COPYRIGHTED, AND PUBLISHED BY SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT.

The Adventures of Captain Kettle

By CUTCLIFFE HYNE

No. 2—

The Guns For Cuba.

"THE shore part must lie entirely with you, sir," said Capt. Kettle. "It's mixed up with the foreign enlistment act and the Alabama case, and a dozen other things which may mean anything between jail and confiscation, and my head isn't big enough to hold it. If you'll be advised by me, sir, you'll see a real first-class solicitor and stand him a drink and pay him down what he asks right there on the bar counter and get to know exactly how the law of this business stands before you stir a foot in it.

"The law here in England," said the little man with a reminiscent sigh, "is a beastly thing to fall foul of; it's just wickedly officious and interefering; it's never done kicking you, once it's got a fair start, and you never know where it will shove out its ugly hoof from next. No, Mr. Gedge, give me the States for nice, comfortable law, where a man can buy it by the yard for paper money down, and straight pistol shooting is always remembered in his favor."

The young man who owned the steamship Sultan of Borneo tapped his blotting paper impatiently. "Stick to the point, Kettle. We're in England now and have nothing whatever to do with legal matters in America. As for your advice, I am not a fool; you can lay your ticket on it I know to an inch how I stand. And I may tell you this; the shipment is arranged for."

"I'd like to see us cleared," said Capt. Kettle, doubtfully.

"No one will interfere with the clearance. The Sultan of Borneo will leave here in coal, consigned to Havana. A private yacht will meet her at sea, and transport the arms out of sight of land."

"Tyne coal for Cuba? They'd get their coal there from Norfolk, Va., or else Welsh steam coal from Cardiff or Newport."

"It seems not. This contract was placed long before a ship was asked for to smuggle out the arms."

"Well, it looks fishy, anyway."

"I can't help that," said Gedge irritably. "I'm telling you the naked truth, and if truth, as usual, looks unlikely, it's not my fault. Now have you got any more objections to make?"

"No, sir," said Capt. Kettle, "none that I can see at present."

"Very well, then," said Gedge. "Do you care to sign on as the master for this cruise, or are you going to cry off?"

"They'll hang me if I'm caught," said Kettle.

"Not they. They'll only talk big, and the British consul will get you clear. You bet they daren't hang an Englishman for mere smuggling in Cuba. And, besides, aren't I offering to raise your screw from £12 a month to £14 so as to cover the risk? However, you won't get caught. You'll find anything ready for your you'll slip the rifles ashore, and then you'll steam on to Havana and discharge your ordinary humdrum way of business, and there's a ten-pound bonus if you pull this thing off successfully. Now, captain, quick—you go or you don't?"

"I go," said Kettle, gloomily. "I'm a poor man, with a wife and family, Mr. Gedge, and I can't afford to lose a berth. But it's that coal I can't swallow. I quite believe what you say about the contract; only it doesn't look natural. And it's my belief the coal will trip us up somewhere before we've done, and bring about trouble."

"Which of course you are quite a stranger to?" said Gedge slily.

"Don't taunt me with it, sir," said Capt. Kettle. "I quite well know the kind of a brute I am; trouble with a crew of any other set of living men at sea is just meat and drink to me, and I'm bitterly ashamed of the taste. Every time I sit underneath our minister in the chapel here in South Shields, I grow more ashamed. And if you heard the beautiful poetical way that man talks of peace, and green fields, and golden harps, you'd understand."

"Yes, yes," said Gedge "but I don't want any of your excellent minister's sermons at second hand just now, captain, or any of your own poetry, thanks. I'm very busy. Good morning. Help yourself to a cigar. You haul alongside the coal shoots to get your cargo at two o'clock, and I'll be on board to see you at six. Good morning." And Mr. Gedge rang for the clerk and was busily dictating letters before Kettle was clear of the office.

CHAPTER II.

The little sailor went down the grimy stairs and into the street, and made toward the smelling Tyne. The black cigar rested unlit in an angle of his mouth, and he gnawed savagely at the butt with his eyeteeth. He cursed the fates as he walked. Why did they use him so evilly that he was forced into berths like these? As a bachelor, he told himself with a sneer, he would have jumped at the excitement of it. As the partner of Mrs. Kettle, and the father of her children, he could have shuddered when he threw his eyes over the future.

