

MOONDYNE JOE

THE GOLD MINE OF THE VASSE

BOOK FOURTH

THE CONVICT SHIP

VIII.

FACE TO FACE

The convict ship, with all sail set, before a strong quarter breeze, ploughed heavily round the South of England, and then spread her arms like a sea-spirit as she swept majestically toward the deep southern seas.

No need to moralize afresh on the weird contrast between the tall ship, nobly and beautifully breasting the waves, and the hideous secret she bears within.

"Who, as she smiles in the silvery light, Spreading her wings on the bosom of night, Alone on the deep, as the moon in the sky, A phantom of beauty, could deem That so lovely a thing is the mansion of sin.

And that souls that are smitten lie bursting within! Who, as he watches her silently gliding, Remembers that wave after wave is dividing Bosoms that sorrow and guilt could not sever, Hearts that are broken and parted for ever? Or deems that he watches, aloft on the wave, The death-bed of hope, or the young spirit's grave?"

The first few days of the voyage are indescribably horrible. The hundreds of pent-up wretches are unused to the darkness of the ship, strange to their crowded quarters and to each other, depressed in spirits at their endless separation from home, sickened to death with the merciless pitch and roll of the vessel, alarmed at the dreadful thunder of the waves against their prison walls, and fearful of sudden engulfment, with the hatches barred. The scene is too hideous for a picture—too dreadful to be described in words.

Only those who have stood within the bars, and heard the din of devils and the appalling sounds of despair, blended in a diapason that made every hatch-mouth a vent of hell, can imagine the horrors of the hold of a convict ship.

About a week out from England, the Hougenout went bowling down the Atlantic, and across the Bay of Biscay. The night was cold and dark, and the strong breeze held the ship steady, with every sail drawing.

Mr. Wylie and Sheridan, the latter of whom had come on deck for the first time since the vessel sailed, in warm great-coats, walked the lee side of the poop; while the captain, also heavily wrapped, paced the weather side, glancing now and again at the sails, and taking an occasional look at the course.

"You have got over your sea-sickness?" asked Mr. Wylie. Sheridan laughed. "You forget that I am a sailor, Mr. Wylie," he said. "I had another reason for keeping my room."

Will Sheridan, for months past, had often been on the point of telling Mr. Wylie the whole story of his life, his love for Alice Walsmsley, and her terrible suffering for another's crime; but the moment still had gone by, and he had never broached the subject. He longed to speak his warm gratitude to the wise friend who had intervened in Alice's reason and life in Millbank.

Mr. Wylie never dreamt that Sheridan and Alice Walsmsley had known each other. He did not know that on the deck at that moment stood Sheridan's deadliest enemy, within five yards of the man he hated, and who mortally hated him.

"I will tell him all now," were the words in Sheridan's mind; and he turned to Mr. Wylie, and took hold of his arm. They paused in their walk, and stood at the foot of the mizzen-mast.

At that moment, the captain went toward the wheel, and bent his head to look at the compass. The strong binnacle light fell full upon his face, just as Will Sheridan stooped and laid his hand on Mr. Wylie's arm.

The face in the binnacle glare was straight before Sheridan. His eyes were arrested by it as by a spectre; his hand closed like a vise on the arm of his friend.

"God Almighty!" The words rushed from his heart in a hissing whisper. Mr. Wylie was astounded, but he could not even surmise the cause of Sheridan's tremendous excitement. He had seen the face of the captain as it remained for a moment in the strong light; but he did not connect this with his friend's emotion. He waited for Sheridan to speak.

Instead of speaking, Sheridan watched the dark figure of the captain as he passed from the wheel to the weather side of the poop, and paced slowly up and down. Then he drew a deep breath, tremulous with aroused passion.

"Who is that man?" he asked, in a low voice, after a long look. "That is the captain," answered Mr. Wylie. "Let me introduce you, Captain Draper!"

The captain walked toward them. Sheridan remained just as he had been standing.

"Captain Draper, let me introduce you—"

"Stay!" said Sheridan, laying his hand on Mr. Wylie's breast, "one moment."

He strode to the binnacle, seized the lamp, and returned with it in his hand. When he was within two feet of Draper, he threw the light full on his own face, sternly turned toward his enemy.

"Now!" he said, "now, introduce me!" The sight of the terrible face struck Draper like a physical blow. His breath came in a short gasp, and he staggered back till he leaned against the mast. He never said a word.

