

try and the British naval authorities—these ships are apt to return from their trading voyages laden with slaves for their owners' plantations.

The most remarkable feature in the geography of Pemba is its deeply indented coast line, which is simply studded with natural harbors, with here and there an arm of the sea stretching so far inland as almost to divide the whole island—something like the Scottish firths, only more irregular. Add to this that it is fringed with reefs and sand banks, sometimes extending many miles out to sea, and you will understand that H. M. S. — had plenty of work to do, and that most of it had to be done in boats.

I was given the command of the steam cutter, and ordered to hold myself responsible for a large bight rejoicing in the jaw-breaking appellation of Kegomacha bay. Here I was left with my crew of six and an interpreter, making with myself eight all told. We left the ship with provisions and coal for five days; but, as it was quite out of the question to keep all that coal in the boat, we made a cache of most of it, and hoped that it might remain unstolen; if not, well, we must cut wood.

My next care was to have things put square and shipshape in the boat; spirit breaker and ammunition boxes aft, other large stores under the thwarts, and small articles in the lockers. Then, having had a regular clear up, we made tea, after which I inspected the arms and served out ammunition. By this time it was nearly five o'clock; so, as I wished to get well into the offing by nightfall, I ordered the anchor to be weighed and stood out to sea.

My reason for doing this was as follows: The Arabs are very good navigators, but even the best navigators when making a reef-bound and unlighted shore, like to verify their position by getting a good look at the land marks during daylight. When a vessel is liable to be chased, this is all the more necessary, as she cannot afford to go pottering about among shoals, trying her nose first at one point then at another, but must dash right through the darkness to her own particular little harbor, and to dash with any confidence requires an exact knowledge of one's whereabouts, and of the bearing of the point to be dashed at. It has thus become customary for the captain of a slave dhow so to regulate his voyage as to be just in sight of land at sunset; the nearer he can manage this the better for him. To be too soon means showing himself longer than he cares about in what he probably calls 'the dangerously-daylight zone'; to be too late means that he does not get a clear view of the land. Relying on this, I argued that a small boat like mine, with no sail hoisted and steaming easy so as to avoid making smoke, by arranging on her part to be at about the same distance from the shore at the same time, or perhaps a few minutes later, might, with the binoculars, have a very good chance of sighting one of these gentlemen just as he was bearing up for harbor. This was my plan, and you may be sure that I searched the horizon very carefully as the sun went down, and

the short twilight of ten minutes or so that there is in these parts gradually merged itself into the dark.

At last I was rewarded; looming up on our starboard bow was something large and black; soon it began to assume definite shape, that of a triangle—it was a dhow's lateen sail. Unfortunately, just at that moment the stoker, who ought to have known better, opened the furnace door, letting the glare light up both himself and the bowman; almost simultaneously the dhow put her helm down and headed away for the eastern extremity of the bay.

'Full speed!' I shouted, at the same time catching up a rifle and sending a bullet through her sail as a summons to heave to. Strictly speaking, I ought to have tried her by firing a blank cartridge but under the circumstances I dispensed with that formality. Of our summons she vouchsafed, as I had expected, not the smallest notice; so we settled down to the chase. Some ten minutes had elapsed when the cockswain remarked to me that the water seemed to be growing very shallow. A sounding taken with the boat hook staff showed him to be right; there was barely a foot of water under our keel. Now I knew that somewhere hereabouts there was a large sandbank, with occasional patches of very shallow water indeed on it, and it occurred to me that the dhow must have altered her course as she did with the object of bringing us across one of these. Lest it be thought singular that a native Arab dhow should have better hydrographic information than a boat belonging to one of Her Majesty's ships, I may say at once that not only is all this part very rough-charted, but that even the best chart could hardly be expected to give all the little boat channels that criss-cross a large reef or sandbank; whereas a dhow belonging to the neighborhood would have her own private marks for every rock and every pool. Had it been a dhow from any part of the island she would have known a great deal less than we did; but it being our first day, we had not had time to make our own observations, and this particular dhow had the advantage of us.

However, to have done anything but keep straight on now would have been to make certain of losing her. While I was reflecting on these things, and wondering whether so small a boat as we were might not escape grounding, I got a most unmistakable answer, namely, a prolonged scraping noise under the keel. For fifty yards, perhaps, we struggled on, churning up the sand with our screw, then came to a full stop.

On this I gave the order, 'stop the engines, all hands overboard,' setting the example myself. Relieved of our weight, the little cutter floated again, and four a-side, we walked along by the gunwhale until once more she brought up with a bump.

'I see what's the matter, sir,' said the cockswain, who was stooping down at the bows; 'there's a boulder right under her forefoot; launch her back a fathom.' This we did, and then, altering the direction of her head, got her forward again,

through a distance of perhaps twice her own length. Here luck was once more against us, the water shoaled to about two feet. I suppose that the chase must have heard our not too mild expressions of disgust at this new check, for out of the night came various guttural sounds, the English equivalents of which would probably have been something like: 'hope you're comfortable; sure you don't want a tow? and so on. This was too much. We shoved and we pushed, and scraped the sand away from the bows, and finally I told the leading stoker to lean over and set the engines going. Then at last she began to move. The word 'stop' was just on my lips when, before we knew where we were, the boat gave a sort of slither forward, and—*boom!* we were all under water. She had been on the edge of a steep bank, and had slid off,

In a few seconds we were all up again, spluttering and laughing, and fortunately untouched by the screw. But where was the cutter? Here was something that Mark Tapley himself would have found it hard to laugh at. Being under steam, she had gone on by herself. In fact, I fancied that I could just discern her outline away out to seaward.

Our position was most serious. Our foothold, such as it was, would be lost when the tide came up, and there being a strong northerly current, we should infallibly be swept out to sea. Even supposing that one or two of the strongest of us managed to reach the shore by swimming, what sort of a fate would be theirs at the hand of people who, only a few months before had murdered a whole boat's crew, and were now smarting from the indemnity that they had been forced to pay for their crime? And this supposition made no account of sharks, which, although not so bad as in some parts, were yet quite sufficiently numerous to constitute a danger.

Every minute that passed the boat was steaming away; yet what was to be done? In this dilemma I called the two petty officers, the cockswain and the leading stoker, to a council of war. *Imprimis*, we were all agreed that to swim after her and try to catch her would be mere foolishness, and wasting our strength to no purpose. Now there came to my mind a certain conversation that I had once had with a very scientific officer about what are called 'turning circles.' A ship's hardness is said to be measured by the diameter—that is the smallness of the diameter—of her 'turning circle' with different degrees of helm. This is fairly clear. It does not want an expert to understand that a vessel under steam, with her rudder kept over at the same angle will, if there be no tide or current, ultimately come back by a circular course to the point at which she started. What, however, is not so well known, is that a screw steamer, even without any helm at all, will do this. But she will take a very long time about it. The reason is that a screw steamer left to herself never goes quite straight ahead; to make her go straight ahead requires a little helm. Hence, leaving her entirely alone, comes to the same thing as giving a little helm to a paddle steamer. The officer in ques-