He took ferry across the filthy Tyne and walked down alleys and squalid streets with coal dust formed the mud and the air was sour with foreign vapors. And as he walked he champed still at the unlit cigar and brooded over the angularity of his fate. But when he passed between the gates of the dock company's premises and exchanged words with th epoliceman on guard, a change came over him. He threw away the cigar stump, tightened his lips and left all thoughts of personal matters outside the door sill. He was Mr. Gedge's hired servant; his brain was devoted to furthering Gedge's interests, and all the acid of his tongue was ready to spur on those who did the manual work on Gedge's ship.

Within a minute of his arrival on her deck the Sultan of Borneo was being unmoored from the bollards on the quay; within ten, her winches were clattering and bucking as they warped her across to the black, straddling coal shoots at the other side of the dock, and within half an hour the cargo was roaring down her hatches as fast as the railway wagons on the grimy [illegible]

The halo of coal dust made day into dusk; the grit of it filled every cranny and settled as an amorphous scum on the water of the dock, and laborers hired by the hour toiled as piecework paces through sheer terror at their employer.

If his other failings could have been eliminated, this little skipper, with the red peaked beard, would certainly have been, from an owner's point of view, the best commander sailing opt of any English port. No man ever wrenched such a magnificent amount of work from his hands. But it was those other failings which kept him what he was, the pitiful knockabout shipmaster, living from hand to mouth, never certain of his berth from one month's end to another.

That afternoon Capt. Kettle signed on his crew, got them on board, and with the help of his two mates kicked the majority of them into sobriety. He received a visit and final instructions from Mr. Gedge at six o'clock, and by nightfall he had filled in his papers, warped out of dock, and stood anxiously on the bridge watching the pilot as he took the steamboat down through the crowded shipping of the river. His wife stood under the glow of an arc lamp on the dockhead and waved him goodby through the gloom.

CHAPTER III.

Capt Kettle received his first fright as he dropped his pilot just outside the Tyne pierheads. A man'of-war's launch steamed up out of the night, and the boarding officer examined his papers and asked questions. The little captain, conscious of having no contraband of war on board just then, was brutally rude, but the naval officer remained stolid, nad refused to see the insults which were pitched at him. He had an unpalatable duty to perform, he quite sympathized with Kettle's feelings over the matter, and he got back his launch ,thanking many stars that the affair had ended so easily.

But Kettle rang on his engines again with very unpleasant feelings. It was clear to him that the secret was oozing out somewhere; that the Sultan of Borneo was suspected; that his course to Cuba would be beset with many well-armed obstacles and he forthwith made his first ruse out of the long succession which were to follow.

He had been insurted by Gedge to steam off straight from the Tyne to a point due E. in the North Sea, where a yacht would meet him to hand over the consignment of smuggled arms. But he felt the night to be full of eyes, and for a Havana-bound ship to leave the usual steam lane which leads to the English channel was equivalent to a confession of her purpose from the outset. So he took the parallel rulers and [illegible] off on his chart the stereotyped course, which just clears Whitby rock and Flamboro head; and the Sultan of Borneo was held steadily along this, steaming at her normal nine knots and it was not till she was out of sight of land off Humber mouth, and the sea chanced to be desolate, that he starboarded his helm and stood off for the ocean rendezvous.

A hand on the fore'ops'l ya rd picked up the yacht out of the gray mists of dawn, and by eight bells they were lying hove to in the trough, with 10 yards of cold gray water tumbling between them. The transhipment was made in two lifeboats, and Kettle went across and enjoyed an extravagant breakfast in the yacht's cabin. The talk was all upon the Cuban revolution. Carnforth, the yacht's owner, brimmed with it.

