

CHAPTER XXXIX

A SECRET OF THE SEA

WE were compelled to resort to rope and pulley, and then search through the dead man's clothes to discover the key. Even with that found, it required the sharp edge of a hatchet to force open the cover. As it lifted the sight within was greeted with cries of astonishment.

"Good Lord, sir, it's money, and a stack of it!"

"English and French coins!"

"Aye, and Spanish!"

"This piece is Dutch!"

"There ain't a shiner there, sir, less'n a hundred years old — look at this one 1763."

White's voice broke in above the babble, the old harsh croak I remembered so well:

"Well, see here lads," he shouted, "whose is all this gold anyhow? ain't it just naturally ours? It's sure no good to these yere dead men, an' there want nuthin' else aboard when we come. Then why ain't it ourn now to divide share an' share about?"

"Sure it's ours," chimed in Masters eagerly. "We saved it and have a right to claim a share. That's sea law. What do you say, Mr. Hollis?"

"We undoubtedly have a claim," I answered, "for salvage; and if the heirs of the rightful owners are un-