Sheridan turned the glare of the lamp upon him for an instant, then snatched it rapidly away from the repulsive sight. At that moment, with the veil of darkness suddenly torn back, Draper's face was ghastly, and his attitude full of terror.

Will Sheridan replaced the lamp in the binnacle, and walked straight to his own room. Mr. Wylie was profoundly astonished and puzzled at this scene. He remained on deck for an hour or more after Sheridan's abrupt departure; but he did not speak to Captain Draper.

"Have you any relatives or others depending on you?" asked Mr. Wylie, falling into the matter-of-fact simplicity of the little policeman. "No, sir; no one as can't get along without me. I've lived here alone for fifteen years. I don't know a man, though, in Walton to take my place. There's a deal of trust in this office, sir; a deal of trust."

"What property do you own here?" asked Mr. Wylie. "The donkey and water-cart is mine, though the village gave 'em to me. That's all the property."

"I need a careful man to oversee a settlement," said Mr. Wylie. "But he will have to go to Australia. He will be comfortably placed, much more so than you are here; and his engagement will be permanent. I came to offer the place to you—can you come?"

"Yes, sir," said Officer Lodge, as quietly as if he were asked to walk down the street. "Do you want me to start now?"

"It is now noon; I will return to London on the 2 o'clock train. Meanwhile, I will walk through the village." Turning to Ngarra-jil, Mr. Wylie said in his own language, "You can remain here."

Mr. Wylie walked straight to the old home of Alice Walsmsley, and lingered a long time in and around the deserted and decaying cottage. There was a warm feeling in his heart, a new and happy growth, as his eye fell on objects that might once have been familiar to Alice Walsmsley.

As he left the place, to return for Officer Lodge, it seemed as dear to him as if he had known and loved it all his life. He turned toward it, as he walked down the road, and there was a quiet gladness in his face.

"She will leave it all behind," he murmured. "There shall be no picture of its wretchedness in her memory." He passed to the courthouse. Officer Lodge and Ngarra-jil were sitting in the office, silently looking at each other. At first, Officer Lodge had spoken to his companion; but Ngarra-jil had answered only by a gruff and unintelligible monosyllable. They then had subsided into perfect silence.

"Are you ready?" asked Mr. Wylie. "Yes, sir." "Come."

They went to the railway station, and took their seats for London. Officer Lodge and Ngarra-jil sat opposite each other, and continued their acquaintance in the same silent fashion which had marked its beginning in the station-house.

On board the convict ship, they had attracted the lonely Mr. Haggett, who, in a patronizing manner at first, joined their company.

As these three stood near the bow of the Hougenout, looking up at the purple cliffs of lofty Pico, there rose an extraordinary commotion on the deck, among the convicts.

Strange it was, that this seemingly discordant trio, Mr. Haggett, Officer Lodge, and Ngarra-jil, had developed a mutual attraction, each for the other; and, after a few weeks at sea, had spent almost their whole waking time in each other's company.

They did not converse much, if any. Ben Lodge did not quite understand Mr. Haggett's solemn scriptural illustrations and heavy comments; Mr. Haggett did not pay much heed to Ben Lodge's dreadful tale of carnage in the Chinese bombardment; and neither of them understood Ngarra-jil, nor did he comprehend a word they said.

Yet they passed day after day in each other's company, leaning over the vessel's side or sitting on the sunny fore-castle. The presence of Officer Lodge on board needs explanation. Two days before the convict ship sailed, Mr. Wylie walked into the lock-up at Walton-le-Dale, followed by Ngarra-jil.

Officer Lodge met him with a mild, every-day air, and, pointing with a backward motion of the hand toward the cell, informed him that it was "henpy."

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sight of the match, gave a wild shout of delight and defiance. "Damn you!" he cried, shaking his fist at the powerless warders, "you can't help yourselves. We'll set fire to the ship before your eyes!"

The dreadful threat struck terror into the convicts on deck, who began to huddle together like sheep. The officers looked into each other's pale faces, dumb and helpless. One of them caught hold of the massive bars of the door, and shook them with all his force. He might as well have tried to shake down the mast.

Yelling with delight at their power the two miscreants within piled up the pyre. Then, he who held the match selected a dry place on deck to strike it. He bent down on his knees, and covered his action from the eyes of the officers.