If you can run the blockade, captain," said he, "and land these rifles and the maxims and the cartridges, they'll be grateful enough to put up a statue to you. The revolution will end in a snap. The Spanish troops are half of them fever-ridden, and all of them discouraged. With these guns you are carrying the patriots can shoot their enemies over the edges of the island into the Caribbean Sea. And there is no reason why you should get stopped. There are fillbustering expeditions fitted out every week from Key West, Tampa, and the other Florida ports, and one or two have even started from New York itself."

"But they haven't got through?" suggested Capt. Kettle.

"Not all of them," Mr. Carnforth admitted. "But then, you see, they sailed in schooners, and you have got steam. Besides, they started from the States, where the newspapers knew all about them, and so their arrival was cabled on to Cuba ahead; and you have the advantage of sailing from an English port."

"I don't see where the pull comes in," said Kettle gloomily. "There isn't a blessed country on the face of the globe more interfering with her own people than England. A Yankee can do as he darn well pleases in the fillbustering line; but if a Britisher makes a move that way, the blessed law here stretches out twenty hands and plucks him back by the tail before he's half started. No, Mr. Carnforth, I'm not sweet on the chances. I'm a poor man, and this means a lot to me; that's why I'm anxious. You're rich; you only stand to lose the cost of the consignment; and if that gets confiscated it won't mean much to you."

Carnforth grinned. "You pay my business qualities a poor compliment, captain. You can bet your life I had money down in hard cash before I sitred foot in the matter. The weapons and the ammunition were paid for at fifty per cent. above list prices, so as to cover the trouble of secrecy, and I got a charter for the yacht to bring the stuff out here which would astonish you if you saw the figures. No, I'm clear on the matter from this moment, captain, but I'll not deny that I shall take an interest in your future adventures with the cargo. Help yourself to a cigarettte."

"Then it seems to me," said Kettle acidly, "that you'll look at me just as a hare set on to run for your amusement?"

The yacht owner laughed. "You put it brutally," he said, "but that's about the size of it. And if you want further truths, here's one; I shouldn't particularly mind if you were caught."

"How's that?"

"Because, my dear skipper, if the Spanish captured this consignment, the patriots would want another, and I should get the order. Whereas, if you [illegible] the stuff safely, it will [illegible] through to the end of the war, and my chance of making further profit will be at an end."

"You have a very clear way of putting it," said Capt. Kettle.

"Haven't I? Which will you take, green chartreuse or yellow?"

"And Mr. Gedge? Can you tell me, sir, how he stands over this business?"

O, you bet, Gedge knows when to come in out of the wet. He's got the old Sultan underwritten by the insurance and by the Cuban agents up to double her value, and nothing would suit his books better than for a Spanish cruiser to drop upon you."

Capt. Kettle got up, reached for his cap, and swung it aggressively on to one side of his head.

"Very well," he said, "that's your side of the question. Now for mine. That cargo's going through, and those rebels or patriots, or whatever they are, shall have their guns if half the Spanish navy was there to try and stop me. Treat me on the square and I'm a man a child might handle, but I'd not be driven by the Queen of England, no, not with the Emperor of Germany to help her."

"O, look here, captain," said Carnforth, "don't get your back up."

"I'll not trade with you,' replied Kettle.

"You're a fool to your own interests."

"I know it," said the sailor grimly. "I've known it all my life. If I'd not been that I'd not have found myself in such shady company as there is here now."

"Look her, you ruffian, if you insult me I'll kick you out of this cabin and over the side into your own boat."

"All right," said Kettle, "start in."

"You'd better not," said the little sailor with glib contempt. "You're not the sort that cares to risk his skin, and I can't be bothered with dead-head passengers."

"Thta settles it," said Carnforth. "I'm coming with you to run that blockade, and if the chance comes, my cantankerous friend, I'll show you I can be useful. Always supposing, that is, we don't murder one another before we get there."

CHAPTER IV.

A white mist shut the channel sea into a ring and the air was noisy with the grunts and screams of steamers' syrens. Capt. Kettle was standing on the Sultan of Borneo's upper bridge, with his hand on the engine-room telegraph, which was pointed at "full speed astern"; Carnforth and the 1d secondmate stood with their chins over the top of the starboard dodger; and all three of them peered into the opalescent banks of the fog.

