

And talk about packing—I know as nobody would have believed to have seen all the stuff lying on the wharf, as we could have stowed it all away out of sight. But, howsomever, there it all was, packed away tight; and we were beginning to want a job, when, one day, the captain came aboard, and began talking to Mr. Smith about getting a place ready for I don't know how many thousand ounces of gold as we were to take back.

"Hear that, Tom?" I says.

"What?" says he.

"Why, we're a-going to shy the tallow overboard, and fill up with gold."

"Gammon!" he says; but, the next morning, down comes the gold with a convoy o' police round the trucks; and then we had to carry aboard a lot of little wood-chests marked, and painted, and bound with iron. Gallus heavy they were, too, and I don't know how much they was worth apiece; but when they was packed down in the little cabin cleared out for 'em, they didn't seem to take up much room; and one didn't feel a bit dazzled or struck.

"Why, it don't seem much to make a fuss about," I says to Tom.

"You're right, old boy," he says; "and yet those two chaps is a-going to stay aboard to guard it till we sails."

"Well, I s'pose it's all right," I says; "but there ain't much to shew, if it is a rich cargo. I'd sooner go in for the tallow."

We was pretty busy now getting in our fresh meat and vegetables, and taking in our water, and one thing and another; and a fine game we had one day, while one of the passengers was aboard. He was down on the lower-deck, swelling about, and trying to get to see and hear all he could—a bounceable chap, with a big black beard, one of a party of six going back with us: they'd been partners up at the diggings, and were going to bring their gold aboard; and a precious fuss they made with the captain and mate about being safe, and proper protection, and so on. They'd been backwards and forwards, all of 'em, several times, and I heard the captain say: "Tell you what, Smith, I've half a mind not to take 'em. I can let their berths directly; and I'm afraid they'll throw us overboard at the last, afore they pay the full passage-money."

Next day, though, I heard it was all right; and the berths were all taken; and this chap, Hicks he called himself, was peeping about aboard, and asking the mate about our chaps, whether he thought this man honest, and that 'other one fit to trust, and all in that way, till I could see with half an eye as old Hammer and Tongs felt savage enough to kick him overboard.

Well, we was lowering down a water-cask, and this chap stood close to the mate as was giving the orders; when somehow or another the tackle slipped, and the cask came down on its head by the run; the head flew out, and the mate and this gold-digger, Hicks, got it beautiful. I'm blest if ever see I anything to equal it. Talk about a shower-bath! My! it was glorious. You should have seen that chap stamp, and splash, and kick about, and to hear him storm and swear, looking as he did like a drowned rat; while old Smith, who had it wuss if anything, sat on a chest and laughed till he was a'most choked; and we had to hit him on the back, being a stout chap, to bring him to again.

"Pon my soul, Mr. Hicks," he says, "I beg your pardon, but you've a'most been the death o' me."

He didn't say nothing; but he shewed his teeth like a savage dog, and I've often thought since he seemed 'o say: "And I'll quite be the death of you one day."

But he didn't speak a word, but went off and into his cabin, and sent one of the sailors ashore with a message; and one of his mates came from the hotel they stopped at, and brought him some dry clothes; but he didn't come hanging about us any more.

Here, shove that cask in the corner there," says the mate, as soon as our gentleman had gone. "Head down, you lubbers, to keep it

clean. Shove the bits inside, and the carpenter shall put it right when we're well afloat."

Next night they was all six aboard, with the captain; and they had a table and chairs out on the poop, and sat smoking and drinking the captain's pale ale. They talked very big about what they'd made, and what an encumbrance it was, and how glad they should be to have it safe aboard.

I happened to be sitting mending and splicing a bit by a lantern, so I heard a good deal of the conversation.

"You see it's safe, I think, now, for they have it in the strong room at the hotel; but if you'll take it into your charge to-morrow, captain, we should be glad to have it off our minds."

This was the one called Hicks as spoke, and then another chimes in, and he says: "But the captain must be answerable."

"O yes, of course, says Hicks. "But curse it, Phillips, if you ain't the worst of us all. You'll have the yellow fever, if you don't soon get rid of your share."

"I wonder you didn't turn it into notes," says the captain. "There they are, snug in your pocket-book, and nobody a bit the wiser."

"What's the good of shying a hundred pounds away?" says another of 'em. "Why, we can make that, and more, too, in the old country."

"What's it in?" says the captain.

"Three cases—government pattern," says Hicks; "all regular and in style; and without being too funky, captain, I'm blest if it ain't like a nightmare allus on us. We've had more than one fight for it, and one chap had four inches of that in his ribs for trying to meddle with what warn't his own;" and then he pulled out a nasty awkward-looking knife, as I could see the gleam of as he gave it a bit of a flourish.

"I made a noise with that, too," says another, pulling out a revolver; and then it came out as they were all armed.

"And I tell you what it is, captain," says Hicks; "we'd one and all shed every drop of blood in our veins before we'd be choused out of it now, after the years of toil and danger we've had."