In another instant he sprang to his feet, holding a blazing rope of loosely-twisted oakum. With a laugh that rang through the ship, he applied the torch to the pile of oakum, and the yellow flame licked up the ready material with fearful rapidity.

At sight of the flame, a cry of alarm rose from the huddled convicts drowning the reports of the officers' pistols, who were shooting down the incendiaries.

It was too late. Had they used their pistols before the match was struck, they would have acted in time. To slaughter the wretches now was to insure the conviction of the officers. Were the convicts let alone they might have become terrified at their own danger, and have quenched the blaze before it had seized the ship.

One of the officers placed the muzzle of his pistol to the ponderous lock of the cage, and fired. The bullet destroyed the lock, but did not force it. At the moment with a cry of success, an officer dashed through the crowd and seized the lock. He had found the key!

But it would not turn in the shattered wards. The bullet had wedged everything together, and the bolt had become a rivet.

By this time the flames had swept over the pile of tarred rope, and had fastened on the beams overhead. The pitch bubbled up between the seams of the deck, and dense volumes of smoke poured through the bars.

The alarm had spread to the convicts below, and an awful sound of horrible hearts from the hundreds of prisoners was heard above.

The officers dashed wildly to and fro. Some of the ship's crew had begun to work with axes on the roof of the cage, which was a heavily-timbered deck. The fire began to roar with the dreadful sound that denotes the untamable power of approaching conflagration.

At this moment, Mr. Wylie came forward, and with one glance took in the whole scene. Every one gave way for him as he strode to the cage. The convicts prayed him, "Haggett," the ultimate appeal of terror-stricken men.

He stood an instant looking at the fire—saw the mortal danger. In ten minutes more, no earthly power could subdue the flames.

"Shall we open the hatches and let the convicts come on deck?" asked the pallid chief warder, the key in his hand.

"No!" shouted Wylie with such sudden force that the man staggered back in dismay.

the two outer bars bending toward the centre under the terrific strain. Once again the upper end of the lever was seized by both men, and with a united effort of strength pulled and pressed down. The next turn was easily made; the mighty bars had bent like lead in the centre and then broken, leaving two gaps wide enough to allow the entrance of a man.

When this was done, Mr. Wylie and Mr. Haggett fell back, while the burning cage, smothered the flames with wet sails, smothering which they trampled out the fire.

The vessel was saved, and not one minute could have been spared. In the wild uproar that followed, each one giving vent to the pent-up excitement of the moment, Mr. Wylie, turning in the crowd, met the eyes of Haggett, earnestly fixed on his face. He had often observed his watchfulness before; but there was another meaning in his eyes today.

Without a word, Mr. Wylie put out his hand, which Haggett grimly seized. "Thank you," said Mr. Wylie. "That's not right," said Haggett; "you have saved all our lives."

Mr. Wylie negatively shook his head, with his usual grave smile, and was about to pass on. Mr. Haggett slowly let go his hand, still looking at him with the same strange expression. They had parted a few paces when Haggett strode after Mr. Wylie with a new impulse, seized his hand once more in a grip of iron, and met his eye with a face working in strong emotion, every possible reef in his immense lips quivering with suppressed feeling.

"Forgive me!" he said; and without another word he dropped Mr. Wylie's hand, turned, and strode off to his room by the other side of the ship.

That night, when the excitement had died, and the usual quiet had been restored, Mr. Wylie and Sheridan walked the poop for hours. Mr. Wylie made no mention of Haggett's strange conduct.

Toward midnight they went to their rooms. The extraordinary events of the day had kept them from talking about Captain Draper, though the subject had been for days uppermost in both minds.

When Mr. Wylie entered his room, his eyes fell on a letter, fixed endwise on his table to attract his attention. It was addressed to him. He opened it, and took out a photograph—the portrait of a convict in chains. There was no other enclosure.

On the back of it were written these words, in Mr. Haggett's handwriting, dated four years before: "This is the only photograph of the man known as Moondyne Joe. It was taken in Western Australia just before his last escape from Fremantle Prison. All other photographs of this prisoner have unaccountably disappeared from the prison books."

Mr. Wylie gazed a long time at the strange present. Then he laid it on the table, locked his door, and walked meditatively to and fro his narrow room. At times he would stop and take the picture from the table, look at it with deep attention, while his lips moved as if he were addressing it.