They had reason for their anxiety. Not five minutes before, a long lean torpedo catcher had raced up out of the thickness, and slowed down alongside with the channel spindrift blowing over her low superstructure in white hail storms. An officer on the upper bridge in glistening oilskins had sent across a sharp authoritative hail, and had been answered, "Sultan of Borneo, Kettle, master, from South Shields to Havana."

"What cargo?" came the next question.

"Coal."

"What?"

"Coal."

Carnforth half rose from his seat and measured Capt. Kettle with his eye. Apparently the scrutiny impressed him, for he sank back to his seat again with an embarrassed laugh. "You are an ugly little devil," he said.

"Thta settles it," said Kettle.

"And I'm not going to play at rough and tumble with you here. We've neither of us anything to gain by it, and I've a lot to lose. I believe you'll run that cargo through now that you're put on your mettle, btu I guess there'll be trouble for somebody before it's dealt out to the patriot troops. Gad, I'd like to be somewhere on hand to watch you do it."

"I don't object to an audience," said Kettle.

"By Jove, I've half a mind to come with you."

"Then Mr. Tyne Coal for the Havana, just heave to whilst I send away a boat to look at you. I fancy you will be the steamboat I'm sent to find fetch back."

The decks of the uncomfortable warship had hummed with men, a pair of boat davits had swung outboard, and the boat had been armed and manned with naval noise and quickness. But just then a billow of the fog had driven down upon them, blanketilke in its thickness, which closed all human vision beyond the range of a dozen yards, and Capt. Kettle jumped like a terrier on his opportunity. He sent his steamer hard astern with a slightly ported helm, and whilst the torpedo catcher's boat was searching for him toward the French shore, and sending vain hails into the white banks of the mist, he was circling slowly and silently round toward the English coast.

So long as the mist held the Sultan of Borneo was as hard to find as a needle in a cargo of hay. Did the air clear for so much as a single instat she would be noticed and stand self-confessed by her attempt to escape; and as a result the suspense was vivid enough to make Carnforth feel physical nausea. He had not reckoned on this complication. He was quite prepared to risk capture in Cuban waters, where the glamor of distance and the dazzle of helping insurrectionists would cast a glow of romance over whatever occurred. But to be caught in the English channel as a vulgar smuggler for the sake of commercial profit, and to be haled back for hard labor in an English jail, was a different matter. He was a member of parliament, and he understood these details in all their niceties.

But Capt. Kettle took the situation differently. The sight of the torpedo catcher siffened all the doubt and limpness grew into composition, his eye brightened and his lips grew stiff, the scheming to escape acted on him like a tonic; and when an hour later the Sultan of Borneo was steaming merrily down channel at top speed through the same impenetrable fog the little skipper whistled dance music on the upper bridge and caught the notion for a most pleasing sonnet. That evening the crew came aft in a state of mild mutiny, and Kettle attended to their needs with gusto.

He prefaced his remarks by a slight exhibition of marksmanship. He cut away the vane which showed dimly on the foretopmast truck with a single bullet, and then, after dexterously reloading his revolver, lounged over the white rail of the upper bridge with the weapon in his hand.

He told the malcontents he was glad of the opportunity to give them his views on matters generally. He informed them genially that for their personal wishes he cared not one decimal or jot. He stated plainly that he had got them on board, and intended by their help to carry out his owner's instructions whether they hated them or not. And finally he gave them his candid assurance that if any our amongst them presumed to disobey the least of his orders, he would shoot that man neatly through the head without further preamble.

Thi elegant harangue did not go home to all hands at once, because being a British ship, the Sultan of Borneo's crew naturally spoke in five different languages, and few of them had even a working knowledge of English. But the look of Kettle's savage little face as he talked, and the red torpedo beard which wagged beneath it, conveyed to them the tone of his speech, and for a time they did not require a more accurate translation. They had come off big with the intention of forcing him (if necessary with violence) to run the steamer there and then into an English port; they went forward again like a pack of sheep merely because one man had let them hear the virulence of his bark, and had shown them with what accuracy he could bite if necessary. "And that's the beauty of a mongrel crew," said Kettle complacently "If they'd been English, I'd have had to shoot at least two of the beasts to keep my end up like that."

