

the bow wave curling past the stem and body of the boat as we headed slowly southward. At long intervals a surge broke precipitately on the stony beach away to starboard, its silver notes echoed tremulously over the reaches of calm sea.

"Kirke, the White Witch, as you folk call Mistress McFaddyen, was 'against our coming,'" said I to my "crew."

The quiet went from his bronzed face; an uneasy look flashed over it. He shoved his quid into his left cheek, gave an uncertain look at Drumore, now vanishing into the distance, and scratched his head in perplexity. "What for is she agin' it, sir?"

"Tides! Nine Tides," I ejaculated laconically, "and a blow from west'ard."

He stared about him, wet his finger to feel the breeze, then shook his head.

"The glass, high; the wind just saft enough, the sky clear; she maun be wrang, she maun be wrang. No, sir, the witches 'll be quiet this nicht."

"Witches!" I exclaimed.

"Ay, sir, witches. The nine auld jades that begat these same Nine Tides—that run high when it blaws hard—for the drooning o' Saint Medan when she was coming back from Mourne in Ireland wi' a witch-finder—Saint Patrick by name—to destroy familiars and a' them out o' the land. It fell aboot, though, the twa saints drooned the jades themselves!"

I burst out laughing at his solemn face and matter-of-fact. Said I on getting my breath, "Why, I thought you folks only had white witches, like Mistress McFaddyen. She does not harm?"

"A gey queer lot, here, once-a-day, sir. Oh, ay, guid Mistress McFaddyen kens a lot; she kens a lot."

An hour later, on the breeze dying away, I chuckled in derision at the White Witch. Peace of mind was mine. Contentedly I pulled at my pipe, knowing we could safely make the Isle, fourteen miles away, on the flow and pulling for about an hour. But tragedy was swiftly heading down on us.

Kirke peered about, now seaward towards the Irish Channel, now at the Mull of Galloway, low and vague in the night and best indicated by the triplicate

flash from its light. As I watched him, the darkness between us deepened suddenly. A strong puff of wind gushed past.

"Here's wind, sir," cried the boatman, sniffing in the salty air. "An' it's comin' from west'ard, too!"

In the ensuing stillness I heard the roar of surf breaking round the Scaur Rocks. In some trepidation I peered away where they stood, in the southwest one and a half miles to leeward.

The boat heaved uneasily on the growing swell that as time went on increased in weight although the calm still held. The weak light from the little binnacle set into the sternsheets caught my knee right, and in the thickening air shone out in a little white wedge-shaped stream, to fall hazily on the lugsail and jib halyards. Not a star was now to be seen. The darkness was become an ever-receding, ever-encroaching woof, stifling and appalling. Through it flashed, wavering and feeble, the Mull of Galloway light.

"This is a sudden change, Kirke," I exclaimed.

"I'm fearing it'll be worse afore it's better, sir," he answered; "I misdoubt that ground-swell. Maybe, afore morning, you and me 'll be thinking the White Witch the wisest of us all."

A flurry of wind shook the sail, flapping it against the mast. The boat ran up the unseen breast of a great swell, then dropped with dizzying swoop into the deep hollow beneath. Frantically Kirke was tugging at the mainsail halyards: "Hard a port, hard a port!" he yelled.

With a wild screech the first of the squalls burst down. The small craft, pressed by the big jib, shoved her nose into it. Slowly she climbed the shadowy ridge of water. In the curve of the oncoming surge the mainsail lost the wind, and with it clapping like thunder we managed to top the heavy sea.

"In jib and mains'l. She'll drive under wi' them on," Kirke yelled in my ear. "Set storm trys'l. In the peak, in the peak, you'll find it."

I crawled forward, and loosening the mainsail tackle, snugged down the lug