At last he took the portrait, tore it to pieces, and, opening the window of his room threw the pieces into the sea.

TO BE CONTINUED

AMERICAN SENTIMENT AND AMERICAN APATHY

published in The Survey, set to the soothing music of "Auld Lang Syne," and called "The Land Where Hatred Dies."

War-racked and torn from sea to sea, The Old World bleeding lies; God called America to be The land where hatred dies.

No tangled web of ancient wars Her prayer for peace denies; Great seas protect her fertile shores, The land where hatred dies.

Unwayed amid a world insane With wild alarms and cries, Now may she calm in strength remain, The land where hatred dies.

So France, fighting with her back to the wall for her homes and her freedom, is insane Belgium, who held her work and her honor more sacred than safety is insane. England, defending the principles of democracy to which—in theory—we stand committed, is insane. But America, coining her millions out of the war, giving little and getting much, building up her trade, and speculating dispassionately upon the art treasures which will be yielded up to her by impoverished Europe, America is the land selected by a partial Providence to play her safe and congenial role.

The assumption that the Almighty means us to do what we mean to do, that He is a silent partner in our game of life, is a base form of self-delusion. The New York State German Catholic Central Verein said in its report before the Central Verein convention in August:

While we most deeply regret that the hand of God rests so heavily upon mankind, we cannot deny to ourselves pleasure and satisfaction at the success of the German people. This is being too much at home in Zion. That Germans should rejoice over the success of German arms is reasonable and right. No one expects them, or desires them, to feel otherwise. But their polite regret at the pressure exercised by Omnipotence seems somewhat out of place. It was not the hand of God which burned the churches of France and Belgium, which desecrated the altars unutterably sacred to all Catholics, which shot the priests, and carried shame to convents. Something fell heavily upon roofless church and ravaged home. Something falls heavily to-day upon the starving children of Poland and the deported women of Lille. But in the name of all that is holy, let us not call it the hand of God!

If the United States is a land where hatred dies, why are our industrial disputes settled by strikes to the accompaniment of violence? Are the soldiers who fire from trenches inspired by hatred, and the rioters who fire from curbstones inspired by brotherly love? How much blood has been spilled, how many "social war" crimes have been committed, how many workmen have been maimed, how much property has been destroyed in fifty years of strife between employers and employed? Is acquisitiveness a nobler spirit than patriotism? Is caste a stronger bond than country?

When in August a body of 400,000 men "held up" a nation of 100,000,000; when the safety and prosperity of the country were put beyond the control of arbitration, and when a panic-stricken Congress, at the instance of a panic-stricken Administration, and with the consent of a panic-stricken Senate, threw the railroads' purse to the highwaymen, The Times headed a column with these lines:

"Strike Would Hit City Babies First Railway Workers to be Appealed to in Name of Humanity to Run Milk Trains."

"Appealed to!" "In Name of Humanity!" Last winter the United States was appealed to by the Germans who asked that we should persuade England to lift the embargo on milk and German children should suffer. But England and Germany are at war. They make no pretense of fraternity. If American men are to be "appealed to" to permit American children to live, it is in justice rather than hatred which dies in "God's own land."

We are also moderately discouraged to note that the "tangled web" of European war enmeshes us more than it has any right to do. A list of the outrages committed in American plants, on American docks, and on boats carrying American cargoes would stagger our belief in neutrality. The intricate plotting of foreign conspirators has kept our Secret Service on the jump, beguiled and baffled our detectives, and given our newspapers a new and animated field of action. "Bomb Plots" have long been a familiar feature of our morning news; and now that Robert Fay, former Lieutenant in the German Army has escaped from our feeble attempts to detain him they are likely to be more numerous than ever. Satan's proverbial facility in providing mischief for idle hands to do has been exemplified by the unholy activities of the North German Lloyd and Hamburg-American employees. Three hundred bombs, destined for thirty ships sailing from American ports, is a large order and might suggest to pessimistic minds that something in the nature of hatred had survived our enervating climate. The explosives were placed under the Youngstown plant, the incendiary fire in the sugar ship Ingham, the incendiary fire on the cotton steamer Bankdale, the explosion of dynamite at Seattle—these are merely individual features of a vast conspiracy as insolvent as it is infamous. Every deed of violence

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