"You're a marvel," Carnforth admitted, "I'm bit of a speaker myself, but I never heard a man with a gift of tongue like you have got."

"I am poisonous when I spread myself," said Kettle.

"I wish I was clear of you," said Carnforth, with an awkward laugh. "Whatever possessed me to leave the yacht and come on this cruise I can't think."

"Some people never do know when they're well off," said Kettle. "Well, sir, you're in for it now, and you may see things which will be of service to you afterwards. You ought to make your mark in parliament if you do get back from this trip. You'll have something to talkabout that men will like to listen to, instead of merely chattering wind, which is what most of them are put to, so far as I can see from the papers. And now, sir, here's the steward come to tell us tea's ready. You go below and tuck in, I'll take take mine on the bridge here. It [illegible] my back yet awhile, or else those beasts forrard will jump on us from behind and murder the whole lot whilst we aren't looking.'"

CHAPTER V.

They saw the coast first as a black line running across the dim gray of the night. It rose as they neared it, and showed a crest fringed with trees, and a foot steeped in white mist, from out of which came the faint bellow of [illegible] picked up his marks and steamed in confidently, with his sidelights dowsed, and three red lanterns in a triangle at his forsmast head. He was feeling pleasantly surprised with the easiness of it all.

But when the steamer had got well into the bight of the bay, and all the glasses on the bridge were peering at the shore in search of answering lights, a blaze of radiance suddenly flickered on to her from astern, and was as suddenly eclipsed, leaving them for a moment blinded by its dazzle. It was a long truncheon of light which sprouted from a glowing centre away between the heads of the bay, and they watched it sweep past them over the surface of the water, and then swept back again. Finally after a little more dalliance, it settled on the steamer and lit her, and the ring of water on which she swam, like a ship in a lantern picture.

Carnforth swore aloud, and Capt. Kettle lit a fresh cigar. Those of the mongrel crew who were on the deck went below to pack their bags.

"Well, sir," said Kettle cheerfully, "here we are. That's a Spanish gunboat with searchlight, all complete"—he screwed up his eyes and gazed astern meditatively. "She's got the heels of us too; by about five knots I should say. Just look at the flames coming out of her funnels. Aren't they just giving her ginger down in the stokehold? Shooting will begin directly, and the other blackguards ashore have apparently forgotten all about us. There isn't a light anywhere."

"What are you going to do?" asked Carnforth.

"Follow out Mr. Gedge's instructions, sir, and put this cargo on the beach. Whether the old Sultan goes there too remains to be seen.

"That gunboat will cut you off in a quarter of an hour if you keep on this course.

"With that extra five knots she can do as she likes with us, so I shan't shift my helm. It would only look suspicious."

"Good Lord!" said Carnforth, "as if our being there at all isn't suspicion itself."

But Kettle did not answer. He had, to use his own expression, "got his wits working under forced draught," and he could not afford time for idle speculation and chatter. It was the want of the answering signal ashore which upset him. Had that showed against the black background of hills he would have known what to do.

Meanwhile thet Spanish warship was closing up with him hand over fist, and decision was necessary. Anyway the choice was a poor one. If he surrendered he would be searched, and with that damning cargo of rifles and machine guns and ammunition under his hatches, it was not at all improbable that his captors might string him up out of hand. They would have right on their side for doing so.

"The insurrectionists were not "recognized belligerents"; he would stand as a filibuster confessed; and as such would be due to suffer under that rough and ready martial law which cannot spare time to feed and jail prisoners.

On the other hand, if he refused to heave to the result would be equally sharper; the warship would sink him with her guns inside a dozen minutes; and, reckless daredevil though he might be, Kettle knew quite well there was no chance of avoiding this.

With another crew, he might have been tempted to lay his old steamer alongside the other and try to carry her by boarding and sheer hand-to-hand fighting; but, excepting for those on watch in the stokehold, his present set of men were all below packing their belongings into portable shape, and he knew quite well that nothing would please them better than to see him discomfited. Carnforth was neutral; he had only his three mates and the engineer officers to depend upon in all the available world; and he recognised, between deep draughts at his cigar, that he was in a very tight place.

