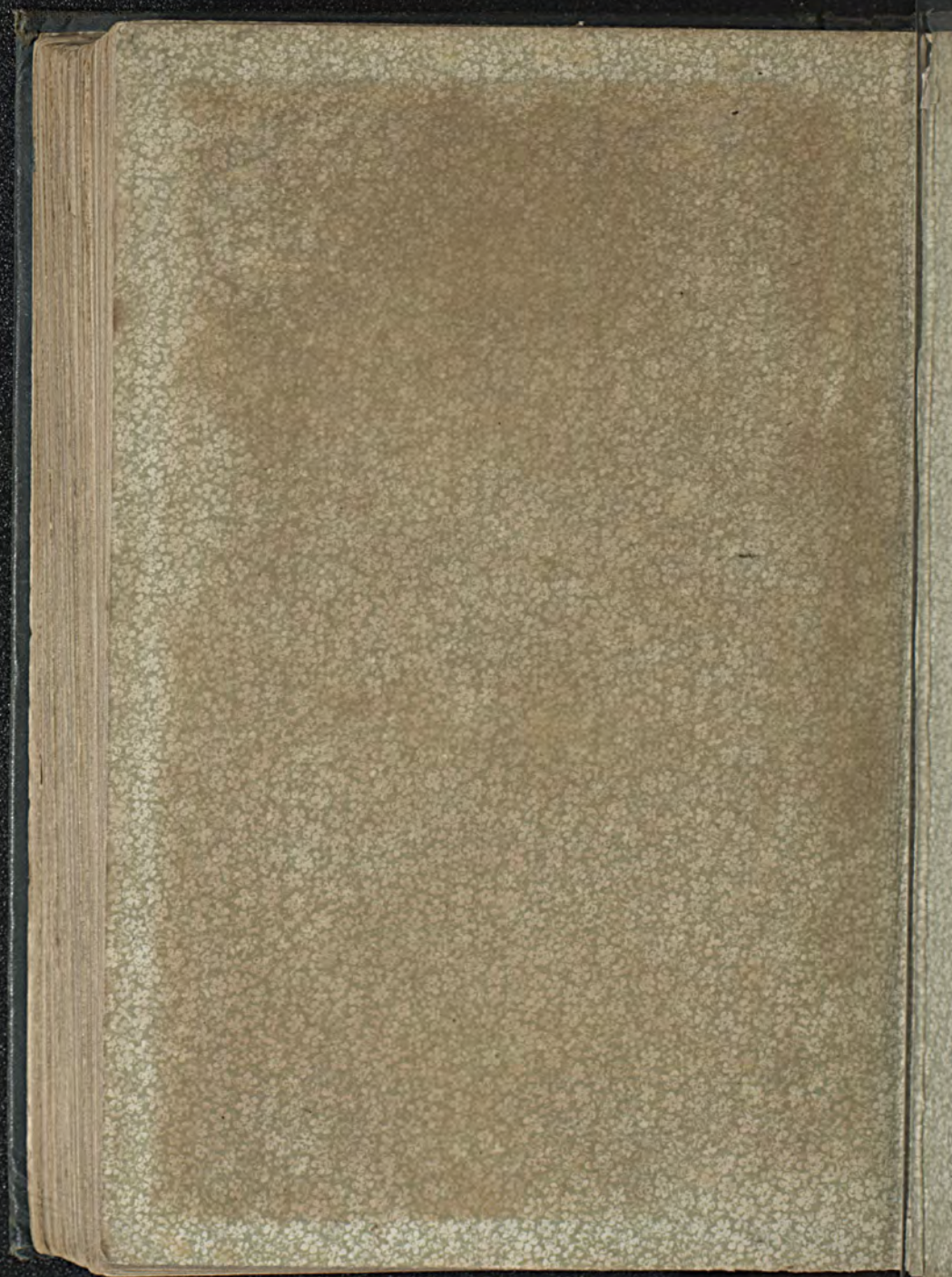
THE END.



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