

NICHOLAS TOP

submerged in the folds of a black cravat, the broad, mottled expanse was grown wild with short gray beard, save where, on the left cheek, a ragged scar (the third) kept it bare and livid. 'Twas plain the man had blundered into some quarrel of wind and sea, whence he had been indifferently ejected, in the way of the sea, to live or die, as might chance: whereof—doubtless to account for his possession of me—he would tell that my father had been lost in the adventure.

"Swep' away by the third big sea," says he, his face wan with the terror of that time, his body shrunk in the chair and so uneasy that I was moved against my will to doubt the tale. "May God A'mighty forgive un the deed he done!"

"Was it a sore, wicked thing my father did?"

"God forgive un—an' mel!"

"Is you sure, Uncle Nick?"

"God forgive un!"

"You're not likin' my poor father," I complained, "for the sinful thing he done."

"'Tis a sinful wicked world us dwells in," says he. "An' I 'low, b'y," says he, in anxious warning, "that afore you goes t' bed the night. . . . Pass the bottle. Thank 'e, lad. . . . that afore you goes t' bed the night you'd best get a new grip on that there little anchor I've give ye t' hang to."

"An' what's that?" says I.

"The twenty-third psa'm," says he, his bottle tipped, "for safety!"