Still the dark shore ahead remained unbeaconed, and the Spaniard was racing up astern, lit for battle, with her crew at quarters, and guns run out and loaded. She leapt nearer by fathoms to the second, till Kettle could hear the panting of her engines as she chased him down. His teeth chewed on the cigar butt, and dark rings grew under his eyes. He could have raged aloud at his impotence.

The war steamer ranged up alongside, slowed to some forty revolutions so as to keep her place, and an officer on the top of her charthouse hailed in Spanish:

"Gunboat ahoy," Kettle bawled back: "You must speak English or I can't be civil to you."

"What ship is that?"

"Sultan of Borneo, Kettle, master. Out of Shields."

"Where for?"

"The Havana."

Promptly the query came back: "Then what are you doing in here?"

Carnforth whispered a suggestion. "Fresh water run out; condenser water given all hands dysentery; put in here to fill up tanks."

"I thank you, sir," said Kettle in the same undertone, "I'm no hand at lying myself, or I might have thought of that before." And he shouted the excuse across to the spokesman on the charthouse roof.

To his surprise they semed to give weight to it. There was a short consultation, and the steamers slipped along over the smooth black waters of the bay on parallel courses.

"Have you got dysentery bad aboard?" came the next question.

Once more Carnforth prompted, and Kettle repeated his words: "Look at my decks," said he. "All my crew are below. I've hardly a man to stand by me."

There was more consultation among the gunboat's officers, and then came the fatal enquiry: "What's your cargo, captain?"

"O, coals," said Kettle resignedly.

"What? You're bringing Tyne coal to the Havana?"

"Just coals," said Capt. Kettle with a bitter laugh.

The tone of the Spaniard changed. "Heave to at once," he ordered, "whilst I send a boat to search you. Refuse, and I'll blow you out of water."

CHAPTER VI.

On the Sultan of Borneo's upper bridge Carnforth swore. "Eh-ho, skipper," he said, "the game's up, and there's no way out of it. You won't be a fool, will you, and sacrifice the ship and the whole lot of us? Come, I say, man, ring off your engines, or that fellow will shoot, and we shall all be murdered uselessly. I tell you, the game's up."

"By James!" said Kettle, "is it? Look there'—and he pointed with outstretched arm to the hills on the shore ahead. "Three res!'n' he cried. "Two above one in a triangle, burning like Elswick furnaces among the trees. They're ready for us over yonder, Mr. Carnforth, and that's their signal. [illegible]

Do you think I'm going to let my cargo be stopped after getting it this far?" He turned to the Danish quartermaster at the wheel, with his savage face close to the man's ear.

"Starboard," he said. "Hard over, you bung-eyed Dutchman. Starboard as far as she'll go."

The wheel engines clattered briskly in the house underneath, and the Sultan of Borneo's head swung off quickly to port. For eight seconds the officer commanding the gunboat did not see what was happening, and that eight seconds was fatal to his vessel. When the inspiration came he bubbled with orders, he starboarded his own helm, he rang "full speed ahead" to his engines, and ordered every rifle and machine gun on his ship to sweep the British steamer's bridge. But the space of time was too small. The gunboat could not turn with enough quickness; on so short a notice the engines could not get her into her stride again; and the shooting, though well intentioned and prodigious in quantity, was poor in aim. The bullets whisped through the air and pelted on the plating like a hailstorm, and one of them flicked out the brains of the Danish quartermaster on the bridge; but Kettle took the wheel from his hands, and a moment later the Sultan of Borneo's stem crashed into the gunboat's unprotected side just abaft the sponson of her starboard quarter gun.

The steamers thrilled like kicked biscuit boxes and a noise went up into the hot night sky as of 10,000 boiler makers, all heading up their rivets at once.