"All right, gentlemen, all right," says the captain. "I don't wonder at what you say; but my crew to a man are English—none of your beggarly coolies or Lascars; so I think you'll be pretty safe. Winds and water permitting, I'll see you safe into Liverpool Docks; and if I don't, it won't be my fault."

Then they sat drinking another bottle or two of ale, and then went ashore.

That night, as I lay close aside of Tom Black, it was that hot that we could neither of us sleep, for not a breath of air came between our hammocks. I got talking about the gold, and about these swell chaps as was coming aboard, and I says: "Tell you what, old boy, if I'd got a chest o' gold, I don't think I should go crying out: 'Look ye here!' even if I had a six-shooter to take care of it with. I'd mark it as lead or copper, or something of that sort."

"Gammon," says Tom. "Who goes travelling with a chest of lead or copper? That wouldn't be no good."

"Well, then, I'd shove it in a coffin, and pretend it was a corpus," I says.

"Yes," says Tom; "and ten to one, if it was rough weather, some o' the chaps would say Jonah was aboard, and shove the coffin out of one o' the lee-ports on a dark night. How then, old boss?"

"Well, I hadn't got nothing to say to that; and as I hadn't got any gold of my own to bother about, I turns over, and goes to sleep, and dreams about seeing angels in a sunshiny land, and they'd all got long golden hair, and black velvet hats with white feathers, and wore yellow kid gloves."

CHAPTER III.

They say it does rain over there sometimes; and when it does come down, it's wash away; but there never came any rain in my time; and of all the hot, dusty, dry places I ever did see, that there Sydney's about the worst. We were pretty well ready for sea now, and a sight more snug than when we were coming out; for

cargo and traps had come in comfortable-like, some at a time, and not bull-roosh all together. That very next day comes our six passengers, with a deal of fuss, and a truck, and a couple of policemen to bring their three little chests on board; for all their luggage, which wasn't much, came on the day before. It did seem such a hullabaloo to make about three little boxes, that as we took 'em aboard, some of us couldn't help having a little bit of chaff about it among ourselves; and precious savage those six passengers looked about it, I can tell you. You see, they weren't gentlemen; but the sorter chaps as I set down in my mind to go on the spree when they got home, and spend all they'd got in a couple o' months; and so I told Tom Black.

Well, once the treasure was all aboard, we did not see much of our six gentlemen till the day of sailing. We had Major Horton's luggage on board—for that was the name of the gentleman as had the two daughters; and just at the last, when we were getting up the anchor, after lying away from the wharf a couple of days, Major Horton came off with the ladies in the same boat with our captain; and when he saw who were going to be passengers as well, I don't think he much liked it; but he didn't say anything; and as he and his daughters had a cabin to themselves, and a servant lad too, why, it did not much matter to them. I managed to get to the gangway, and was going to help the same young lady aboard as she was being slung up; but the black-bearded chap, Hicks, starts forward, shoves me on one side, and takes off his hat, and holds out his hand. But I warn't sorry to see her just lightly lay her hand on his arm for a moment, then bow stiffly, and take her father's arm, quite turning her back on my gentleman; and then giving me a smile and a nod, just to thank me all the same—though I didn't help her.

You see when that Hicks shoved me back, it was as if some one had rubbed all one's fur up wrong way, while, when I got that smile and nod, it was like a hand smoothing me down again; but I must say as I should have liked to pitch that chap over the bulwarks.

I'd no time to see more then, for old Hammer and Tongs was letting go at us all like blazes. He did swear that day, and no mistake; for he was one o' them old-style sailors as couldn't get on without. I don't believe he meant any harm; but Lord bless you, how he would go on! It was like a thunder-storm—thunder and lightning—thunder and lightning, till the bit of work was done; and then he'd stand there rubbing the perspiration off his old bald head, and dabbing himself, and smiling, and—"Werry well done, my lads—werry well done, indeed," he'd say, and this day he turns round to Major Horton, as was standing close by:

"Smart bit of seamanship," he says, "wasn't it, sir?"

"Well, really, I'm no judge," says Major Horton; "but I thought the men were getting wrong over it, by your being so angry."

"Angry, sir!" says old Smith; "angry, Lord bless you, I wasn't angry; I never see the lads do it better;" and he looked so surprised and innocent that our captain couldn't help laughing.

"It's a way of his, he's got, sir, that's all."

"Ah!" says Major Horton, with his face a bit screwed up; "then I hope he will not have that way of his on often when my daughters are on deck;" and then he walked aft.

Our captain cocked his eye, and grinned at old Smith; and the old chap screwed up that old figure-head of his just like a bit of carved mahogany; and then he blew out his cheeks, and stared at the captain, and he says: "I must turn over a new leaf mate. But, I say, that was rather hot, wasn't it?"

A fine fair breeze as ever blew homeward, and the good ship bent to it with every stitch set, and away we went through the blue water, sending it out behind us covered with white foam; and now for days past we had seen nothing but blue sky and blue sea.

I hadn't seen much of the ladies, only just when they took a walk on the deck with their father; for, after the first day or two, they never came on deck alone, on account of that Hicks,