On both ships the propellers stopped as if by instinct, and then in answer to the telegraph, the grimy collier backed astern. But the war steamer did not move. Her machinery was broken down. She had already got a heavy list towards her wounded side, and every second the list was increasing as the sea water poured in through the shattered plates. Her crew was buzzing with disorder. It was evident that the vessel had but a short time longer to swim, and their lives were sweet to them. They had no thought of vengeance. Their weapons lay deserted on the sloping decks. The grimy crews from the stokeholds poured up from below, and one and all they clustered about the boats with frenzied haste to see them floating in the water.

There was no more to be feared at their hands for the present.

Carnforth clapped Kettle on the shoulder in involuntary admiration. "By George," he cried, "what a daring little scoundrel you are! Look here, I'm on your side now if I can be of any help. Can you give me a job?"

CHAPTER VII.

"I'm afraid, sir," said Capt. Kettle, "that the old Sultan's work is about done. She's settling down by the head already. Didn't you see those rats of men scuttling up from forward directly after we'd rammed the dam? I guess that was a bit of a surprise packet for them, anyway. They thought they'd get down there to be clear of the shooting, and they found themselves in the most ticklish part of the ship.

"There's humor in the situation," said Carnforth. "But that will keep. For the present it strikes me that this old steamboat is swamping fast."

"She's doing that," Kettle admitted. "She'll have a lot of plates started forward, I guess. But I think she's come out of it very creditably, sir. I didn't spare her, and she's not exactly built for a ram."

"I suppose it's a case of putting her on the beach?"

"There's nothing else for it," said Kettle with a sigh. "I should like to have carried those blessed coals into Havana if it could have been done, just to show people ours was a bona fide contract, as Mr. Gedge said, in spite of its fishy look. But this old steamboat has done her whack, and that's the square truth. It will take her all she can manage to reach shore with dry decks. Look, she's in now nearly to her forecastle head. Lucky the shore's not steep-to here, or else—"

From beneath there came a bump and a rattle, and the steamer for a moment halted in her progress, and a white crested wave surged past her rusty flanks. Then she lifted again and swooped further in, with her propeller still squattering astern; and then once more she thundered down again into the sand; and so lifting and striking made her way in through the surf.

More than one of the hands was swept from her decks, and reached the shore by swimming; but as the ebb made, the hungry seas left her stranded dry under the morning's light, and a crowd of insurrectionists waded out and climbed on board by ropes, which were thrown to them.

They were men of every tint, from the gray-black of the pure negro to the sallow lemon tint of the blue-blooded Spaniard. They were streaked with wounds, thin as skeletons, and clad more with nakedness than with rags; and so wolfish did they look that even Kettle, callous little ruffian though he was, half regretted bringing arms for such a crew to wreak vengeance on their neighbors.

But they gave him small time for sentiment of this brand. They clustered round him with leaping hands, till the morning sea fowl fled affrighted from the beach. El Senor Capitan Inglese was the saviour of Cuba, and let every one remember it. Alone, with his unarmed vessel, he had sunk a warship of their hated enemies; and they prayed him (in their florid compliment) to stay on the island and rule over them as king.

But the little sailor took them literally. "What this?" he said; "you want me to be your blooming king?"

"El rey!" they shouted. "El rey de los Cubanos!"

"By James," said Kettle, "I'll do it. I was never asked to be a king before, and the chance may never come again. Besides, I'm out of a berth just now, and England will be too hot to hold me yet awhile. Yes, I'll stay and boss you and if you can act half as ugly as you look we'll give the cons a lively time. Only remember there's no tomfoolery about me. If I'm king of this show I'm going to carry a full king's ticket, and if there's any man tries to meddle without being invited that man will go to his own funeral before he can think twice. And now we'll just begin business at once. Off with those hatches and break out that cargo. I've been at some pains to run these guns out here, so be careful in carrying them up the beach. Jump lively, now, you black-faced scum."

Carnforth listened with staring eyes. What sort of broil was this the young little scamp going to mix in next? He knew enough of Spanish character to understand clearly that the offer of the crown was merely an empty civility; he understood enough of Kettle to be sure he had not taken it as such and would assert his rights to the bitter end. And when he thought of what that end must inevitably be he sighed that [illegible] Kettle's fate.

DOROTHY'S ECONOMIES

—By Alice Edna Crawford.

Dorothy climbed upon Tredgar's knee.

"I want to consult you," she announced. Tredgar smiled indulgently.

"What is it now,'" he asked, "a name for the newest doll?"

"This is important, and you mustn't laugh," reproved Dorothy. "It's presents."

"Most important," confirmed Tredgar, gravely. "I am all attention."

Dorothy drew from the tiny pocket of her apron a battered purse.

"Mother says that presents ain't really presents unless you give them yourself," she explained "Here's what was in my bank."

She handed the purse to Tredgar, who cast a rapid glance at the contents. "My, but we are rich," he exclaimed. "Here's a whole dollar, and a half a one, and a quarter, and seven cents. A dollar eighty-two."

"It seems a lot of money," admitted Dorothy, gravely, "but there are such lots and lots of people one wants to give presents to."

"That is the saddest part of Christmas," he confirmed.

"It is not sad,'" she insisted. "It's just that it takes a lot, a whole lot, of brains to make it go round. That's why I asked you."

"I am tremendously flattered," he laughed. "Let us see what we can do." He drew from his pocket a pencil and a letter and prepared to make notes on the envelope.

She was Sitting on the Steps With the Box in Her Hands as He Came Toward Her.

Something in the child's wistful look gave Tredgar the hint. "Suppose just we two go shopping," he suggested. "Then no ono need know what his present is until the night of the tree."

Dorothy clapped her hands. "Just what I wanted," she cried, gleefully. "I was afraid I should have to go with mother, and then she would know that her cup came from the ten-cent store. She never could tell," she explained, "if she didn't know."

The matter was quickly arranged with Mrs. Cameron, and the two set out. The stores were crowded with the rush of Christmas shoppers, but Derothy gave a start. "I never remembered anything for you," she wailed. "What will you think of me?"

"I shall think that I am a very forgetful person not to remember myself," he comforted. "It was entirely my own fault."

"I can't save any more pennies before Christmas," she lamented. "Isn't there something I've got you'd like for a present, even if it is old?"

"You might give me a share of your [illegible] the cab she could not see the wistful tenderness of the smile.

empty interior there was a laugh that brought tears to Dorothy's eyes until Tredgar gravely proclaimed that to be the most precious gift of all. The rest were willing to take it at his valuation, but when Rhoda also received an empty box and shut the cover with crimson face, there was no comment from Dorothy, who climbed upon Tredgar's lap.

"You see," she confided, "when I told Rhoda I was going to give her to you, she kissed me and seemed so glad that I thought I'd give you to her and then I could have that hat pin for the little lame girl at school."

"Did she say she was glad?" he whispered eagerly.

Dorothy nodded as she slipped off his lap to receive another gift.

"Do you accept Dorothy's present?" he asked softly. "I want mine," and he showed her the "Rhoda" printed on the bottom of the pasteboard heart.

"I think," she said with a laugh that was half a sob, "it would be a shame to spoil Dorothy's economics."

"That wouldn't be anything," she protested.

"I'd rather have that than anything else," he insisted whimsically.

"Then you may have half of Rhoda," she ahnounced comfortably. "and I shan't have to worry any longer."

"Neither shall I," he said. Rhoda had been a torment ever since she had begun to realize her power over him. That she liked him he knew, but she would never permit him to make her a tender speech or approach a proposal.

"Let's go in and get some candy," he suggested as they flashed past a confectioners. He pushed up the trap to direct the driver and fought his way to the counter. Some little heart-shaped boxes attracted Rhoda's attention and she selected one as her share of the spoil, while Tredgar had a box filled for Rhoda.

Once home, Dorothy flew upstairs with her treasures to hide them from all curious eyes until the tree should be displayed. Tredgar made his apologies to her sister.

In spite of the fact that there was no engagement, Tredgar was considered almost as one of the Cameron household, and he participated in the Christmas festivities. There were gifts for him from the various members of the family, but the oddest was the red, heart-shaped box he had purchased for the child the night before.

When he opened it and disclosed an

(Copyright, 1905, by McClure, Phillips